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Six Memos for the Current Time. Rethinking six contemporary sociological matters in light of the emotional dynamics shaping them

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Abstract. This contribution is inspired by Italo Calvino's Harvard Lectures which should had been hold at Harvard in 1986 and were never delivered because of Calvino's sudden and premature death. Calvino began his American lectures with a series of reflections on six qualities that he considered essential for good literature and then broadened his reflections to other (no strictly literary) dimensions of our existence. This article is based on a series of reflections on six sociological subjects that I consider essential to frame the recent pandemic, and then it extends such reflections to other realms of our everyday life. Care, Welfare, Death, Politics, Europe, and Marginality: the common denominator of these different key sociological subject matters is represented by emotions and their too often unacknowledged role in interpreting and explaining contemporary phenomena. They have been chosen as they represent a number of core themes which are considered key to help us demarcating the field of our critical analyses of the pandemic, but also because they epitomise paradigmatic contexts where the political relevance of emotional dynamics vividly emerge. In this sense, the main goal of this contribution is to invite scholars from different disciplinary perspectives to further investigate these key sociological subject matters by taking into account the crucial role of emotions, shedding light on the not so visible links between micro- and macro-levels of analysis and their implications for social change, and broadening our reflections to other (no strictly sociological) dimensions of our existence.

Keywords: Calvino's Harvard Lectures (Six Memos for the Next Millennium), emotions, politics, care, welfare, Europe, marginality, social change.

INTRODUCTION

In 1985-86, Italo Calvino was due to deliver *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (subsequently known as *Lezioni Americane*) in the context of the Harvard Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, then left unfinished because of his sudden death. The lectures were not just distinctively pregnant reflections on

literary qualities that he considered essential—lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity[1]; they were also a thoughtful and insightful legacy for the 20th century. In this paper—with a deep sense of humility—I aim to recollect the *spirit* of Calvino's Six Memos by jotting down six short reflections revolving around six sociological topics and research areas. Care, Welfare, Death, Politics, Europe, and Marginality are the six words which I consider key to interpret and reflect upon the recent global health emergency and which, although significantly distant between them, may be combined through the common denominator of *emotions* and their still too often undervalued role in explaining the social world. In the following sections, each of these key topics will be critically and reflexively analysed in light of their intersections with the literature, the role of emotions, and the recent pandemic.

The reasons why I consider these six topics crucial to interpret the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are related to the complex nature of the recent crisis, combining a sudden health threat with our notions of "care", they ways in which such notions are reflected in social policies and political choices and welfare interventions, the ways in which the pandemic has dramatically disrupted end of life care and rituals, the ways in which this global health crisis has shed light on both the positive and the problematic aspects of the European project, and the ways in which it has brought to the forefront the issue of marginal subjects. Whilst other subject matters could definitely help us framing the analytical borders of the recent global pandemic, the main objective of this contribution is to focus on those that are directly and distinctively related to the pandemic and that clearly possess important political implications. In other words, the main goal here is to cast light upon a number of core themes which are essential to draw the boundaries of our critical analyses of the pandemic. The six key words represents some of the most important components of the complex pandemic puzzle and should be metaphorically considered as the rings of a chain of closely interrelated and interwoven issues.

In this sense, our conventional notions of *Care* have been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic—suffice it to think of the numerous practical, political, economic and emotional challenges raised by this unprecedented scenario—forcing us to rethink the *value of care* in our societies. Rethinking care and its value implies, in turn, reflecting critically on the ways in which our societies deal with issues related to public health and well-being from a political point of view, in other words, to put notions of *Welfare*, which is the second, logically subsequent link of the chain of memos. This pandemic has dramatically changed not only our ideas and experiences of welfare, health and illness, but also our ideas and experiences of death. The third memo on *Death* follows therefore consistently the second memo on welfare and introduces us to the fourth one on *Politics*. Similarly to care, death is not merely a private matter, but also an utterly social and public one, which shows all the ambivalent interconnections between personal life and public history (Mills, 1957) and consequently brings the political sphere to the forefront. The focus on *Europe*, the fifth memo, is explained by several reasons: because of the specific ways in which Europe has dealt with the pandemic compared to other political contexts, because our notions of Europe are key to visualise the theoretical relevance of emotions, and because of the manifold bright and dark sides of the current development of the initial European project. The revitalisation of the European project can be enabled also though those social actors who live in the margins. This explains the choice of the concept of *Marginality* to develop the sixth, key memo. As several scholars have shown (Ahmed 2010; hooks 1989, 1990; Sennett 2011; Sharma 2013; Unger 2000), marginality can open the doors to several forms of resistance and pathways to social change. It is precisely in the interstices of marginality that fragments of social and cultural innovation may occur.

Undoubtedly, the recent pandemic has marked a significant turning point in many respects; a turning point that holds several cultural, social, and political implications and that requires new, multidisciplinary approaches to interpret it; most likely, a genuine paradigm shift. In coping with this complex challenge, whose only foreseeable consequence is a potential exacerbation of social inequalities and social exclusion, we have, I think, two main options: either surrendering to pessimistic temptations or trying to identify a margin of possibility in order to turn this crisis into an opportunity for positive change.

It is in this vein that, in what follows, I will discuss six contemporary sociological subject matters meaningfully connected to the recent pandemic by translating them into six memos for future theoretical, methodological and

[1] A sixth lecture, on consistency, was never accomplished.

political developments and providing some original insights in light of the emotional dynamics that are shaping them. Calvino's memos can be considered an inspiring way to stimulate reflexive thoughts on a series of matters which go beyond literature. With a similar spirit, it is hoped that the following memos will stimulate some reflexive thoughts on the importance of a genuine interdisciplinary approach by bringing *emotions* to the frontstage. The significance of the proposed approach lies precisely in these premises.

FIRST MEMO: CARE

Almost in the same period in which Calvino was preparing his lectures, Waerness (1984) introduced the concept of the *rationality of care* with the aim to overcome one of the traditional dichotomies characterising the concept of care: the separation between emotion and rationality. It is now commonly agreed by scholars in this field—but it wasn't back in the 1980s—that *care* represents a particular kind of work; an activity directed to identify and meet the needs or the well-being of certain others and challenging the opposition of head and heart, thinking and feeling. If we want to understand care, then, we need to envisage a different type of rationality, compatible with, but more substantive than the formal rationality by which orthodox economists analyse labour supply decisions. Inspired by Hochschild's concept of the *sentient actor* (1975), Waerness' pivotal article proposed a new concept of care which included both thinking and feeling, without inflating any of these crucial aspects. By taking the example of motherly care as an ideal type in the Weberian sense, Waerness described how learning in this context, although different from learning in the context of science, still requires a form of rationality. If in the context of science predictability, generalisability and control represent the benchmarks and «one understands from the position of an outsider», in the context of everyday motherly care, «one has to think and act on the level of the particular and individual [...] and to understand from the position of an insider» (Waerness 1984: 197). Acknowledging the rationality of care and its value would imply to emphasise people's personal knowledge and practical experience «at the expense of professional and bureaucratic control and authority» (1984: 204) in the care system, and to provide women with more voice and visibility in the public sphere, given their direct experience as primary caregivers and their theoretical contribution in understanding care as a complex phenomenon involving rational and emotional components.

Regrettably, we know that this did not happen neither at a policy level nor at the political one, and, after almost 40 years, Waerness' ground-breaking concept still seems at odds with a large part of the classic sociological tradition which considers *emotion* and *rationality* as two separate analytical categories and tends to underestimate the role of emotions to grasp social structures and social processes. Despite the fact that during the last 40 years a growing body of literature within the field of the Sociology of Emotions showing the links between micro- and macro- levels of analysis has helped clarifying the fallacy of such dichotomy (Barbalet 2001; Collins 1990, 1993, 2004; Flam and King 2007; Gordon 1990; Hammond 1990; Hochschild 1979, 1995; Kemper 1990; Jasper 2006, 2011; Scheff 1990; Pratesi 2018; Smith-Lovin 1993; von Scheve and Salmella 2014; von Scheve and von Luede 2005; Van Ness and Summers-Effler 2018), the complex nature of care is far from being fully grasped and understood.

Several scholars have highlighted the implications of care in terms of social justice, gender equality and citizenship, conceptualising care responsibilities in terms of universal, public concern (Casalini 2020; Knijn and Kremer 1997; Tronto 1994; White and Tronto 2004); and yet care is still highly gendered and social policies tend instead to define the notion of «citizen-carers» in neutral terms (Barnes 2012). The gendered nature of care responsibilities and the *collective denial of care* and dependency as central to the construction of the public sphere transform care into a *burden*. And whilst scholars still disagree on the place and the meaning of care in women's lives, most of them now seem to agree on the necessity to look for broader and empirically grounded definitions of care, concluding that care cannot be described and conceived in terms of a single theoretical category but rather as a multifaceted, empirical one. Accordingly, examining care within specific historical, political and social contexts may be the most effective way to grasp a fuller understanding of its place and meaning in people's lives.

Back in the 1990s, Hochschild highlighted how «in the absence of wider changes in the culture of manhood and workplace, two-job couples often suffer a micro version of the *care deficit*» (Hochschild 1995: 337). More

recently, Zelizer (2005) suggested that what we need is a «feminist rethinking of care concerns» which focuses on several types of concrete care relationships with the aim of overcoming «the traditional hostile worlds dichotomies that erroneously split economic transaction and intimate personal relations into separate spheres» (Zelizer 2005: 303). Additionally, a growing body of critical theorisations of care, intimacy and citizenship from feminist, multicultural and global perspectives has tried to provide a broader, more grounded, intersectional understanding of care, at the crossroad of multiple dimensions including, among others, migration, sexuality, social inclusion, emotion and citizenship (Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Fudge 2014; Kershaw 2010; Longman et al. 2013; Parreñas 2005; Pratesi 2018; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Yuval-Davis 2007).

Elsewhere, I have shown how *emotions* are key to explain the dynamics by which care-related inequality is reproduced situationally, beyond the rigid and reifying categorisations of sex and gender and beyond family discourses which posit heterosexuality as the norm (Ingraham 2005; Pratesi 2018). By looking at the inner, dialogical, interactive, emotional dimensions of informal care, we can construct an *embodied theory of care*, by contextualising it in the specific situation we are living and intersecting multiple sociological dimensions and issues, both at the micro- and macro- level. Findings from previous research have also shown how, by claiming their *right to care*, same-sex families challenge conventional definitions of families and intimacies and generate new forms of relational and anti-assimilationist citizenship (Pratesi 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic is adding further elements of complexity to our ideas of care. In the recent scenario, care has been *denied* (we cannot take care of our beloved ones when they get ill) and too often even professional carers had to make unimaginable choices faced with a limited amount of resources available and with the retrenchment process characterising the national health systems. Care has been transformed for many of us into a "forced distant care" (many states worldwide have issued far-reaching lockdown measures), it has implied for other people an additional unbearable strain (consider: domestic violence, war, forced migration, homelessness, mental health issues, physical health issues, absent or poor health system, no income, only to mention a few) and it has meant for others a fatal risk. But it has also provided us with a unique opportunity to rethink the *value of care* (both paid/professional and unpaid/informal care) in light of this momentous and dramatic experience. Rethinking care and its value means reconsidering the ways in which our societies deal with our health and well-being from a political and institutional point of view. This is why the second ring of the chain of memos here outlined concerns our notions of "welfare".

SECOND MEMO: WELFARE

Care is indeed strongly connected with one of the most important pillars of our health and well-being: the welfare state. During the last 40 years, attempts have been made to analyse the welfare state in its historical, institutional and political development and to provide theoretical models in a comparative perspective. Some of the original classificatory attempts provided by Titmuss (1974) and then Esping-Andersen (1990) have been eventually integrated to include important dimensions that had been overlooked by such models, such as the gender dimension and the role of the family in the production of welfare. Critics of these models, among other aspects, have concerned the reference to the concept of *decommodification* in the typology proposed by Esping-Andersen, which is based on the assumption that individuals are in fact commodified, i.e., that their possibilities of allocation of resources depend on the selling of their workforce in the market. According to feminist criticism (Orloff 1993), this concept can only be applied to male workers, since women, in addition to having less stable working careers than men, often do not have an active position in the labour market.

A growing literature (and Esping-Andersen himself) has eventually employed the notion of *defamilization* into the comparative examination of welfare state models to indicate the difference between countries with a strong or a minimal family dependency. Within this analytical framework, the social democratic regimes of Northern Europe display the highest degree of defamilization, while the Southern European countries shows a lower level of defamilization, which means a higher level of welfare responsibilities dropping on the family. No attempts, though, have

been done—beyond that of assessing the family culture or the political culture of a country—to overcome a mere policy-oriented analysis to deal with the *care deficit* (Hochschild 1995), which emerges in a context where the need of care increases and the supply of it contracts. The cultural models informing the different types of welfare identified by Hochschild are the *traditional* model, represented by the stay-at-home mother, the *postmodern* model, represented by the multi-task working mother, the *cold-modern* model, represented by impersonal, institutional care, the *warm-model* model, in which there is a balanced combination between institutional/formal care and private/informal/family care and men and women equally share care responsibilities, burdens and joys.

The problem with these theoretical models is that they tend be focused upon specific ideas of the family which do not take into account what makes a family and the multiple family arrangements around the world. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) use the term *world families* to describe a heterogeneous set of social actors, extremely different from each other, who share though the ability to overcome traditional dichotomies such as public/private, centre/periphery, national/international, able-bodied/physically impaired, heterosexual/homosexual, etc., helping us reframe the concept of social citizenship. These families represent a group of very different social actors, including couples of mixed cultures and ethnicities, low-paid migrant workers, skilled migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees, distant families, etc. who challenge our limited understanding of family and care. In order to overcome such limitations, I suggest to start looking at the *emotional frameworks* shaping the different welfare models and at the different ideas of care we currently have and we might want to have in the future.

The still brief but dramatic history of the COVID-19 pandemic has already taught us several lessons about the importance of international cooperation and solidarity as well as about the different ways to think about cooperation and solidarity within different contexts, which are different not only because of their sociological cultures, political cultures, welfare cultures, care cultures, but first and foremost because of their *emotional cultures*. In Europe, there is a clear emotional divide which is discernible at a local, regional, national and supranational level, but which is amplified as we move up the sociological lenses from the micro (national) to the macro (international) level. Taken together, whereas we might define the emotional cultures of Southern Europe in terms of "expressive" emotional cultures—i.e., characterised by the propensity to express and manifest emotions more blatantly and spontaneously—the emotional cultures of Northern Europe—characterised by the propensity to conceal emotions and/or to manage and control them—can be defined in terms of "repressive" emotional cultures. *Expressive* and *repressive* here do not possess any form of value-oriented assessment and they are only meant to represent ideal-typical abstractions and terms which are used for analytical purposes. Are we then becoming more or less able to deal with our emotions? Though these considerations are in no way meant to be judgmental, it is clear that whatever the answer may be, emotional cultures are as important as sociological, political and economic cultures.

Both emotional cultures have got their advantages and disadvantages: this is not a question of establishing trivial and pointless hierarchies of values between different emotional cultures (i.e. the passionate, warm South and the rational, cold-blood calculator North), but rather to acknowledge the crucial role of emotions in determining every aspects of our life, including political choices, putting emotions and rationality in dialogue and embedding emotions in our analyses of future welfare policies and politics. Reconsidering or rebuilding new welfare states cannot be left merely in the hands of economic and political considerations. We all know that several gaps in terms of efficacy, efficiency, equality and social justice dramatically resonate with a North/South divide; but we also know that there are several grey areas and that the divide between welfare models becomes blurred when we compare different policy areas (such as, for example, the presence of a universal national health system, the quality of the education system or the quality of pre-school childcare services). Emotions and different emotional cultures affect the way we think and we act, as well as the way we imagine, reassess and implement new policies. This calls for a radical shift in the way we think about both the future design of our welfare and the welfare's future itself.

The global drama of the recent pandemic makes us understand the value of health and of the importance of an efficient welfare state. A working and efficient welfare state is a stronghold to be preserved and strengthened to foster solidarity between peoples, states and continents and would also represent a dyke against nationalistic drifts, national self-interest and privileges of all kinds. This pandemic, in all its natural and entropic cruelty which does

not acknowledge borders or social divides of any sort, has upset not only our ideas and experiences of health and disease, but also our ideas and experiences of death.

THIRD MEMO: DEATH

«Never before have people died as noiselessly and hygienically as today in these societies, and never in social conditions so much fostering solitude» (Elias 1985: 85). Never before has this quote been more pertinent. One of the most dramatic aspects of the recent pandemic concerned precisely the impossibility to be alongside our loved ones in the moment they die and even to grieve their death with a funeral. It is still too early to try and figure out the emotional and psychological consequences that this collective ungrieved trauma, this mass genocide with no rituals will bring about. And we do not need to quote Durkheim or the Ritual Theories on emotions to remember how important the collectivization of ritual was for several of the recent crises we have faced at a global level in the past decades, be it the Aids pandemic, 9/11, the terrorist attacks, the earthquakes across the globe, the Tsunami, the thousands of deaths of refugees and asylum seekers in the Mediterranean, and so on and so forth. Undeniably, though, there are specificities in this pandemic that make it a quite unprecedented event in many respects. The impossibility to take care of our beloved ones (what we might call the *denied care*) and, quite often, even to bury them, is one of them.

Around the same period in which Waerness introduced the concept of the rationality of care (1984), Elias published the *Loneliness of the Dying* (1985), where he described the historical, civilizing processes through which modernity conveys new meanings and shapes to our ideas of death and life. Together with the monopolization of violence by the state and the internalization of a series of moral norms managing emotions, the civilizing process also brings a different idea of death that is henceforth seen as something somehow predictable, expected to occur in an ostensibly typical form, and situated at the end of a long orderly process. It is essentially because of the emotional restraint resulting from the process of civilization, and more specifically because of the taboo «against the expression of intense and spontaneous feelings» (Elias 1982: 47) that we are witnessing, today, the removal of death from the frontstage and its confinement into an aseptic and invisible space. Thus, the farewell to the world of the living happens in solitude, without the emotional comfort of others.

For Elias, it is not just a question of having feelings for the dying person that is at stake, but also the possibility of manifesting one's *emotions* in a society that tends to ban them. Hence, new generations have now to work out for themselves how to behave in certain circumstance because of the changing emotional rules (Hochschild) but also of the declining appropriateness of conventional rituals and, according to Elias, of the absence of new rituals.

Elias (1985) suggested that terror and fear of death affect both individual and social spheres, the psychological defence mechanisms internalised through socialization echo the presence of defensive strategies which are socially constructed. However, from a different perspective, Kubler-Ross et al. (1972) had previously shown how, if the fear of death has always occurred, what has changed in the last decades is our way of coping and dealing with death and dying. Why? How? «One of the most important facts is that dying nowadays is in many ways more gruesome, more lonely, mechanical, and dehumanized; at times it is even difficult to determine technically when the moment of death has occurred. [...] Dying becomes lonely and impersonal because the patient is often taken out of his familiar environment and rushed to an emergency ward. [...] Maybe the question has to be raised: Are we becoming less human or more human? (Kubler-Ross et al. 1972: 10-11)».

Quite tellingly, even if we limit ourselves to look at recent work on these matters, we can see how we have already spent half a century shedding light on important aspects of our life and death. These explanations, whilst at times encouraged prolific academic debates, did not seem to have much effect on the public discourse and space. Indeed, if it is true that death is no more a taboo subject, be it in the sociological literature or in the wider society, it still remains a secreted one in the sense that it is generally taken away or removed from the public arena (Mellor, 1993; Mellor and Shilling, 1993). In a sense, then, death is very much present in contemporary Western societies; however, *talks of death* are still relatively absent. «Consequently, a sociological consideration of death must reflect

upon, and attempt to explain, the apparent contradiction between the *absence* and *presence* of death in contemporary society» (Mellor 1993: 11).

The taboo on death resonates with that on emotions, and particularly the emotion of shame, which is key to the close links between self and society, as several scholars have shown (Scheff 2000, 2003; Goffman 1956). By *shame* Scheff means a large family of emotions that includes many variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related emotional states, such as shyness, which involve feelings of failure or inadequacy. What unites all these variants is that they involve the feeling of a threat to the social bond. Although it is not a frequent event, *grief* also signals the loss of a social bond, therefore it is crucial to highlight the relations between individuals and society and possesses significant political implications.

Talking about death and rethinking death and its role in our lives may be one of the best ways to also rethink the type of health and care institutions we want, the question of end-of-life palliative care, the cultural, legal and institutional tools we might put in place to facilitate a *good death*. A good death is one that gives the dying person a choice, that allows him/her options for a specific dying process; that warrants, whereas and as much as possible, a pain-free status; that provides emotional support and take care of the dying person's physical, psychological and emotional well-being; that respects the dying person's dignity and will; that allows family and/or friends to be there; that facilitates a good relationship with professional caregivers, nurse and doctors, which excludes forms of power unbalance and puts the dying person's will, perspective and needs first.

Like critical care, death is not necessarily doomed to be purely associated with unbearable emotional burden or despair, but it can also become an opportunity, certainly a key one, to embrace life in its full meaning and entirety. But all this, quite obviously, requires a common effort of interaction between the public/political and the private/individual spheres, between what Elias would call the *intrapsychic* and the *interpersonal* realms. It requires, in other words, acknowledging the interdependencies in which we are all enmeshed, shedding light on the relationship between individual experience and the wider society, and henceforth bringing politics to the forefront.

FOURTH MEMO: POLITICS

Acknowledging the importance of interdependence and interconnectedness cannot be merely an intellectual achievement, but also a political one, both at the national and the international levels. During the first few months of the pandemic crisis, nationalist and separatist drifts seemed to have been temporarily swept away; nevertheless, at the same time, political self-centredness and economic-centred preoccupations have emerged, at least in the first stages of the European response to the crisis. Feelings of solidarity, sympathy, cooperation, and reciprocity have schizophrenically intermingled with feelings of estrangement, disaffection, antagonism, and dissent. From the very beginning, emotions were (and still are) at the centre of the stage and led many of the political decisions; perhaps even more than scientific evidence or realpolitik. But their role was hardly acknowledged, thematised and discussed. And yet, the development of a suitable interdisciplinary literature which puts emotions at the centre of their political analyses has been particularly rich in the last decades (Marcus 2000; Clarke et al. 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Clément and Sangar 2018; Demertzis 2013, 2020).

In her critical analyses, Ahmed (2004, 2010) discusses the sociological and political relevance of emotions by shedding light on the dynamics through which emotions work to align and separate individuals and the collective. Emotions are not merely psychological dispositions, but they operate in concrete and specific situations to mediate the relationship between the psychological component and the social one; in other words, they are linked to the way we inhabit the world together with others. Emotions play a crucial role in drawing distinctions between different bodies and worlds, between different individuals and different collective realities, between insiders and outsiders, and even between regions, countries and nations.

That emotions are part of social and political processes and the construction of political opinions and consensus has always been relatively clear; there is nothing new about that. Yet, there is something typically distinctive about the current political climate that does not always clearly emerge from the literature on these subjects. In

the case of the current rise of right-wing populism, what is new has to do with the ways in which and the means through which emotions are expressed and manifested; in other words, with the existing interactive forms, mediated spaces, and temporal models of affective dynamics, as well as with the ways in which emotions intersect dominant discourses, power structures and status hierarchies. Consequently, for example, we might start asking ourselves: how does the interaction between different «emotional dispositions» (Mühlhoff 2019) produce and shape forms of participation, mobilization, organization or political outbreak in people with different distributions of power, wealth, cultural, symbolic and social capital? What are the micro-social bases of emotional dynamics that explain the ability to influence and be influenced by a populist or neo-authoritarian political discourse? Mühlhoff (in Kemmer et al. 2019) reminds us how addressing these questions with a critical attitude can help us reframe emotions not (only) as a phenomenal category but (above all) as a theoretical and analytical one. This is the way forward for further theoretical advance within the context of the «emotional turn» (Clough and Halley 2007) that during the last decades has involved several disciplines.

In this respect, rather than comparing different emotional regimes (Reddy 2001) with each other, it can be more fruitful to use emotional lenses as an interpretative tool in the awareness of their intrinsic continuous mutability and their limited but indispensable contribution. The fact that the contribution of current sociological theories on emotions is incomplete provides us with additional evidence of its necessity and ineluctability, as theory-building advances exactly through the attempt to overcome limitations and inconsistencies. Social phenomena, old and new, should be reconsidered in light of theories on emotions as well as within the frame of specific historical and cultural contexts. Recovering the contribution of classical theories through the analyses of emerging social phenomena and their often-ignored emotional component can open up surprising theoretical and methodological developments, and possibly facilitate the development of a new form of humanistic knowledge which may represent as a stimulus for positive social change too. Without abandoning the primarily theoretical vocation of the academy, reinforcing this latter function of scientific knowledge is, however, possible and plausible. This can only happen if we are not scared to approach such knowledge in a proper interdisciplinary fashion, entangling sociology with anthropology, philosophy, neurophysiology, biology, economics, literature and art, or engaging in dialogue some of its multiple theoretical traditions such as media studies, studies on organizations, studies on migration, studies on citizenship, critical disability studies, feminist studies on the ethics of care, feminist studies on gender, queer studies, welfare studies, studies on globalization, studies on conflicts on an international scale, studies on violence and terrorism, etc.

As countries during the last couple of years have been debating how to combat the virus, one lesson from the recent experience may be that governments and scientists worldwide must increase the transparency and the efficacy of their decisions and expand the quality of their analyses and strategies. Manipulation and fake news proliferate (more than the virus itself) among those subjects who rely on stereotypes and a total lack of humanistic knowledge and emotional literacy as their reference system. Science is important, but it is not enough. An emotional literacy enabling politicians and policy makers to understand the manifold emotional dynamics involved in the pandemic and to handle them effectively is what is needed. Including in their team of experts and advisors those social scientists who are willing and able to engage with the aforementioned interdisciplinary approach would surely ease the governments' difficult task and improve the outcomes of their political decisions. Only in this way will it be possible to avoid future scenarios in which algorithms will end up elaborating social and political systems increasingly pushed towards the elimination of what today we can still define "the human" dimension. Emotional literacy and a deep understanding of the emotional dynamics are crucial also to reframe and rethink the European project, particularly in light of the recent pandemic.

FIFTH MEMO: EUROPE

In many ways and for different reasons, we all have experienced positive and negative emotions towards Europe and particularly towards the gap between its original ideal and vocation, and the actual shape and direction the

European project has taken. There are reasons for being at once pessimistic and optimistic about the future of such project. The list of reasons for being pessimistic, regrettably, is quite long and far more complex and articulated than the selection of some key problems currently affecting Europe on which I will focus in what follows.

There are, to start with, several "isms": nationalism, populism neoliberalism, terrorism, sexism, racism, etc. Racism takes several forms and shapes and racist violence involves as diverse ethnic and religious groups as Muslims, Jewish people, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Roma and other ethnic and national minorities. Racism and violence, verbal and physical, very often combine and intersect within sport contexts and arenas. Neo-Nazi and far-right parties, groups and movements are on the rise all over Europe. Sexism does not only concern gender-based discrimination in the work place and within the domestic sphere, but it is increasingly related to sexual violence, rape and femicide. Sexual minorities have also known a resurgence and regurgitation of (physically and emotionally) violent forms of discrimination even in countries which had been considered the cradle of culture, liberalism and open-mindedness.

Europe seems also to have forgotten the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly with regard to the question of forced migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Mediterranean Sea has become a veritable necropolis of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants and, thus far, the response of the European Union to this tragedy has been shockingly and shamefully weak (Pels 2016). On the contrary, borders, border controls and measures to manage and limit the arrival of refugees bourgeoned exponentially, up to the point of jeopardizing the freedom of mobility guaranteed by the Schengen Treaty; as if governments were mainly facing a matter of security and political strategies rather than a humanitarian crisis to be dealt with within the *ethical borders* of Europe's inspiring and leading values. Contradicting Europe's historical tradition of outward-looking policies and practices, European states have withdrawn into themselves, shutting doors, implementing austerity measures, tightening immigration rules, trying to prevent refugees and asylum seekers to arrive and keeping those who survived their dreadful travels and ordeals in reception centres more similar to concentration camps than to anything else. In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, rationales of national security and borders defence have prevailed over the «right to have rights» (Arendt 1958) and the moral imperative to take care of a whole series of *distant others* (Pulcini 2020). Inside fortress Europe, then, many of those people who were meant to be kept away ended up joining the crowd of cheap, unprotected and exploited workers within a context of widespread and growing anti-immigrant feelings (Bauman 2004). They ended up joining a sort of invisible underclass who becomes visible only when something extremely dramatic captures the attention of the media.

Social exclusion in Europe, however, is not only the prerogative of refugees and asylum seekers but it growingly involves many European citizens within a context where the gap between the extremely rich and the extremely poor people exponentially grows. The boundaries between inclusion and exclusion are all the more blurring and today's included can easily become tomorrow's excluded. This is adding sources of anxiety, anger and fear for the future, but also further social divisions and the temptation to blame "others" for one's misfortunes and economic struggles. Economic inequality is also mirrored in the North/South divide, which has considerably widened, creating a sort of «international class division between richer and poorer countries» (Pels 2016: 66). The explosive mix of inequality, poverty, lack of opportunities, and growing competitiveness has fostered feelings of distrust, cynicism, frustration, resentment, lack of empathy and what Bauman and Donskis (2013) call *moral numbness* or moral blindness, a sort of moral insensitivity towards the suffering others around us which is not limited to certain contexts or social groups, but rather permeates every aspect of our lives. Finally, Europe is missing a long-term vision «as distinct from the "problem resolution" and "crisis management" policies calculated for stretches of time that hardly ever reach beyond the next parliamentary election» (Bauman 2004: 23). The recent pandemic crisis, overlapping with a long-standing European crisis and fuelling more negative than positive emotions, shows how what is missing in Europe is *imagination*. «EU decision-makers are guided by short-term political considerations and are chiefly concerned with defending their own partisan interests, be they national or institutional. [...] Their abstract modelling and theorizing are increasingly detached from European realities and as such are of little use» (Zielonka 2014: 10). However, this crisis also represents for Europe an opportunity to recover, through a rediscovered imagination, its original project.

Indeed, there might be several reasons for being optimistic about the future of Europe as well as about the possibility to replace emotions such as fear, resentment and hatred with love, care and hope. To begin with, Europe's seventy-year long commitment to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights for which, in 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Pels 2016). The social democratic traditions which have characterised Europe since the end of WWII have made of Europe not only a symbol of resistance against violent conflict resolution, but also a model of civilization (albeit imperfect) for other countries and continents. In addition to that, and for better worse, Europe has also represented for centuries a melting pot of different languages and cultural traditions emerging out of a context where traders, travellers, artists, conversed and interacted with each other. «Europe has been and remains a homeland of perpetual translation» (Bauman 2004: 89). A constant translation exercise which, over time, converted a merely linguistic process into a cultural one: an ongoing reciprocal adaptation and understanding of different, cohabiting cultures (Bauman 2004).

In the EU, the persistent and consolidated practice to live with "others" has made of *otherness* a typical European trait and habitus; we are all "others" and simultaneously we keep our sense of cultural and social identity in a context where we constantly negotiate and interact with (other) people different from us, whilst being under the same European roof. It is not by chance that, both historically and at present, Europe has always tried to expand its cultural and geographical boundaries and, ironically enough, if we consider the defensive and seclusive attitude we described further above, Europe has always been averse to borders and limitations. Since its post-war constitution, Europe has been inspired by democratic values and ideals including freedom, equality, social justice, respect, human dignity, solidarity, cooperation, openness, curiosity, self-critique, tolerance, etc. and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) represented a milestone for all peoples and all nations. Fighting poverty was and still is an aim both within and outside the European borders. The social European state, inspired by principles of universal health care, also applies in principle to non-European citizens, tourists, and migrants.

The abolishment of death penalty was another distinctive mark of the European project, together with a progressive, ongoing strategy to fight violence, discrimination, inequality, social exclusion and to protect and support civil liberties and all types of minorities. Human rights legislation has protected the rights of the individuals in several contexts: work, family, education system, market, the State, and several other institutions. The defence, safeguard and protection of the natural environment has also been an important flag of Europe of which being happy and proud, particularly within a context of disquieting and rapid climate change, and the role of Europe has always been determinant in correcting other continents' laidback attitude towards environmental issues.

Given these premises and what we have been experiencing with the pandemic, we could rethink and re-imagine the European project as one that strengthens its virtuous foundations, values and visions and simultaneously invents new ones. Freed from racism, violence, cruelty, hatred and fear, Europe could become a safe harbour accessible to all citizens, non-citizens, and citizens to become. A safe harbour in which all types of diversity would be welcomed and treasured instead of feared and fought against. *In varietate concordia* («United in diversity») is the official motto of the European Union. The renaissance of the European project might be facilitated precisely by those social actors who are currently excluded, silenced, discriminated and marginalised. Their agentic potential, as we will clarify in what follows, can be revealed also in this case by taking into account the role of emotional dynamics.

SIXTH MEMO: MARGINALITY (AND THE EDGE EFFECT)

The last key word and memo is therefore *marginality*. The term marginality encompasses several other terms and concepts, which showed their faces and implications with a particular emphasis during the global pandemic; it means nonconformity, peculiarity, oddness, but it also recalls borders, edges, liminality, exclusion, powerlessness. In what follows, I want to draw attention to the less explored aspects of marginality, i.e., the positive ones. Marginality can be referred to a heterogeneous group of social actors whose status—in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.—situate them in a non-dominant social position, but who can translate their disadvantaged position and the associated marginality into a potential resource and even a drive for positive social

change. What I am trying to convey here is a broader development of the first formulations of the concept of *positive marginality* provided by Mayo (1982), Rubin (1982) and Unger (2000), according to which the marginal position is a choice that, beyond the intrinsic risks, can also imply a series of advantages depending on the social actors' different positioning in terms of status and power and on the different connotations that the concept of marginality assumes in different societies and historical periods. In this perspective, my argument is that marginal social actors, precisely because of their inhabiting symbolically marginalized spaces, become interesting from a theoretical point of view as well as from a political point of view.

Thus, for example, Ahmed (2010) focuses on a series of marginal social groups (feminists, LGBT people, and migrant people) to challenge conventional definition of the concept of 'happiness' and suggests «rethinking happiness as a possibility» (2010: 17), which involves giving voice to silenced subjects and introducing issues of difference and inequality and issues of social justice into current debates on happiness. Ahmed offers an alternative history of happiness, not simply by offering different readings of its intellectual history, but also by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter the history only as troublemakers, dissenters, joy killers. In reality, these marginal and marginalised social actors can stimulate alternative, non-conventional definitions of happiness, unveiling and therefore overcoming traditional dichotomies such as happy/unhappy, public/private, inclusion/exclusion, assimilation/marginalisation, etc. and making their borders more blurred, less clearly defined.

In the first memo on care at the beginning of this contribution, I have mentioned several examples of critical theorisations of care, parenthood, intimacy, migration and citizenship providing phenomenological, relational and intersectional understanding of these concepts (Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Fudge 2014; Kershaw 2010; Longman et al. 2013; Parreñas 2005; Pratesi 2018; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Yuval-Davis 2007). Far from reproducing a narrative of oppression, social exclusion and victimization, these critical perspectives tend to emphasize the advantages of being *outsider inside* (Unger 2000) and shed light on the ways in which different types of what I have called elsewhere *unequally entitled citizens* (Pratesi 2016, 2018a, 2022) can facilitate various forms of micro-situated social inclusion and citizenship based on emotions and foster social change (Albrecht 2016, 2018). Pakulski's (1997) notion of *cultural citizenship*[2], underpinning the idea of full and effective inclusion in the culture of a specific society, can be helpful here. The rights involved in this notion can be applied to a whole variety of unequally entitled citizens who inhabit different marginal spaces, different types of legal and political limbos, i.e., different types of in-between-areas whose borders are not yet clearly defined. These unequally entitled citizens whose identity is constantly shaped at the crossroads of several oppositions (visibility/invisibility, private/public, inclusion/exclusion, absence/presence of rights, agency/social structures, etc.) share a marginal, interstitial and liminal condition that can be propulsive of *critical cosmopolitanism*, i.e. a type of anti-assimilationist coexistence of different cultures which is always aware of the risks of ethnocentric and patronising forms of social integration.

Marginality has to do with margins, borders, thresholds, frontiers, but also with the idea of beginning, opening, starting point. It can therefore represent an in-between area, a land of opportunity and open spaces, where ambivalence, openness and indeterminacy show all their positive and negative potential (hooks 1989, 1990; Sennett 2011; Sharma 2013). Ambivalence, openness and indeterminacy that also characterise emotions, making of them either a conservative force preserving the status quo or a revolutionary drive fostering social change. The landscape of marginality opens the doors of social change and creates fragments of possible new worlds and identities. Social and cultural innovation occurs in the interstices of marginality. Sennett (2011) describes the displacing and uprooting experience of the "foreigner" as an experience that creates value: a reflexive value that allows the subjects to add meaning and solidity to their existence. But the outcomes are not certain: marginality can lay the foundations for a positive transformation and for social change or it can produce discomfort, anomie, depression, despair and even illness and death, leading to social exclusion and further marginalisation.

The theoretical and political potential of the concept of marginality can be analysed in its entirety by examining those social actors who experience forms of displacement that intersect different dimensions and variables, such

[2] Which involves a series of rights – including the right to symbolic presence and visibility against marginalisation, the right to dignified representation against stigmatisation, and the right to affirmation and dissemination of one's identity against assimilation.

as geographical mobility, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality. I henceforth suggest to look at what happens at the level of emotion-based, micro-situated interactions, and in particular at what happens at the margins, at the borders, at the liminal interstices inhabited by various types of unequally entitled citizens in order to grasp the multiple implications that their marginal condition produces in terms of social change. It is a form of relational, interactional and emotional social change that takes place gradually and slowly, but steadily, at the micro-level to eventually involve the macro level as well. The slow pace makes it less visible, but not less effective, also at the structural, political and institutional level.

The different outcomes (positive or negative) will primarily depend on the ability of these different social actors, of these different types of *unequally entitled citizens* to channel the potential of their marginal position towards a broader, more flexible and more phenomenologically grounded concept of citizenship and social inclusion (Pratesi 2016, 2018a, 2022). Although extremely diverse, their constituencies should not be seen in competition between them but rather in a sort of coalition for positive social change. Different types of marginal social actors, old and new, can mutually benefit from each other's presence. This is the last memo and lesson we can learn: creativity lies at the margins, diversity means richness, in every tension and conflict there is a balance and something to learn, and collaboration is more productive than competition. Nothing simpler than that.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This contribution has focused on a few key topics that have been chosen to reflect upon the necessity of rethinking contemporary phenomena in light of the emotional dynamics shaping them. It has done this by providing examples of positive contamination between different theoretical approaches and disciplinary fields and focusing on some crucial issues related to the recent pandemic. *Care*, *Welfare*, *Death*, *Politics*, *Europe*, and *Marginality* are the six topics that I consider key to interpret and reflect upon the recent global emergency through the lenses of emotions. These six topics are central to interpret the consequences of the COVID-19 as they intersect our notions of care, how such notions are reflected in social policies and politics, the dramatic disruption of the end-of-life care and rituals, the encouraging and the challenging aspects of the European project, and the potentially agentic role of marginal social actors. Most importantly, they hold central theoretical and political implications.

The main goal of this contribution was shedding new light on some crucial matters characterising the complex pandemic puzzle and suggesting potential pathways of inquiry able to take into account the too often overlooked explanatory role of emotions. Reflecting on such matters can help us understanding the necessity to integrate conventional approaches to the issue of inequality and social exclusion based mainly on economic, political and static interpretations of reality with dynamic, phenomenological, micro-situated, and emotion-based approaches.

Beyond the future developments of sociological theory, its multiple implications are evident not only in a conceptual sense, but also and perhaps above all in political sense, in terms of relevance for the public sphere, social change, and policy recommendations, both at national and international level. The question then becomes how to translate such theoretical and conceptual work into affective atmospheres and positive emotional propensities that support social commitment and emotional investment in multiple forms of participatory democracy. In this regard, social criticism is certainly necessary but not sufficient, on its own, to oppose nationalism, populism, new forms of authoritarianism and new manifestations of racism, sexism and many other forms of discrimination, and to support alternative expressions of identity and sense of belonging and alternative ways of conceiving the public sphere and practicing life in common. The mistake of a certain criticism is failing to understand how public opinion develops and expecting that everyone thinks and behaves in a certain way, in spite of such perceptions.

We live in extremely challenging and interesting times, full of risks but also full of opportunities for positive social change. Current social, institutional and political pillars have all shown their fallacy and their gaps in front of the pandemic and their unpreparedness to deal with it. The failure has been a political, institutional, and *emotional* one, since they have also failed to acknowledge the central role of emotions in our social and political lives. In order to fill those gaps, within which the contemporary banalities of evil thrive and grow, we need to create

positive and stronger counter-narratives. These gaps can be irremediably occupied by destructive narratives with no return or, instead, become the beginning of a new start.

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