



## Book review symposium

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Costis Hadjimichalis

*Crisis Spaces: Structures, Struggles and Solidarity in Southern Europe*. London: Routledge, 2018. xiii + 217 pp. ISBN: 9781138184503 £105.00

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### Ray Hudson, Durham University, UK

This is quite a remarkable book, a product of years of careful and original research into the question of uneven and combined development in southern Europe (SE), informed by a sophisticated Marxian political economy perspective – one in which the influence of Antonio Gramsci and an emphasis on the cultural and political constitution and consequences of the capitalist economy is always prominent. Hadjimichalis combines a breadth and depth of evidence from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources drawn from across Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain with a rare political and theoretical sophistication, drawing on a deep knowledge of cross-disciplinary and multi-lingual literatures. I find it difficult to imagine anyone else being able to do this, and certainly not with the depth of scholarship and political insight that he reveals. The book is a rare achievement, one that should be widely read, both by academics interested in questions of uneven development and the future of Europe and by European Union (EU) politicians and policy-makers as they grapple with the task of finding a way

forward out of post-austerity Europe and onto a socially more progressive development trajectory.

As Hadjimichalis explains, there are good reasons for focusing upon SE. Greece, Portugal and Spain all made the transition from dictatorships to democracy in the 1970s and became members of the European Community (EC, as it was then) in the 1980s. Italy was in a sense the ‘odd one out’ of the original six member states of the EC, although like its southern European neighbours it also had its own earlier history of profoundly uneven development and a transition from dictatorship to democracy. Furthermore, by the 1980s all four had broadly similar economic and social structures – certainly not identical and with differences among them but with enough commonality to distinguish them from the other member states of the EU. In addition, by 2009/2010 all four were in the grip of severe economic and financial crises.

While these are issues on which he had been working for many years (for example, see Hadjimichalis, 1987), as Hadjimichalis explains the immediate stimulus for writing this book was an

encounter in Brussels in October 2013. It is worth saying a little about this. He was invited by the EU Directorate General for Regional Development to give a talk in a session on ‘Spatial Justice in Future European Regional Development’ organised by the Regional Studies Association Open Universities Sessions. In this, he argued that the cause of the crisis, which by then was rampant in the economies of the southern European states, was not, as was commonly assumed, debt. In fact, Hadjimichalis argued, debt was one its effects rather than its cause. In contrast, he argued that the causes of the crisis lay in a combination of the *longue durée* of uneven geographical development in Europe and the uneven and undemocratic structure of the Eurozone, which was ‘the fragile and explosive background upon which the global financial crisis was grounded and hit its first weak link, Greece’ (p. 1). While his presentation was received in stony silence, in the subsequent coffee break he found himself assailed by participants from northern Europe who, in a nutshell, asserted that the root of the problem was the irresponsible behaviour of southern Europeans and, as a result, they should repay their debts to the north European banks who had lent money to the Greek government. This book is a powerful demolition of the arguments of those critics. I can only hope they read it.

The book is structured as follows. After the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 analyses uneven development in the 1980s and 1990s prior to the introduction of the euro, but is always sensitive to the *longue durée* of uneven and combined development at multiple spatial scales. Hadjimichalis emphasises a number of features that the four economies shared in common: the dominance of medium-sized and small, especially micro-scale, enterprises; the varied significance of the informal sector, both in underpinning the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and providing ways of ‘getting by’ for those excluded from the market for waged labour; the significance of the family as a unit of both production and social reproduction; and the role of the weak, clientelistic and familistic state. The combination of these characteristics enabled the emergence of economically dynamic ‘intermediate’ regions in these countries in the 1970s and 1980s.

While the paradigmatic examples were the industrial districts of the ‘Third Italy’, there were similar regional economic ‘success stories’ in the other three countries. However, these then faced severe economic problems following crucial changes in the European and global spatial divisions of labour in the 1990s as former “success stories’ became problematic places (ironically just at the time that they were becoming models for development strategies in deindustrialised regions in the north of Europe). The Maastricht Treaty was a major turning point, institutionalising neoliberalism and transferring major regulatory powers to unelected EU organisations, with serious consequences for the economies of the southern European states in the run up to the introduction of the euro. This leads into Chapter 3, which focuses on the building of the Eurozone in the context of capitalist transformations towards financialisation and the switch to rent-seeking activities, particularly speculative real estate, in the context of a shift from the primary to secondary circuits of capital as the focus of accumulation strategies. Hadjimichalis emphasises the absence of any geographical or regional perspective in the Eurozone proposals, with their exclusive focus on ‘national convergence criteria’. In a multi-scalar world, the policy-makers responsible for the Eurozone saw only the national scale. Consequently, in coming to terms with the crisis, this mono-scalar view of the world was very soon revealed as inadequate. In understanding why the crisis came about – and so in principle how it needs to be tackled – Hadjimichalis argues that this sole pre-occupation with the national needs to be challenged and attention given to spatially uneven development and uneven trade flows and trade imbalances, as well as national debt. Furthermore, he argues that the undemocratic character of multi-scale governance in the EU and the Eurozone exacerbated the effects of the crisis and precluded any effective measures to deal with the resultant problems. In brief, in these two chapters he firmly locates the causes of the crisis in the political economy of uneven development in the EU, processes that are inherent to capitalist development and that had been in place for decades but that were given a savage added twist by the introduction of the euro and new forms of regulation in the Eurozone,

while uneven development was to be further intensified by the austerity policies imposed directly or indirectly by the Troika in response to the crisis.

In Chapter 4, Hadjimichalis turns his attention to 'ideological wars', to the imagining and discursive construction of the 'New Southern Question'. This is important in emphasising the relationships between culture and economy, that the economy is always a cultural as well as an economic construction. Drawing on Gramsci's earlier analysis of the 'southern question' in Italy, he argues convincingly that from the outset of the crisis dominant elites in Europe, along with the mainstream media, constructed a narrative that placed the blame for the crisis wholly on southerners who 'lived beyond their means' and on 'their' governments who cheated EU institutions. In this chapter he uses material drawn from newspaper articles and cartoons to excellent effect in illustrating the stereotypical images used to portray people and governments in SE. In many ways these visual images convey the prejudices exhibited by political elites and the mainstream media more powerfully than the written word.

Chapter 5 shifts the register to 'the problem of the de-politicisation of regional development', to relationships between theory and practice, focusing particularly on regional and urban planning and their links to economic geography. Reflecting on the changes that took place in theoretical approaches in these disciplinary domains in the latter years of the 20th century, Hadjimichalis argues that the gradual shift towards 'Third Way' thinking (he points to the developments in the (so-called) 'New Economic Geography/Geographical Economics' (NEG/GE) and 'New Regionalism' (NR), and while there are differences between the NEG/GE and NR they are much less significant than what they share in common) became a new de-politicised orthodoxy precisely 'at the same time as neoliberalism making a frontal attack in the field' (p. 114). The 'Third Way' suggested that the solution to the problems of economically lagging regions lay in a combination of institutional change and changed attitudes and behaviours by the people who lived there – in essence, it blamed the victims for their plight. Any suggestion that the problems experienced in these areas were a consequence of the processes of uneven and combined development that are

integral to capitalism was effectively written out of the narrative. As a result, this made it easy to absorb 'Third Way' views into neoliberal policies so that when the crisis began there was no alternative to neoliberalism and its policy prescriptions – TINA (There Is No Alternative) was back in town and would have no truck with older social democratic redistributive socio-spatial welfare policies. As a result, other than the gestural rhetoric of 'territorial and social cohesion', EU policies to address issues of uneven regional and urban development were notable by their absence at a time when national governments in SE had virtually no room for manoeuvre, even if they had had a serious commitment to tackle socio-spatial inequalities. Consequently, and predictably, these inequalities burgeoned yet further as the crisis and the austerity policies that became the response to it bit deeply into the social and economic fabric of SE.

However, as Hadjimichalis demonstrates in Chapter 6, people in SE did not necessarily accept that they were powerless in this situation. He shows how – via demonstrations, square occupations and solidarity social movements in urban areas – people in SE created a terrain of resistance and solidarity. In spatialising democratic practices in these ways, these movements challenged the de-politicisation that was characteristic of neoliberal austerity. He also shows how there were links between older leftist traditions in SE and these new initiatives, helping in the creation of the new political subjectivities that came out of the mass demonstrations and square occupations. There is a fascinating discussion of the emergence of the extensive network of bottom-up self-organised solidarity movements that spread across SE, focusing on three paradigmatic Greek examples around food distribution, health care and the accommodation of migrants. The emergence of these initiatives raises a whole series of both theoretical and political questions, not least the possibilities for new forms of both participatory and representative democracy.

It is the questions of politics and the future of the EU and Eurozone that are the focus of the final chapter. What of the future for the EU and those who live there? As Hadjimichalis puts it, drawing again on Gramsci and his reflections on the crises of the inter-war years, 'Are there any politics of hope, or do we face the time of monsters?' Reflecting on the aftermath

of the 60th 'birthday' celebration for the EU in Rome in 2017, Hadjimichalis is severely critical of the proposals for a 'multi-speed' EU, seeing in this the institutionalisation and legitimisation of a future of continuing socio-spatial uneven development. I agree with him on this. So, recognising the problematic nature of the EU as currently constituted, he poses the question: 'should the European Union even be saved?' (p. 182). This is a hard question. His answer, balancing the tensions between the 'pessimism of the intellect' and the 'optimism of the will', is 'yes, it is worth an effort' because, as he says, while recognising all the risks 'at least it gives a chance that I personally would not like to miss, since at this juncture, the destruction of the EU would leave free space for monsters to roam in' (p. 182).

Is he right in this view? I think he is and that the EU, warts and all, is the least bad option on offer in the foreseeable future. In the UK Brexit referendum in 2016 I voted to remain in the EU, not because I had any wish to preserve it simply as it was then and still is now – quite the contrary, for reasons that are very clearly set out by Hadjimichalis. I voted to remain on the grounds that the only way to try and change the EU (and so the UK, then and for now at least, a constituent member state) to something more socially progressive – recognising that given the recent past and the present conjuncture, the best that could be hoped for was a revived and revised social democracy – was to be fighting on the inside, not gazing in from the outside. Given that such change remains at best a distant prospect, I still think he is right to argue for the continuation of the EU, warts and all, because, like him, I have no wish to open a space in which monsters can once again roam across Europe.

#### **Bob Jessop, Lancaster University, UK**

This excellent book continues the author's critical engagement with the socio-spatial dynamic of uneven regional development in capitalist social formations as this dynamic is shaped by their integration into wider regional and global spaces. It does not reduce uneven development to the contradictions, crisis-tendencies and laws of motion of capital accumulation but instead considers the role of state intervention (broadly defined to include para-state apparatuses and

political modes of meta-governance) and the dynamics of class struggle not just within the economic field but also politically and ideologically. In some ways, this book elaborates arguments presented in the author's *Uneven Development and Regionalism: State, Territory and Class in Southern Europe* (1987), based on work that begun in the mid-1970s on Spain, Italy and Greece. Like the present book, which covers Portugal too, the earlier text was inspired by Marx's analysis of the inherent, incompressible contradictions of the capital relation, the importance of valorisation, tendencies towards the equalisation and differentiation of profit rates and, as the author's innovation, the uneven regional appropriation of surplus-value, with some regions appropriating more value than they produce, others less than they produce; inspired by Antonio Gramsci's analyses of uneven development (notably in Italy), Americanism and Fordism and hegemony; draws on Nicos Poulantzas, his compatriot, for the analysis of the political mediations of uneven development and the modalities of class struggle and challenges in coordinating the activities of political parties and social movements; and emphasises the different kinds of politics involved in the state's role in promoting regionalisation as part of differentiated accumulation strategies and in subaltern struggles against exploitation, domination and marginalisation. Taken together, the two books, separated by more than 30 years but still close theoretically, illustrate the power of a spatially sensitive relational analysis of uneven development that pays due regard to political and ideological as well as technological and economic factors and gives due weight to issues of agency as well as structural and conjunctural influences. Nonetheless, the analysis that Hadjimichalis offers now reflects major discontinuities in economic and political relations in SE and its differential relations to the rest of the EU, especially its two leading powers, Germany and France.

In his 1987 text, Hadjimichalis conceives spatiality 'as the material form of the social relations of production, as the concrete historical and territorial framework for accumulation, and hence as the terrain for new forms of class struggle and political mobilization' (1987: 2). This makes the state, territory and social classes essential categories in the analysis of socio-spatial development, including tendencies

towards uneven development and equalisation, which must be explained in terms of a spatially differentiated accumulation process rather than localised inadequacies of particular regions and people (1987). This approach is elaborated in the present book. There are five main substantive differences between the books: first, a shift from the dynamics of extensive accumulation in SE grounded in the exploitation of agriculture and rural areas to the leading role of the FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) sector's uneven development; second, a shift in an active role for the state in promoting extensive accumulation to rolling back the state's role, leading to new forms of uneven regional development; third, a shift from concern with democratic transitions and authoritarianism, with early intimations of the impact of neoliberalisation in the 1980s, to a full confrontation with the latter as a form of class struggle rather than a technical fix to resolve earlier crises; fourth, a shift from crises in peripheral Fordism in SE to the financial crises in SE and their roots in uneven development within the EU as a whole; and, fifth, there is a stronger emphasis on institutional reforms, alternative politics and policies and their feasibility in the current conjuncture – although there is a political message concerning the problems of linking party political activities and autonomous social movements and combining economic, political and ideological struggles while respecting their distinctive sites, stakes, modes of calculation, spatio-temporal horizons and rhythms.

The present book also starts from the dynamics of uneven development but is less concerned to critique other approaches than it is to develop a well-grounded analysis of its dynamic. It addresses this in two steps: first, the uneven development of SE before the formation of the European Monetary Union; and, second, the period after the euro was introduced, leading up to the Eurozone crisis and its particular manifestations in different south European social formations. Costis Hadjimichalis emphasises that some regions in these formations and southern European economies more generally faced severe problems in the 1990s due to the prevalence of SMEs, the fragmentation of regional labour markets, the continued importance of the household as an economic unit and a weak, clientelistic and familistic state. These issues were aggravated by changes in the European and global division of

labour and by the consolidation and constitutionalisation of neoliberalism through the Maastricht Treaty, which also shifted political competences upwards to the EU level, and the Stability and Growth Pact. This reinforced the EU's undemocratic nature and its multi-spatial meta-governance. Overall, these developments meant that SE entered the monetary union ill-prepared for its challenges, especially following the eruption of the Eurozone crisis, which is not just the product of immediate debt, default and deflation dynamics, but also of the rise of finance-dominated accumulation and the *longue durée* of capitalist development. Underlying problems have been aggravated by the neoliberal forms of crisis management since 2007–2008, which turned southern European economies into 'territories of exception' (Hadjimichalis 2018: 178).

This political economy of regional and national uneven development is combined with a more Gramscian analysis of the ideological wars that concern how to construe the Eurozone crisis, identifying its causes, ascribing blame and proposing solutions. Hadjimichalis refers here to attempts to construct a new 'Southern Question', whereby southern Europeans are blamed for wider structural problems. Attention then turns to the de-politicisation of uneven development and neoliberalisation as the Third Way political imaginary becomes dominant, making it difficult to conceive of alternative policies when the financial crisis erupted. This does not prevent diagnosis of symptoms of economic and social justice, but it does hinder the authorities and official opposition from imagining alternatives to neoliberal austerity policies and the consolidation of an enduring state of austerity and enhanced authoritarianism.

Given the strong Gramscian influence in Hadjimichalis's analyses over 40 years, it is surprising that he does not draw more heavily here on Gramsci's analysis of crisis. Writing about the 1929 Crash and Great Depression, he wrote that crises are complex and cannot be reduced to a single cause or origin. Thus, 'we are dealing with a process that shows itself in many ways, and in which causes and effects become intertwined and mutually entangled' (1995: 219). This also means that there is scope for infinite regress back into history in searching for the causes of the crisis and/or for expanding the socio-spatial arena that

generates the intertwined and entangled causes. Gramsci adds that 'it is difficult in real terms to separate the economic crisis from the political and ideological ones etc., even though this is possible scientifically, that is, through a process of abstraction' (1995: 219). If we consider the analyses offered in both books, however, it is clear that the author is working with this kind of approach to the genealogy and symptomatology of the crisis. He denies that the crisis started in 2008–2009 and has no pre-history. Accordingly, he explores three further causal complexes: the contribution of uneven geographical and regional development from at least the 1980s, especially the weak productive and export performance of southern regions as a contributory factor in increasing public debt; the shift from profit-producing activities to rent-seeking activities; and the effects of neoliberalisation, promoted by Germany and other leading powers in the EU.

What is missing is an analysis of why some constrictions become hegemonic and dominant, given that the nature of crises is often contested in transnational, national and regional hegemonic blocs, between different fractions of capital, and, of course, among subaltern groups, including their political parties and social movements. Why do some constrictions get selected and, even more significantly, which forces have the authority, legitimacy and competence to translate them into crisis management responses? The nature of the state and state power are important factors here, of course, but we also know, from Gramsci, Poulantzas and other materialist state theorists, that the state is not monolithic, but a strategically selective institutionalised ensemble of apparatuses, powers and prerogatives and that state power is the result of struggles within, around and at a distance from the state.

These kinds of question bear directly on two other themes in the present book. One is the de-politicisation of crisis management that has occurred under the aegis of neoliberalism and in the shadow of an increasingly authoritarian state. The latter trend is read in part through Gramsci's analysis of Caesarism as a response to economic and political crises and it involves reinforcing the power of unaccountable institutions – in the present case, made easier by the upward shift of power to the EU and the increasing power of financial

capital with a global scope of operations. The other is the role of resistance and solidarity among groups and social forces at a distance from the state. The political principle that 'nobody is alone in the crisis' is illustrated in detail from attempts to spatialise democratic politics through demonstrations, occupying squares and local solidarity campaigns and thereby counter the de-politicisation that turns crisis management into technical fixes, fiscal rules, the conditionalities imposed by external authority and so on. Hadjimichalis presents three insightful case studies from the Greek experience: goods without middlemen; self-organised 'social clinics' to express health solidarity; and solidarity movements to support migrants and refugees.

The concluding chapter revisits some analyses and arguments from the 1987 book but updates and amends them in light of the radically different global and continental structural context of the EU and the changed political conjuncture. Hadjimichalis criticises reform proposals that consolidate a divided and polarising Europe (such as a multi-speed EU with variable geometry or differentiated integration). He opposes a time of monsters with a politics of hope based on building solidarity among subaltern groups while respecting the differential geographies of subaltern groups and the multiplicity of their identities, stakes and spatio-temporal horizons of action. Three important themes are as follows: first, and again, the problematic relation between political parties and social movements, related this time to dilemmas around a one-sided emphasis on statist solutions and over-reliance on civil society, without support from the state; second, the failure of radical left movements to develop an alternative economic, political and social imaginary as part of a war of position that can be mobilised during crises to advance feasible alternatives to the hegemonic or dominant neoliberal constrictions and crisis management responses; and, third, reflecting the increased importance of multi-spatial meta-governance in European and wider systems of economic and political rule, there must be an equal concern in the radical left about the forms of multi-spatial meta-governance that are appropriate to the kind of Europe that 'we want', starting with how to rescale local bottom-up initiatives based on networks and solidarity rather than non-accountable market forces and top-down authoritarian government. These

desiderata require a rethinking of the meaning of key economic and political categories from the immediate post-war period, including the meaning of territorial and popular sovereignty, government and governance, the forms of social welfare and role of self-organisation and the challenge of ecopolitics as a new site of capitalist contradiction and key issue for radical left politics.

In short, while it would be premature to treat this book as the culmination of a long-running intellectual and political project, because the issues it explores are still live and urgent, it is a book that demands careful reading and reflection as a powerful illustration of the continued relevance of serious engagement with the political economy of uneven development and its contradictory, crisis-generating dynamic.

**Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain**

*Crisis Spaces* constitutes not only a much-needed synthesis of the impact of the crisis in SE, but also a discursive contribution to the development of incipient transregional solidarity networks. The book is based on a wide range of evidence drawn from political economy, governance analysis, the examination of institutional and academic discourses and the exploration of new forms of grassroots resistance, but it is more than the sum of these perspectives. This is above all a work written with that particular blend of indignation, bitterness and sad irony that feels so familiar for readers from any of the countries under scrutiny – it is also, though, a hopeful statement that a different Europe is still possible and that southern contestation might be the spark that ignites further struggles.

Hadjimichalis provides a coherent analysis emphasising the similarities between Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain while also taking into account the specificities of their previous developmental paths. In my opinion the book's chief strength is the robust political-economic elaboration that supports its main argument, that is, that debt is not the cause but one of the effects of a crisis whose origins should be sought elsewhere, in the EU's regulatory architecture and its inability to correct – or the attempt to take advantage of – existing uneven

development patterns in the context of regional convergence processes, to the benefit of central European countries. From this perspective the crisis is reframed as an opportunity to turn debt management into an experimental form of governance that consolidates and expands previous inequalities. Hadjimichalis identifies structural antecedents to the crisis in the trajectory of southern European productive areas since the 1970s, including amongst others the absence of conditions for monetary union on equal terms with central and northern regions, the prioritisation of economic integration at the expense of political cohesion and the subsequent reconfiguration of the continental division of labour, the erosion of the south's industrial sectors and its specialisation in secondary circuits of capital in a context of deepened financialisation. These arrangements, together with EU's undemocratic governance scheme, allowed the implementation of austerity policies that Hadjimichalis reads as symptoms of a new Caesarism, following Gramsci's analysis to suggest the consolidation of a new financial totalitarianism during the crisis. The book connects with broader theoretical and political debates, such as the strategic articulation of economic and regulatory scales in the production of the EU's institutional space or the critique of economic discourses and geographical imaginations based on mainstream academic narratives, in line with the author's earlier assessment of NR. These scholarly aspects, however, remain as a background to the pressing drama of a crisis of reproduction in the south, which Hadjimichalis portrays through on-the-ground aspects of everyday life. In the following sections I will comment on some of these aspects using the case of Spain to expand the book's exploration.

### **From political economy to discourse analysis**

The first two chapters trace the rise and fall of intermediate industrial regions with their complex, interwoven social, economic and regulatory specificities – a phenomenon traditionally associated with *Terza Italia*'s industrial districts that Hadjimichalis identifies with SE more generally, avoiding the usual

celebratory tone to present the contradictions of these productive spaces and their structural weaknesses. Along with other factors, the book presents the erosion of these regions' industrial fabric after the Maastricht Treaty as a result of EU's 'indifference' towards southern specificities, but the process could also be defined as a calculated project. The debate about alternative trajectories of integration was still open in the early 1990s, when some political forces from the south warned about the catastrophic consequences of existing regional inequalities if economic convergence was not coupled with common political and welfare structures. In Spain, a sector of Izquierda Unida opposed Maastricht for its foreseeable impact on the south's productive fabric and the overall European project (Izquierda Unida, 1992). The growth of the party's electoral base until the mid-1990s suggests that scepticism about this particular vision for Europe was well articulated and shared by a sector of the population against the discourse of the right and social democrats. In this debate, critical economists cautioned that certain regulatory mechanisms would actually operate as peripheralisation devices. With the deterioration of its industrial capacity vis-à-vis north-central European regions, the south would be more dependent on goods manufactured in core countries, especially Germany; during a crisis this uneven trade flow and the divide between export- and import-oriented economies could easily become a rift between creditors and debtors. Hadjimichalis reminds us, however, that the working class and the local administrations of certain core regions were used as a first laboratory for this strategy of precarisation, a situation especially obvious in Germany after the unification and the Hartz reform. In my opinion, the relocation of this pressure on the workforce abroad can be understood politically, as an attempt to contain the emergence of more aggressive contestation profiles in central Europe.

The financial dynamics of the crisis are also related to this deviation of political and economic pressure towards the periphery. The severe control over SE is, amongst other factors, an attempt to avoid further destabilisation of central European banks, exposed not only to American subprime mortgages but also to the real estate bubbles of the

south. It should be borne in mind that the latter – particularly in Spain – were made possible by regulatory manoeuvres in the second half of the 1990s that rendered capital and land markets more flexible to allow the entry of foreign investment (Portas, 2017). German financial interests in Spain skyrocketed in the late 1990s alongside the extraordinary cycle of housing construction and following special measures facilitating the securitisation of mortgages and other assets (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015: 39–41). As Hadjimichalis suggests, this is not to reduce the responsibility of a bizarre domestic economic model that goes back to the 1960s and that many of us have long criticised. However, it is impossible to understand the enormity of the economic bubble in this country without noticing that Spanish and central European elites, along with many Spanish families attracted by an overinflated real estate market in the early 2000s, were united by financial speculation.

The ensuing collapse has been equally disproportionate, with over 700,000 eviction procedures going through the law courts since 2008 (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, 2018). The outbreak of the crisis, of course, did not put an end to financial opportunism but simply changed its contours. The analysis of *Crisis Spaces* could be extended to explore the rise of new ventures such as vulture funds and other speculative players willing to exploit the vulnerability of southern real estate sectors. In fact, in Spain the main regulatory response to the housing crisis so far – the creation of SAREB, an asset management company or 'bad bank' similar to Ireland's NAMA – can be understood as an attempt to save the main national industry, avoiding the fragmentation and dissemination of assets in foreign funds and containing downward price adjustment. In relation to sovereign debt, some estimates suggest that the Spanish burden could have been reduced to around a sixth of the level in 2012 – when Madrid requested the EU's financial assistance package – had it been monetised by means of traditional mechanisms, that is, through national central banks, a procedure prohibited by Maastricht Treaty's article 104 (Garzón, 2012).

The book then moves on to examine institutional discourses about the crisis, dismantling the myth of a lazy and unproductive south with a few pages of



quantitative evidence. In discourse analysis the forms of reception and re-appropriation of a message are as important as the truth it may contain, and this constitutes another opportunity to extend the book's inquiry. No doubt, a fraction of the middle classes, at least in Spain, has assimilated the moralising harangue about an irresponsible people that 'lived beyond its means', legitimising harsh retrenchment policies that the right had been willing to impose for decades. However, these discourses have also become fundamental to articulate new narratives from the left. Think, for instance, of Alexis Tsipras' inauguration at the time of his first mandate with a symbolic visit to the National Resistance Memorial at Kaisariani to honour Greek victims killed by Nazi forces during WWII, or Pablo Iglesias' 2014 debut speech in Berlin – 'Spain does not want to be a German colony' – surrounded by young emigrants at the start of the European election campaign. Podemos' first steps were indeed framed as an inversion of dominant EU discourses, presenting its programme as a national-popular liberation project, borrowing explicitly from Gramsci in a sense that ties in with Hadjimichalis' interpretation of the crisis as a new 'Southern Question'.

### **The limits of new politics**

The final sections of the book deal with the political consequences of the depression, with special attention to the ongoing crisis of social reproduction and forms of grassroots resistance and their connection to a previous genealogy of urban social movements, including union and neighbourhood struggles or World and European Social Forums. Although Hadjimichalis considers the spatiality of these struggles, it would be interesting to see subsequent developments in comparative studies analysing how this new class composition – understood in the classic operaist sense as the subjective articulation of an objective social structure through new forms of struggle – has turned the urban into a fundamental feature of mass contestation.

The concluding remarks are dedicated to exploring how these struggles translate into new experiments in representative democracy, another phenomenon that per se would require a monograph given its complex

evolution in the last 3–4 years. Podemos was perhaps the clearest case of a new political force that tried to incorporate aspects of local activism to face the challenge of government through a hybrid of direct and representative democracy. The actual configurations and results of that project, however, remain irregular at different scales and contexts. At the time of writing this piece, the party continues its long decline after its auspicious prospect in early 2015 when the emerging formation was setting the agenda of public debate and defeating the social democrats and even the right seemed possible at the national level. Since then, Podemos has lost a good deal of its capacity for political innovation and there seems to be a setback in its internal democracy, in the context of concerted media efforts to discredit its leaders and a shift of public attention to the Catalan affair. To date, the greatest achievement of the new political parties in Spain and beyond may have been to channel mass discontent against austerity programs into an electoral threat, forcing European institutions to abandon a harder approach, at least in countries with a greater share of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP). The quantitative easing programme undertaken by the European Central Bank (ECB) in 2015 to purchase national bonds, for instance, can be understood as a measure to protect national economies from aggressive financial speculation at a time when 'anti-systemic' formations were on the rise and the spectre of Syriza threatened to extend across the south. By the same token, the 'fractious' Greeks, less significant in the structure of the European economy, deserved a deepened punitive therapy intended as a cautionary measure, especially after they had challenged the troika with a clear 'OXI' to austerity in July 2015.

Hadjimichalis emphasises the local state as a privileged spatialisation of new politics but unfortunately, at least in Spain, new municipalism has both bright and dark sides. A blend of strategy and pragmatism, Podemos' alliance with different groups of activists and popular personalities for the 2015 local elections was one of its most innovative and promising initiatives. Three years later, however, the uneven trajectories of the so-called 'councils for change' show the fragility of the overall design in the context of an immature class composition and fierce opposition from the media and the right. Trying to gain

credibility as an institutional force, their greatest achievement so far is their managerial capacity to reduce the debt burden inherited from conservative municipalities in accordance with the national state – that is, right-wing – prescriptions. Unfortunately, in most cases this strategy is not linked to a clear effort to generate a consistent, progressive social and territorial basis, and the approach in many municipalities seems to target an undifferentiated, passive and ambivalent middle class, casting a long shadow over the political subjects that emerged during 15M demonstrations. In Madrid, particularly, mayor Manuela Carmena and a section of Podemos have taken up a docile attitude vis-à-vis central government pressure and, even worse, have given in to the expectations of real estate and financial elites, prolonging the projects and models of previous right-wing administrations. Hadjimichalis' book was written when this could hardly be foreseen. This dramatic turn raises serious doubts about the possibility of a reformist approach in a context of deepened neoliberalisation, undemocratic economic governance from above and growing social polarisation.

**Judit Timár, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary and Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary**

When, nearly two decades ago, Neil Smith (2000: 41) urged 'a clearer, sharper and more articulate focus' in critical geography, even the very term 'critical geography' was unlikely to have been mentioned in any Hungarian publication. There has been tangible progress made in both Hungary and central and eastern Europe in general since then, though. Nevertheless, when delivering university lectures on the fundamental approach of critical geography with its roots lying in Marx's thought, that is, that we want not only to understand, but also change the world, I encounter serious misunderstandings and doubts. Misunderstandings stem from publications by researchers of an older generation who were socialised in the positivist geography of state socialism, and who interpret the intention of change in a technocratic manner and who think that change means, for instance, modifications to regional development. Doubts are also raised mostly by politically

active leftist university students who have entered the political arena in the meantime and fail to find an answer to the 'how?' in the results provided by research seeking to facilitate changes. Furthermore, spurred by the intention of 'wanting to do something', they may easily skip the indispensable phase of understanding.

The book by Costis Hadjimichalis reflects an intention to both understand and to change. It is not only those interested in SE whose questions about crisis spaces are answered by the book, for the analysis of uneven development in this region (in particular, in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece) before and after the adoption of the euro, and that of geographical imaginations and prejudices about the south (i.e. the New 'Southern Question') identifies interesting facts while helping one to understand the capitalism of the day. Other equally important merits of the book (touching on ontological and epistemological issues) are as follows:

- It makes it clear that crises are essential to the survival of capitalism and challenges the dominant view that 'debt, public and private, is the sole cause of the crisis, arguing that it is the combined outcome of financialisation and the *longue durée* of uneven capitalist development' (p. 12).
- It points out that contrary to the radical leftist approach to uneven geographical development, 'Third Way' thinking cannot help one to understand the geographical foundation of the recent crisis. In fact, with uneven development having been de-politicised, both NEG and NR as two major schools of thought, although perhaps unintentionally, have worked to support dominant neoliberal policies. As a result, no EU policies capable of effectively managing regional and urban inequalities have been developed.
- It cites concrete examples of democratic policies challenging the de-politicisation of neoliberal austerity, and of the spaces of resistance and solidarity. It even shares a few ideas regarding the future of the EU and the Eurozone and the possible politics of hope.

Written with the intention of understanding and changing, the book also responds to the issue of ‘how?’; thus, it may even serve as a handbook for both researchers and activists. What is more, it presents theory and empirical facts in a manner that contributes to breaking the Anglo-American hegemony of geographical knowledge production. I would like to substantiate the fact that this book is not simply about ‘a southern European version’ of the crisis by raising two issues for further contemplation that reading *Crisis Spaces* as an east central European reader prompts me to touch on.

Studying the characteristics in the 1980s and 1990s of uneven capitalist development underlying the crisis and its deepening caused by the evolving Eurozone, Hadjimichalis presents a consistent argument concerning the social impacts of crisis and uneven development by gender, class, ethnicity and age. A series of spatial data shed light on, for instance, how austerity, financialisation or the crisis itself served the interests and the enrichment of the bourgeois class and the political élites in some European countries and regions, and on how the same groups contributed to the further deterioration of the situation of marginalised groups. It is clear that what brought success in one place turned out to be a failure at another.

The author outlines the shared characteristics of the southern European countries that emerged as sources of disadvantage in the 1990s. He stresses that the Maastricht Treaty was a turning point for institutionalising neoliberalism, and transferring major regulatory powers to EU bodies that severely affected dynamic ‘intermediate’ regions. As regards characteristics (e.g. the dominance of SMEs, the fragmentation of regional labour markets, the weak, clientelistic and familistic state), Hadjimichalis addresses the issue of the importance of the informal sector and that of the role of the family. He highlights those fighting for survival in this sector daily, that is, the gendered and ethnicised members of families and communities, adding that ‘This labour pool does not conform to the description of formal, full-time employment but that means that it is marginal or outside the capitalist relations of production’ (p. 19). At this juncture, I did not look for the cultural characteristics of ‘the ways of doing or performing

the economy’, rather the shared characteristics and the underlying reasons that render the daily practices of that labour pool similar to those in central and eastern Europe.

The reason for this is that Hadjimichalis’s description evokes the concept of the ‘domestication of state socialism’ (Creed, 1998), which Smith and Rochovská (2007) thought was also applicable to neoliberalism. Comparing and thinking through households’ economic practices, the daily practices of families for survival (see e.g. Stenning et al., 2010) and the production of household scales from the perspective of the crisis may strengthen international solidarity in fighting against austerity and capitalism. Do practices for surviving the crisis and making neoliberal capitalism more ‘tolerable’ serve the reproduction of capitalism or a learning process that strengthens wider resistance?

In their analysis of alternative local and regional development activities in Europe, Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2007: 109) earlier wrote, ‘The struggle against [socio-spatial] inequality starts at home and everyday life and extends to local, national, and global issues’. However, in light of the high number of the similarities of daily practices, the conclusion of a study conducted in the regions undergoing peripheralisation in Hungary, namely, that households fighting against marginalisation adopt survival strategies that may sometimes, inadvertently though, contribute to the reproduction of patriarchy and ableism at a micro and/or macro scale (Nagy et al., 2015), may also be worth thinking through.

As Hadjimichalis stresses, everyday life is definitely the primary scene of the struggle that many people have taken up as active agents participating in resistance and solidarity social movements in SE. He presents a number of political movements and actions organised at various scales and in various forms between 2010 and 2015. His excellent analyses may prove particularly useful for those who, although living in different regions, are engaged in establishing networks and unifying struggles. For, fundamentally, the author would like to understand ‘who has the capacity, with or without experiences from other movements, to mobilise during crisis and how, while having the courage to resist austerity and to build networks of solidarity and social movement

structures' (p. 139). Studying the traditions of the four countries focused on here and, hence, taking a closer look at the 1970s and 1980s as well, the author goes back to the ideas of Antonio Gramsci who had first-hand experience of the crisis of the 1930s. He describes Gramsci's idea of 'neighbourhood circles', which should have represented alliances and solidarity across social divisions and spaces. The countries where and the circumstances under which his recommendations were acted on, whether in part or not at all, teaches us similar lessons, as does the way in which Italian feminists were marginalised in traditional worker-based policies. Naturally, there are also successful examples of alliances between various social groups or those living at different locations, of the establishment of local umbrella organisations and even of north-south solidarity at a European level.

If I were to write a book entitled 'Crisis Spaces in Central and Eastern Europe', its chapter on 'Struggles and Solidarity' could cite many fewer cases, unfortunately. However, in the spirit of 'understanding and change', that imaginary book would certainly address the 'rural scale' and attach greater weight to it. Naturally, I agree that although there are various forms of social resistance outside of urban areas across SE (see note 3 on page 175), resistance is at its most extensive in cities. I do not doubt either that the revolution has to be urban if a broader meaning of 'urban' by Lefebvre (2003) is used. The fact that I live in a country in Europe where the impact of neo-liberalism and austerity is not necessarily greater in cities is a different story. In a country where impoverishment is no longer restricted to certain villages undergoing peripherisation and marginalisation, it now affects extended rural areas undergoing ghettoisation comprising such villages. According to recent research, after the crisis, economically prosperous areas are being targeted by lending out abundant cheap credit, while in economically more disadvantageous places the credit is inaccessible or much more expensive. It is exactly the above rural spaces that are the most sharply marked on Hungary's map of increasingly tight redlining (based on a settlement rating list prepared for the mortgage lending practice of a bank) (Pósfai, 2018). Such rural spaces seem to be being excluded from current international

discussions on, for instance, 'planetary urbanisation' (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). As a matter of fact, the creators of this concept do not suggest that 'rural' or 'non-urban' zones have totally disappeared, but most of their examples are from the Global South, and they seemingly neglect the notable differences that can be observed in the transformation of rural zones inside Europe.

Naturally, the book by Hadjimichalis is not expected to discuss explicitly the problems of rural regions overlooked in the production of conceived spaces by academics and EU politicians. On the contrary. This book, due to its approach and owing to its presentation of an experience similar to that in central and eastern Europe, urges me and my leftist students in search of the 'how' of changing the world to write another *Crisis Spaces*. That is why I do not resent that Hadjimichalis, although aware of the fact that 'anger is a bad companion', states point-blank that his opinion of the crisis in SE is tinted with his frustration over the events. Awareness of this makes the promotion of solidarity easier, however, only in the fashion described by Elisee Reclus (in Harvey, 2008: IX) when talking about being a revolutionary: 'every effort to promote justice and solidarity rests on precise knowledge'. Finally, if, by way of closing this review, I rethink the idea put forth by Eduardo Galeano about utopia and cited by Hadjimichalis as a conclusion of his own thoughts about the politics of hope, that is, that 'utopia is on the horizon ... it's good for making us keep walking forward', my summary is that Hadjimichalis's book is inspiring us in the very same way.

**Mário Vale, University of Lisbon, Portugal**

Hadjimichalis's book is a powerful and engaged discussion of the recent crisis in the southern European countries, challenging mainstream explanations of its causes and effects. The most significant elements of the crisis involved a rapid increase of unemployment, wage and pension reductions, public budget cuts and tax increases. Many think that such a crisis in SE is mainly due to the high levels of public and private debt, an interpretation not shared by the author. In fact, Hadjimichalis advocates that '...debt, which everyone believed caused the crisis, is but one

of the effects of the crisis and not its main cause' (p. 1). The author is keen to offer an alternative and radical interpretation of the crisis, one that goes beyond moral judgements about the indebted SE nations, while contesting the imposed austerity programmes by the Troika – the International Monetary Fund (IMF), EU and ECB – on Greece and Portugal, and the threat to Italy and Spain to adopt austerity policies to avoid inclusion in similar programmes.

*Crisis Spaces* is primarily a political economy critique of the crisis in SE, one that engages with uneven capitalist development. The factors leading to the crisis in SE combine a variety of exogenous and endogenous elements of uneven development, intensified by the introduction of the euro currency, which translated in the accumulation of debts in the south and surpluses in north European countries. Debt management became a primary concern of the Eurozone, culminating in the imposition of austerity measures in the indebted SE countries. At the same time, dominant political discourses and narratives associated debt with the Global Financial Crisis (2008/2009), disregarding the uneven social-spatial capitalist development process in the EU and the distinctive elements of capitalist development in SE countries. Furthermore, inevitable moral judgements about the debt levels of SE countries, fuelled by the public opinion and media of northern European countries (exemplified in the cartoons republished in the book), stigmatised SE people as lazy, irresponsible, party-people, etc. With this book, Costis Hadjimichalis intends to offer an alternative analysis of the crisis in SE countries, one that fully engages with capitalism's crisis-prone and uneven development tendencies – often inspired, as others have noted, by Gramsci's writings – focusing on the particularities of the SE periphery's integration into the EU and the evolving socio-spatial structures that resulted.

The book is organised in seven chapters, which can be grouped into three main sections: analysis of the EU uneven development process (Chapters 2 and 3); critique of the dominant neoliberal policies and discourses towards the SE countries and regions (Chapters 4 and 5); and finally the discussion of resistance to the 'time of monsters' and alternative 'politics of hope' in the EU. In the first section, the

chapters offer a consistent and comprehensive analysis of the structural weaknesses of southern European economies before and after the introduction of the euro. Hadjimichalis claims that the capitalist development of the SE countries, with the notable exceptions of a few regions, did not conform with the Fordist model and the welfare state of the more advanced regions. The particularities of SE countries and regions shaped development trajectories after EU integration, namely inward investment-oriented growth, unskilled work, low wages, informal and family work, flexible production systems, tourism and construction specialisation in many SE regions and state and local authorities tolerant of land use control and planning permissions, along with limited power to control tax evasion. These aspects are integral to the development trajectories of SE and might have been overlooked by many academics and policy-makers with a preference to emphasise positive aspects such as industrial district dynamics, particularly in the 'Third Italy'. The enforcement of the Single Market and the Maastricht Treaty uncovered these structural weaknesses in SE, disturbing the backbone of the southern economies, which became even more acute as a result of the integration of central and eastern European countries into the EU and the prosecution of neoliberal policies that made state intervention more difficult.

These endogenous particularities and exogenous elements have further shaped the development of the SE countries under the euro. In Hadjimichalis's own words '... public debt [...] is the outcome of the crisis that resulted from the combination of the long durée of uneven capitalist development and financialisation's end, not the reason for the current turmoil in the EU' (p. 44). Hadjimichalis points to five unfolding processes acting in conjunction that preclude the balanced development of SE, including the switching of capital from the primary to secondary circuits and an increase in rent-seeking activities, a real estate boom and bust cycle, the absence of certain economic, political and spatial preconditions for a strong currency union, the imbalance in intra-EU trade flows and undemocratic and authoritarian EU and Eurozone governance mechanisms. Hadjimichalis's sound analysis gives a much more plausible interpretation for the SE crisis, overcoming narrow explanations from the

media and a few academics and policy-makers. His claims are supported by regional evidence, since the primary scale of analysis is the national level. It would be interesting if the analysis could have extended to a discussion of how regional inequalities evolved in these countries over this period and particularly which regions were more affected by the crisis, and why. For example, in an interesting paper about the crisis effect in Spain, Méndez says regions dependent on real estate and construction activities with many migrant workers were hit first by the crisis, whereas the subsequent enforcement of austerity measures affected more deeply regions specialised in public services and those with high youth unemployment rates. Some rural areas might have not been so harshly impacted by the crisis, a phenomenon found also in metropolitan areas, but alongside increasing intra-metropolitan inequalities. Actually, a comprehensive regional analysis of the crisis effects in SE regions is missing, but the lack of consistent, updated and comparable data may not have made such an analysis possible.

The critique of the dominant neoliberal policies and discourses is discussed in detail in the following section of the book comprising Chapters 4 and 5. In these chapters, Hadjimichalis offers a critical view of EU tensions that still exist today and may endanger the whole European project. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci's work on the Southern Question, the Hadjimichalis critically reviews the geographical and cultural imaginations of the SE by some northern politicians and media. Beginning with the PIGS acronym<sup>1</sup> and ending with the infamous and sexist comment of J Dijsselbloem, then the Dutch non-democratic elected President of the informal Eurogroup, about the inclination for spending '...all the money on drinks and women and then ask[ing] for help',<sup>2</sup> these are just but a few examples of ongoing prejudice among Europeans, in this case towards the SE countries, which undermine the construction of Europe and challenges its future. Overall, these episodes resonate populist opinions that intend to diffuse the idea of 'people living beyond their means' at the expense of the hard working population elsewhere in Europe, rather than presenting a serious analysis of the causes of regional inequalities and the crisis of SE countries.

Perhaps the discussion of the causes of the depoliticisation of uneven development that led to

authoritarian and technocratic visions of the SE crisis is the most significant contribution of this book to the understanding of the current politics and policies seeking to deal with the crisis and its repercussions. In fact, Hadjimichalis provides a rigorous assessment of academic work in economic geography and regional development studies, noting that dominant paradigms were partially understood (and probably still are) and misused (and probably still are too) by policy-makers and practitioners. More precisely, Hadjimichalis focuses on 'Third Way' thinking, particularly on two major schools of thought: NEG and NR, the former also known as 'geographical economics' and the latter comprehending a number of theoretical contributions and concepts, offering an alternative and progressive approach to local/regional development (Asheim, 1996; Cooke and Morgan, 1998; Moulaert and Sekia, 2003; Storper, 1997). Some of these new ideas (e.g. agglomeration economies, transaction costs, localised innovation systems, industrial districts, social capital and so on) were very influential among EU policy-makers to the point that "'Third Way Thinking" became the new orthodoxy in progressive economic geography and regional studies and influential in local and regional development policies in Europe and beyond' (p. 111). Unfortunately, some of these ideas were poorly implemented and 'Of course, one cannot blame the original ideas if others use them wrongly' (p. 111). According to Hadjimichalis, regional policy changed:

From the promotion of infrastructures to allocating funds to lagging regions and handling unemployment, spatial cohesion policies shifted to entrepreneurship, vocational training and institutional restructuring. Technological innovation and human capital were the two pillars of the new policy following the new EU Development Strategy, introduced in 2000 with the Lisbon Pact. Although initially a social-democratic project, it was taken over by the EU technocrats and has been transformed in a neoliberal project. (p. 111)

However, Hadjimichalis goes deeper into this discussion and states that NR's '... treatment of urban/regional development issues is often highly compatible with a neoliberal view' (p. 113). This is not to say that theories are neoliberal and much less that authors support this political ideology, however:

The way they formulated, directly or indirectly, the original question posed by D. Massey back in the late 1970s, 'In what sense is it a regional problem?' de-politicized it, at the same time as neoliberalism was making a frontal attack in the field. (p. 114)

Actually, this well-observed point, made also by Hadjimichalis and Hudson (2014), calls for attention to the theoretical development of the field of economic geography, which has often overlooked political and social aspects of spatial and economic change. Focusing on the study of agglomeration economies to explain spatial uneven development, economic geography emphasises production, competition and efficiency, disregarding aspects such as exploitation of less developed places (Walker, 2018). The recent endeavour from Barnes and Christophers (2018) is precisely a way to engage with a more critical and pluralistic economic geography. Having said that, it is important to recognise the difficulty of economic geographers to engage with orthodox visions in the field, and as such the enormous effort made by NR authors must be recognised in introducing new elements in the analysis of the regional development process.

The last two chapters examine social responses and resistance to the crisis and neoliberal austerity policies, focusing on protest and occupations in the main squares of large cities in SE and open a discussion about future challenges for Europe. Is it à la Gramsci the time of monsters or is it time for a politics of hope? Certainly, Europe today is very different from the original idea and project and Hadjimichalis advocates a leftist stance for the future of the EU, one that is to be built around alternative politics and development policies to fight uneven spatial capitalist development, otherwise it might be the 'time of monsters'.

*Crisis Spaces* offers an overarching analysis of the crisis in SE countries that goes beyond short-view explanations, while advocating a sea change in politics and cohesion policy to combat spatially uneven capitalist development, a mandatory condition to avoid further EU fractures. It also becomes clear that there is a key role for academics in the fields of economic geography and regional studies to inform alternative development policies. No matter what the difficulty of such an endeavour, we need always to

remember Gramsci's words, 'pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will', for the sake of the whole Europe.

**Response by: Costis Hadjimichalis, Harokopio University, Greece**

I would like to thank Adrian Smith and Nick Henry, editors of *European Urban and Regional Studies*, for organising this book review symposium and each of the five reviewers for their time in reading and commenting on *Crisis Spaces*. Their responses are broadly very positive although they each highlighted several areas in which more work and attention is required. They have highlighted areas such as the need to draw more fully on Gramsci's analysis of crisis, which was suggested by Bob Jessop; considering the extension of financially speculative ventures in SE and a stronger discourse analysis, mentioned by Álvaro Sevilla-Buitrago; the lack of attention to rural space, noted by Judit Timár; and more on regional inequalities during the crisis within each country, following Mário Vale's suggestions. Their constructive comments will be taken on board in my future research and in another book, which will be in Greek this time, on which I am currently working. I will try also to convince my English editor at Routledge to make some corrections and changes before the paperback edition is published in 2019.

By way of a broader reflection on the symposium commentaries, let me explain my obsession with uneven geographical development, Marx, SE, Gramsci and the EU. It is true that my southern European focus spans over 40 years and the same is true for my analytical framework based on the political economy of uneven geographical development. This is true not only in *Crisis Spaces* but also in the older book, mentioned by Ray Hudson and especially Bob Jessop, plus in several other publications, comparative research, fieldwork, academic exchanges and individual trips. Nevertheless, my persistence on these foci, besides my academic interest, is due also to a political motivation. Firstly, I have major political problems with the de-radicalisation of concepts, explanations and emerging policies relating to uneven geographical development by those progressive and left-wing friends and colleagues in economic

geography and regional development working within the framework of 'Third Way' thinking, who often use cases from SE as models. I appreciate the comments by Mário Vale on this in his review. Within our field, we face a gradual sliding towards a dominant neoliberal discourse that de-politicises uneven development issues, evident in published research and more importantly in applied policies, even in this journal. Moreover, I am disappointed when I see similar tendencies in some spatial policies applied in Greece by the coalition government headed by Syriza, alienating many of its left-wing supporters. Thus, there is an urgent need to go back to politicise views, asking the hard questions of radical geography and planning, demanding more sensitive and distributional socio-spatial policies instead of those that are currently promoted.

My second political persistence, in Greece and abroad, goes to the other end of the spectrum. I am struggling to convince my anti-capitalist comrades about the importance of spatiality in left-wing macro and everyday politics. Uneven geographical development, socio-spatial inequality and injustice plus other forms of spatiality are powerful demonstrations of the exploitative world we live in, but they seem less so to some Marxists in SE and beyond. Although what happened in our countries during these 10 years of crisis (due also to the *longue durée* of uneven development) and the way people resisted or organised solidarity movements cry out for socio-spatial interpretation and political action, left-wing political forces (with some notable exceptions) refuse to consider them as part of radical politics. In other cases, after a period during which these issues were high on the political agenda of some radical parties, later on they disappeared, as Sevilla-Buitrago pointed out in his review criticising Syriza and Podemos.

Why do I still work within the Marxian political economy framework and struggle with comrades with whom I often disagree? This is for a very simple reason: I do not know any better and equally politically sensitive framework, and convincing others within the movement is equally as important as convincing outsiders. Together with others I use a version of Marxism that goes beyond the iron laws of capital accumulation to consider the role of

the state and institutions at different scales, including meta-governance such as the EU and interventions by a multiplicity of social agents (including political parties and social movements), all of the above overarched by analytical lenses on ideology, culture, class and gender. In other words, what is central is investigating the motion of value in valorisation, circulation and realisation in *particular social and spatial formations and not in abstracto*. Our southern peripheral positionality vis-à-vis the birthplaces of capitalism was, in a contradictory way, both a constraint and a window of opportunity. This is because 'catching-up' was not applied only in development theory, but also in the significance of language and the production of knowledge. Soon we realised that the political economy tools coming from other language discourses and other capitalist histories could not grasp the complexities of our societies. We were lucky enough to rely on the Gramscian tradition (and I will add Fernand Braudel and the Annals School) as well as on Nikos Poulantzas, Salvador Ginner, Massimo Paci, Arnaldo Bagnasco, Maria Todorova, Kostantinos Tsoukalas and others, who helped develop a particular 'southern critique'. In this tradition, our Marxism, besides studying classical processes of capital accumulation, value motion and capital-labour conflicts, gives homologous attention to what could be called the 'residuals' of the grand narrative. These include, among others, the informal economy and small firms; statism, clientelism and patronage; the role of land and land rent, extended families, cultural, gender and ethnic variations; and above all space as a social construct, always uneven and built-in to everyday life. In this framework, we also give particular attention to rural space, as southern societies continue to engage in rural and new-rural activities. As I said above, Judit Timár correctly pointed out this omission in *Crisis Spaces*, but this was only due to the particular crisis focus of the book that hit urban areas more than rural spaces.

All of the reviewers kindly mentioned the timeliness of the book. This was a particularly difficult issue, not only due to constant changes in political and economic developments, but also because of my personal involvement, 'being there'. Looking back,



the EU of today has nothing to do with our left-wing slogan 30 years ago ‘Against capital’s Europe and for working people’s Europe’. We were too optimistic and we failed to understand on time the major economic and political restructuring that was taking place. Today, post-facto, we can analyse and write books about it, but the damage seems quite serious and has already been done. ‘Europe’ looks less attractive to Europeans, in contrast to the thousands of desperate migrants-refugees who try to escape via Greek, Italian or Spanish shores, leaving behind thousands of others who lost their lives in the sea. The combination of financialisation with capital’s global shift, long-established austerity, all kinds of dispossessions and the arrival of migrants-refugees provides a dangerous mix that fuels the rise of reactionary, racist and neo-Nazi political forces across Europe. The answer from EU institutions and individual governments to these developments, instead of democratisation, changing austerity policies and dealing with uneven geographical development, is more funds for Frontex and externalising European borders via building camps in Africa to stop desperate people from crossing the sea.

As Ray Hudson said in his review, I did not avoid the question about what to do with the EU, and asked whether it should even be saved. He is in agreement with my point that saving it is worth an effort because, in his words, ‘it is the least bad option on offer in the foreseeable future’. Hudson summarises in a few words the political failure of all kinds of left-wing European forces, from social democracy to the radical left and communists: thinking of and accepting the EU as ‘the least bad option’. As I wrote in the final chapter, *Crisis Spaces* could not answer these questions, and deliberately I wrote only some very general ideas. Nevertheless, it is the ‘elephant in the room’, a question that all of us who are struggling for alternatives need to look upon, both academically and politically. I wish that this ‘European’ journal can open up this debate in our field.

## Notes

1. ‘PIGS in Muck’ article published by the *Financial Times* on 9 January 2008, where the appalling acronym stands for Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain.
2. Interview to FAZ in 03/20 2017.

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