

THEME SECTION

The anthropology of austerity: An introduction

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Abstract: This introduction posits that austerity is an instantiation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and thus must be revisited in two ways, involving its historical and geographical rendering. First, anthropological accounts should think of austerity in the long term, providing encompassing genealogies of the concept rather than seeing it as breach to historical continuity. Second, the discipline should employ the comparative approach to bring together analyses of SAPs in the Global South and austerity measures in the Global North, providing a more comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon. We are interested in what austerity does to people's temporal consciousness, and what such people do toward a policy process that impacts their lives. We find, in this comparative pursuit, instead of Foucauldian internalization, dissent and dissatisfaction.

Keywords: Austerity, crisis, Global South, structural adjustment, temporality, transnationalism

The European sovereign debt crisis and the related processes of austerity have been intensely discussed post-2008. Pensions, livelihoods, and public health have been sacrificed so that debts may be repaid. The resulting social, political, and economic crises have garnered extensive academic attention and widespread coverage in mass media. This crisis world has come to be geographically associated mainly with the EU's semi-periphery, which has experienced years of slow growth or even recession, most notably in Southern European countries, from Portugal to Cyprus, and in Ireland—with Greece being a particularly violent case.

Austerity there was a remedy that governments and international financial institutions have unanimously agreed on as the panacea for the crunch, although the medicine has proved toxic, as it has exacerbated recession, bloated debt, and constructed a myth (Blyth 2013: 216–226). However, the concentration on Europe stands in stark relief to the attention devoted to instances of austerity elsewhere. Indeed, there is scholarship outside anthropology, in earlier and recent work by Silvia Federici (1990, 2014), for example, that takes the association between indebtedness, austerity measures, and structural adjustment very seriously, not least in the case



of Africa (which concerns most of our contributions here). As this recognition in the discipline is wanting, this collection serves the aim of making it more tangible ethnographically and theoretically.

We accept that austerity might be a “European” *term* but contend that it is not a European-only condition. The local components in the genealogy of the EU’s self-understanding as a poly-identity structure that forges this “dangerous idea” are important (Blyth 2013). We thus might need, in social anthropology, to both root the term in European settings *and* attempt comparisons with the social effects associated with the imposition of similar policy assemblages elsewhere. It is significant, in order to de-provincialize the term austerity further from its current economistic obfuscation, to think back to its own alternative intellectual genealogies (Chakrabarty 2000). There have been different waves of austerity *within* the European context, where the concept has been used in different ways, as discussed by Keith Hart (2018) in his essay on how postwar Britain was organized on austerity as a principle of shared egalitarianism. To remain within Europe, “taking the bullet for a cause” was also the case in the former socialist bloc’s rationing.

It might be futile to explore a year zero for contemporary manifestations of fiscal austerity. However, the restructuring of New York City and other urban centers in capitalism’s core following a financial crisis (Peck 2012; Susser [1982] 2012) and the Dickensian tale of two cities—New York and Detroit, finance and industry—linked through austerity measures (Susser 2016), serve a good aim in situating the contemporary phenomenon. But the 1970s and 1980s especially also saw the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and stabilization programs by the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which served to disseminate keywords of the new reality to societies across the Global South. Key policy principles associated with both SAPs and austerity circulated transnationally during the

1980s. They included the privatization of state functions, the introduction of cost recovery for social services, the elimination of exchange controls, and currency devaluation. These keywords have set the agenda for a global restructuring that has been centripetal in nature: encroaching the “center” (e.g., Europe) from the “peripheries” (e.g., Africa). Indeed, the imposition of SAPs across the Global South during the 1980s constituted an earlier wave of austerity, and, while the branding of SAPs has changed, the social, political, and economic effects of austerity continue to be reproduced across the Global South today.

The anthropologies of adjustment and austerity

As with the example of austerity in contemporary Europe, SAPs were imposed on societies across the Global South by international financial institutions in the wake of debt crises, but the roots of SAPs can be traced to the 1960s, when many postcolonial governments undertook large-scale projects to transform their societies following political independence (Ha-Joon 2014). As the debt crisis spread across the Global South, a shift in World Bank philosophy away from poverty reduction and toward neoliberal policy principles led to the development of SAPs. Adjusting here meant “catching up”: if injecting debt in the veins of developing economies to boost development meant a deleterious debt crises, then the panacea was to “adjust” the body economic (Stuckler and Basu 2014; cf. Rakopoulos 2018a). The idea of a *passe-partout* treatment, a remedy that works cross-culturally and across geographical and temporal contexts has been a staple for crass modernist development projects for some time (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1998). But to fabricate a universal medicine for a global disease (debt), has been a thoroughly neoliberal practice—and has seen its materialization in SAPs, and—more recently—debt directives in Southern Europe, most tragically in Greece.

Anthropologists documented and analyzed the effects of SAPs from the late 1980s onward, from the point of view of those who suffered these proto-austerity measures. Given the disciplinary focus on local-level single field analysis, the tendency has been, for example, to scrutinize how the suffering body politic and the body of the self were hit by effects of particular elements of structural adjustment. Medical anthropologists have been at the forefront of that tendency, focusing on public health sectors cuts and privatization—on individuals and communities (see Pfeiffer and Chapman 2010: 154–156; see also Powers, Pfeiffer, this issue). Within the subdisciplinary focus on health, critical medical anthropologists have also analyzed how broad forces have impacted the health of communities and individuals (Baer et al. 2003; Farmer 1996; Singer and Baer 1995; Susser 2009).

The emerging anthropologies of austerity have largely bypassed the engagement with an earlier wave of austerity, defining it rather as a historical blow that delivered a fall from grace for third-sector economies oriented toward mass consumption (see Muehlebach 2016). Indeed, such contributions seem to embrace a definition of austerity regimes as a condition concerning societies that enjoyed a high standard of consumption (e.g., Knight and Stewart 2016). At the same time, the logic of normalizing austerity purposefully confuses correlation and causation (Blyth 2013: 71).

Against this backdrop, we need to salvage meaningful causality. Austerity exacerbated the crisis when it was employed to tackle it, and it was applied to vulnerable economies before it touched Europe. Indeed, by now, the culprit in recession is austerity—not an abstracted “crisis.”

The current state of play in anthropology seems to suggest this, after all. While the anthropology of hope and crisis has been bifurcating into those scholars embracing hopefulness against all odds and those associating it with disorientation (Kleist and Jansen 2016), most ethnographies of hope seem to converge on crisis (Narotzky and Besnier 2016). This operates

either as a structural condition engendering hope or as the end of rational time, after which only affective—and thus hopeful—temporalities can exist. What is more, the existing ethnographies of austerity seem to focus on its temporal dimensions but allege that it is actually a historical rupture with the chain of events, a fallout with capitalist modernity, or indeed a time breach in the lives of people experiencing it (Knight 2016). Instead, we insist that austerity’s own history needs to be narrated, seeing crisis as *longue durée* (Rakopoulos 2014b).

An anthropologizing of austerity implies that analysis must be situated in its historical context. E. P. Thompson’s call for anthropology as a discipline of historical context, applied in our current predicament, implies addressing the political culture that constructs austerity as a discourse of obedience and self-blame, as well as the systemic capitalist domain in which perpetrators and victims of austerity operate (see Kalb 2018). Compiling this theme section, we aimed for a collective endeavor that would bring together contributions from the “developing” world that challenge and reshape austerity, measuring it comparatively with processes in the global scale. We also stress those cases that are suspended between two worlds, that of the old periphery and the erstwhile center—including Luandan/Lisboan and Argentinian/Italian conjunctures. As a critical intervention, these inter-ethnographic assemblages are set to problematize the Eurocentrism and presentism inherent in this contemporary application of “austerity.” This aim is served by the makeup of this theme section: ethnographically informed takes effectively decolonize the term, extrapolating it from its current political and intellectual confines. We thus trace a contemporary archaeology of disaster, in going toward the unexpected places of austerity, from Latin America to Southern Africa, in order to establish its current centralization onto Europe. This is not a linear examination of historical development (see Rakopoulos, this issue) but rather one careful to grasp the ways in which capitalism oper-

ates in multiple chronicities—that see Southern Europe in aspects of Southern Africa or South America, and vice versa.

Moral crises and the morality of crisis

In addressing these concerns, we are, to an extent, operating at the back of a recent volume (*The Global Life of Austerity*) that links austerity with structural adjustment (Rakopoulos 2018; see also Powers 2018). In that book, there is, arguably for the first time in anthropology, a suggestion that the two might be seen not antithetically or as different categories in political economy but indeed as contingent on each other. In fact, the anthropology of austerity cannot rely on a bankrupt sociological-cum-political economic categorization that ascribes, like a global division of value (and people's worth), the SAP system of domination to a postcolonial Third World and austerity to Euro-America. It strikes us that neoliberalism, structural adjustment, and austerity are not issues to be triangulated but rather a general continuum bringing the world together in discontent about capitalism's internal accounting systems. This is a moral, normative continuum: an audit of how human lives are ought to be managed on a large scale (i.e., "state budgets"), a fiscally concerned mode of operationalizing societal control. The current austerity Euro-moment has a world-reaching story, associated most recently with the 2008 global financial crisis, which sparked the wave of "fiscal responsibility" enveloping Europe. Public health and social supports have been sacrificed so that "sovereign" debts may be repaid through the financialization and socialization of sovereign debt (Bear 2015: 10–11). For the ideology of this fiscal fetish, the tit for tat is between livelihoods and indebtedness (Graeber 2011), with a moralistic language of excess—"excessive" expenditure, services, money, and work(ers)—forming austerity's economy of words. This speaks to a more general point.

We posit that austerity is the novel ideological and moral, circumstantial specificity of a

long genealogy of thought that begins with the classics in political economy and is based on the scare of the scarcity society. The idea of scarcity is central to the core of austerity's moralism—this is, an idea that brings us back to some key debates in economic anthropology (Sahlins [1972] 2017). This comes from a specific political economic position that is *neoliberal*, in that it is practically a repetition of classic Malthusian political economy. It is well ingrained, if unwittingly, in early eighteenth-century debates that seemed resolved for a few decades after the war but are now coming back with a vengeance. The historical roots of austerity as a concept, and its centrality to liberal economic theory, can thus be traced back to the origins of political economy as a discipline. This observation radically confirms not only that austerity is "not new" but also indeed that it provides an episteme of human management that corroborates with the moral philosophy of yesteryear.

Critically, austerity policies are premised on an idea of social sustainability *themselves*. That is the main intellectual struggle here: that austerity is posited as the most efficient way possible to serve as many people as possible within the realm of the possible, that is, within a "limited resources" framework. The delimitation of such resources is done on the grounds of equal sharing of a fiscal burden and a growth aim, as the aforementioned volume's contributors have suggested (see Hart 2018 on "egalitarian rationing" and Schober 2018 on "taking the bullet"). With that in mind, we should avoid a facile critique of austerity against a "defending the social" epistemology. Austerity kills, and while it is important to never lose sight of its severe, dehumanizing effects, we must also note that there are limits to moral critique. Indeed, this points to an insight that Karl Polanyi (2014) might not have noticed fully in *The Great Transformation* but might be hinting to an extent in other work: *the market itself has an ethics*. It is a morality that, at least in rhetoric, is premised on the maximization of the well-being for everyone, an idea noted already since Adam Smith's seminal contributions.

Indeed, the moral foundations of Smith's work are resurfacing now, on the grounds of moralistic makings of people's livelihoods, and how those normativities are counteracted by grassroots, anti-austerity morals. The main dilemma is not whether austerity or rationing our carbon footprint is an idea of morality or not. There is dystopic potential of the late environmentalism in its moralizing take ("consume less"), but there is also critique of the corporate state in other formations of this ecological austerity. In that, we see that austerity is not *necessarily* a shrewd way of suggesting a common political life. Indeed, we can say we have had three austeries: rationing, eco-"logical," and fiscal. The main dilemma is, instead, are these three forms of economic rationality that oppose other forms of economic behavior, such as squandering of resources in war to mitigate power decline, or are they all moral discourses, impracticable and utopian, that can only generate corrupt—and, importantly, inefficient—forms of state regulation?

In the aforementioned volume, we argue that austerity is not new: it is a historical continuity and a geographical specification of structural adjustment. Rather than a breach, as seen almost universally in anthropology (e.g., Bear 2015), the approach taken here is that austerity is a deepening of really existing capitalism (see also Rakopoulos 2014a). Here, we take this "not news" argument further: austerity is the more recent moral normativity of a long intellectual genealogy rooted at the heart of political economy. Talk of scantiness and insufficiency is the moral basis for austerity nowadays. The idea posits that, being in shortage, seen as deficient and undersupplied in a period of global demand legitimizes (indeed, begs for), austerity *measures*. Importantly, the current one is a demand that expresses itself in debt and interest rates that *measure* the capacity and the—financial and moral—*worth* of individual political economies and their taxpayers (people, the anthropological concern). Indeed, human life is an area that is now measured and through which algorithms are produced in certain global health

discussions that are meant to salvage "a certain amount of people." If one considers the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation policies, for instance, one sees the ideology—and morality—of scarcity at work, in the field of human lives. This is made explicit in the two contributions of this theme section that deal with austerity in the health sector in Africa.

The history of austerity that is mapped out in *The Global Life of Austerity* is a useful jumping-off/reference point, and we would like to advance several points that are hinted at in the volume. First, austerity is not a unique or original phenomenon but instead one expression of SAPs in less fragile economies. This observation is—or should be—the natural outcome of the anthropological comparative approach between what looks unfamiliar (SAPs in, say, Jamaica) and what seems accustomed (austerity in, for example, Britain). Second, the anthropology of austerity is ethnographic, in that it mines the senses and experiences of indignation, frustration, and general discontent we have encountered in the places we and the other contributors to this theme section have done fieldwork. The containerization of austerity, historically and academically speaking, while challenged by recent accounts, requires us to think beyond borders, to embrace how politically produced precarity is intertwined with the dynamics of transnational movement of various kinds and thus requires us to start thinking—and doing research—in ways that reflect this situation. Indeed, the contributions in this collection underscore the need to think beyond local context and national frames in order to understand how austerity and SAPs have unfolded as social processes.

Overview of articles

Imagining ways to extend beyond a Eurocentric nexus and onto global processes would seem necessary in moving beyond the discourse that has influenced academic accounts of austerity. Here, we do so by bringing together anthropological perspectives on African, South Ameri-

can, and European experiences of austerity and SAPs. However, analyzing how austerity has unfolded as a social process in different cases highlights the need to construct new ways of tethering together the social, economic, and political dynamics described in the collection that build on established approaches and animate these concerns. This theme section is a first step in a process of discerning how to build an approach that more accurately accounts for the continuities and relationships outlined within the contributions

A clear pattern of transnational process enlivens the articles, with points of emphasis including policy norms, the power of elites, capital flows, debt obligations, and strategies for recuperating socioeconomic activity in the aftermath of crisis. These themes underscore a point of tension that animate the collection: how local actors, institutions, and historically particular conditions channel the effects of austerity and SAPs, as well as the sense of a broader set of forces driving the manifestation of similar outcomes across time, space, and modes of sociality. Several of the contributors emphasize the role of elites in overseeing the enactment of these policy assemblages, and their responsibilities in producing the social, political, and economic outcomes associated with them. However, a reductionist understanding of elites as “local” is engaged with critically within the collection, as such framing perhaps reflects the anthropological approaches deployed more so than the social process under analysis.

Giovanni Orlando’s article is a comparative exercise, focusing primarily on Italy but also suggesting how localized, specific anti-austerity struggles that inspire alternative economies branch out to projects inspiring them at the other side of the Atlantic. Italian austerity produced job cuts and the eventual shifting of production out of the country, which led to various survival strategies, including factory occupation, at the local level. Critically, the company that shuts the factory in question is Polish, and, when viewed along with further off-shoring toward Poland, this ethnographic analysis fur-

ther complicates the multi-scalar ramifications of both the austerity joint venture between corporate and state policy, and what are the current crises of an overheated globalization (Eriksen 2016). Given Bruce Kapferer’s (2010) recent contributions on the corporate state, it is our assumption, here confirmed by ethnography, that austerity is a phenomenon of state/corporation common enterprise.

Here, Orlando is highlighting that an intra-European process of exploitation has been enabled by the formation of the EU, a neoliberal construct that has facilitated the movement of finance capital. A transnational anthropology of austerity is evident here via changes in ownership and the condition of self-management, common in Argentina postcrisis, and now springing up in places like Northern Italy. That this process was facilitated by a series of lies also coheres with the idea of austerity as a bundle of productive lies, an idea Don Kalb (2018) put forward in his critique of Douglas Holmes’s (2014) “cultural economy” take. The mendacity involved in austerity’s implementation is a discursive force to reckon with (Raudon and Shore 2018).

James Pfeiffer’s article takes more of a classical national case study focus, underscoring how the circulation of austerity as a transnational policy assemblage is weaponized by an alliance between the IMF/WB and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) elite, which exacerbates inequality—and unequal health outcomes—in post-conflict Mozambique. Pfeiffer focuses on the effects of these policy assemblages on public health, with the explosion of nongovernmental organizations to address public health and the emergence of a transnational audit culture particularly significant.

The study is, however, situated in what is more than “national policies” of a financially and politically bankrupt FRELIMO and into concerns in global health. Pfeiffer takes the argument further, arguing that the defunding of public health via SAPs/austerity is addressed by the proliferation of NGOs, which channels donor capital to support private organizations,

further entrenching the underfunding of the public health sector. Here, the transnational response to austerity arguably exacerbates the privatizing tendency within various austerity assemblages, reproducing the neoliberal logic on which they are based. Here, again, organizations and people, not abstract forces, are driving the process forward. Pfeiffer's study underlines the two main tropes of analysis in this collection: the changes in time and the internal shift from a progressive government to an actually existing neoliberalism and the framing of this shift in the broader geography of a transnational matter: global health.

The article by Theodore Powers does something similar for South Africa, tracing how the African National Congress's rise to power dovetails with the Washington Consensus's ascendance, leading to the self-imposition of austerity. Linking the emergence of epidemics, mortality, and public health across space and time, the article outlines how transnational policy assemblages can serve as a unifying conceptual platform to analyze the complex interplay of actors, institutions, and modes of temporality in analyzing how austerity unfolds as a sociopolitical process. Powers also discusses how this process unfolds according to a time signature that deviates from what was witnessed for SAPs across the Global South and contemporary austerity in Europe. While this process was initiated amid crisis, it did involve a localized acceleration of the usual temporal rhythms of global politico-economic dynamics. In South Africa, austerity waxes and wanes, carried forward through interpersonal networks within the state, as the initial period of austerity ends in 2003, but related policy principles are mobilized in various fora before being made actionable in the Western Cape via the Health Care 2010 policy.

Deploying policy as a chronotope, Powers argues that South African austerity highlights a form of "slow violence," where austerity, once introduced, continues to percolate within elite governmental networks, which include people who are willing—and eventually able—to

re-implement policies based on austerity principles. Like Pfeiffer's contribution, Powers's analysis is based on the national case study model, underscoring a tension between broader temporal dynamics that are structured by the global financial class and the wealth they control. It also elucidates how state actors are able to initiate processes that are linked to, but not contingent on, broader temporal processes linked to global capitalism.

The article by Ruy Llera Blanes analyzes how austerity in Angola and Portugal was manifested in a mutually constitutive fashion by focusing on how the movements of people, capital, and policy principles unfold across a transnational field. The article is particularly central to the overall argument, as it integrates flows of concerns and responses to austerity that span across continents. The case study underscores how Angolan politico-economic elites, Portuguese expatriates, and working-class residents of Luanda navigate austerity as a social process that circulates across national boundaries and animates local narratives of political critique. The article's main contribution to an anthropology of austerity is the heuristics of travel that it proposes: how austerity follows people, stories, politics, and enterprise across the postcolonial setting of intercontinental relations.

Indeed, Blanes is arguably pushing the agenda of our transnational focus further and in the clear direction of a focus on people across places, united in discontent (Theodosopoulos and Kirtsoglou 2010) over austerity policies. Blanes directly links how austerity ties together Angola and Portugal via networks of political elites and their expropriation of public goods, but there is more than that. The author is in some ways showing us how we might move beyond national case studies of austerity to trace the movement of people to transnational social process and link these together in coherent ways (Powers 2017). As Blanes's ethnographic vignettes underscore, working-class Angolan people are making links that transcend the limits of local and national case studies as they ride in the taxis; can we not as well?

The collection is accompanied by two afterwords that suggest two parallel but possibly intertwining takes on the overall contribution of the theme section. Building on the social, political, and economic trends outlined during the period of neoliberal globalization, Ida Susser pushes the authors to link their findings to politico-economic theories that offer explanatory value to the subtleties of global integration and to the material foundations of social movements that counteract austerity's impact. Pondering the dynamics of time, a theme implicitly crossing all the articles, Theo Rakopoulos suggests we assume a "reverse" logic in reading the global dynamics of austerity by paying attention to the possibilities for radical comparison based on an anthropology situated in the Global South but looking at the Global North. Inspired by Eduardo Galeano (1991), the author suggests reversing the makings of evolutionary time to revisit austerity's current implications. His use of the "lever" as a metaphor points to the threads started in the introduction and, like Susser's points, brings together the regionalism, comparativism, and global urgency of the articles' discussion.

Time, space, and a transnational anthropology of austerity

What does austerity do? It appropriates public goods toward private hands—redistributing wealth from the middle and lower classes, concentrating it among the elite—and enacts violence on the bodies of poor and working-class people, fundamentally transforming their lifeworlds and their capacity to live a life devoid of disease, illness, and premature death. It does this transnationally, of course. But it should not be ignored that this is the logical extension of the scarcity principle, as we are investigating the conditions under which austerity is implemented. We are calling for an extension of substantivist accounts beyond the local and national levels, to embrace how austerity unfolds as a double movement. We view austerity as crys-

tallization, concentration, and intensification of liberal capitalism is this collection and thus rely more on evidence of continuity rather than breach, of discontent rather than subjectivation.

Some of the current debate explores what austerity does, how it is *performed*, and indeed how it is internalized—how it becomes a sort of Foucauldian subjectivation writ large to include the societal. However, rather than subjectivation to neoliberalism through docility and embodiment of exploitation, of which there is a long anthropological documentation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ong 2006), we have observed resistance to austerity through the formation of alternative trajectories to tackle austerity measures, be they solidarity economies, new migration patterns, or existential frustration. Indeed, most of the articles seem to be showing a rejection of neoliberal assault via austerity, a sort of postcrisis double movement.

If subjectivation is occurring, it appears to be tiered or aggregated in differing ways in different contexts, where political elites are being pulled into a loose, fragmentary, and shifting transnational coalition of what we might tentatively call austerity practitioners. These agents—people, institutions, and the interpersonal relations entangling them together, as in Powers's article—are following and are embedded in "austerity culture(s)," an idea we borrow from Sally Raudon and Cris Shore (2018). Austerity culture is so tightly linked with all the cultural assumptions on the "rational choice actor," as rationality is evoked as a trope by austerity perpetrators. Rational choice theory is, after all, a culture—a specific cosmology that is entirely ideological. Whether this group of austerity practitioners is a tangible entity, or whether it is possible to follow their combined actions via the loose aggregation of international institutions, national states, and elites across the Global North and South, is of course a different question entirely, but one we are alluding to here.

In thinking through these dynamics, we are concerned with the chronicities and spatialities of austerity, as a phenomenon that manifests

itself as condensed historical time in a given locality. Like evaporated milk, the time of austerity is dense and thick, and needs to be diluted to metabolize. It thus requires thick historical description, where ethnography meets history. Recent ideas on acceleration in anthropology (Eriksen 2016) are inspiring, because they point to the overheated space-time compression of crisis capitalism. In this temporal situation, the need to account for speed (Duclos et al. 2017) is pressing. The task is to account for the ways in which hurtling temporality is imprinted on societies and how the most vulnerable hold back against this political, “adjusting” speed—a speed that is identified with catching up with rational fiscal choices, often in the moniker “transition economies.” The political Lefts often glorify the union achievements of the past, Fordist or otherwise. For that reason, resistance to austerity is often seen as inertia, a nostalgic clinging to a recent past, the-time-before-change. Again, African examples can be inspiring, especially regarding how futures collapse into the present, while people can see no futurity in their exploits (Ferguson 1999; Nielsen 2014).

The condensation of political time is central to what austerity does. Austerity measures seem to distill, from historical rendering, a specific notion of historical urgency. It is “changing times.” The very subjects and culprits for austerity, those fighting the class war of neoliberalism, *à la* David Harvey and Susser, are always quick to point out that what we are undergoing in Europe is not “austerity measures” but “needed fiscal obedience” and “restructuring”—terms that evoke the histories of SAPs outside Europe. After all, “to adjust” here has connotations of linear time that appear almost evolutionist—that is, “to catch up” with the teleology of further deregulation (see also Rakopoulos, this issue). Attention to the cultural modes of expression tied to elite mediation—as part of the social stratification that has unfolded alongside “restructuring”—may offer a site for reconceptualizing how transnational policy assemblages are localized and put into motion. The accounts

collected here point to spatial and temporal dynamics as areas for further theorization in order to link together the experience of SAPs across national boundaries, class divisions, and differential experiences of fiscal discipline.

Another dimension this theme section outlines as deserving of further attention is the spatial aspect of austerity and its concomitant impact on society. Indeed, the collection underscores that using Europe as a category for analysis is insufficient for understanding the contemporary austerity epidemic. Cartesian notions of containerized space do not offer a useful means with which to analyze transnational displacement and movement, or the dynamics that facilitate these ends. The Mediterranean, for instance, is marked by trajectories of labor and desperation that bring Africa, the Middle East, and Europe closer than the liberal imagination wishes to entertain. Austerity and SAPs may be productive of particular modes of socio-spatial movement fomented by material privation, conflict, and social dislocation. It would be remiss of us to see the refugee and the austerity “crises” in the Mediterranean as disconnected in that sense. The regional boxing of greater Europe can be unsettled via a reconceptualization of the broader region that now appears linked, although not integrated.

Certainly, space is not static but produced through a dynamic process that unfolds through the actions of people on both sides of a double movement that manifests, and can be analyzed, both spatially and socially (Lefebvre 1991). How, when, and where this double movement is mediated is where we might situate our discussions of temporality. Where and how do socio-spatial zones of austerity’s mediation unfold for different class-based interests? Anthropologists have approached this question through community-oriented case studies that correlate with a conception of society organized among national lines. But, of course, this does not reflect the social processes that have led to austerity or SAPs being put into place. Anthropologists, therefore, have been reflecting analytical categories

in their work that reproduce a set of distortions regarding how austerity is performed.

However, what can be discerned if one zooms out from communities and toward a transnational conception of austerity? We see an attempt to restructure how societies are organized, transnational in its form, which ensures that particular groups of people, in both the metropole and among the restructured, are able to extract wealth and resources from their respective societies. Here, accumulation by dispossession, secured through various forms of enclosure and/or privatization, is the necessary means for ensuring the establishment or continuation of economic growth, with SAPs and austerity standing as its contemporary exemplars (Harvey 2003, 2005; Luxemburg [1913] 1951; Marx [1867] 1977). One might think, with Rosa Luxemburg and Harvey, that accumulation is not a one-time event but a constant feature of capital expansion (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014: 5), in which aggressive shock SAP treatments of austerity measure imposition have been central recently. Think of the bailing of French and German banks during the Greek debacle. This is the situation in which the double movement is emerging postcrisis (2008), and one that can only be accurately depicted by tracing social processes across national boundaries.

Making claims of this sort requires us, as anthropologists, to find the human(s) in the (inhumane) transnational circulation of austerity. Doing so may help us to move past reliance on the usual constructs (IMF/WB/Troika), which have proven to be useful shorthand but have elided how people, and the institutions they control, lie at the center of violence that is all too often discussed in abstract terms. Indeed, anthropologists have long recorded the human suffering that has accompanied the imposition of austerity/SAPs, but this has seldom extended to the ways in which other groups of people, such as elites and their allies actively create these conditions and benefit from them. Can we analyze both sides of the coin based on observed human behavior? What might we gain and/or lose from doing so? These are the questions that

this collection brings to mind, a set of concerns that require further anthropological research and debate.

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