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## Camera Fog; or, The Pendulum of Austerity in Contemporary Portugal

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay analyzes the semantics of fog in the context of neoliberal austerity in Portugal. Drawing on portraits of young Portuguese in the style of vignettes, the essay historicizes the political and epistemological uses of fog as a medium. Attending to the materiality of fog — a blurring through which visibility occurs — the argument unearths the logical structure of recurrence in and as crisis as it affects the powers of decision-making. The goal is to push the limits of this recurring structure into the present, in order to better expose how two seemingly opposite historical eras — authoritarianism and neoliberalism — share, in fact, the enduring structure of potentiation in language and governance.

**KEYWORDS:** Fog; Youth unemployment; Authoritarianism; Neoliberalism; Portugal; Austerity; Precarious employment; Political messianism; Salazar, António de Oliveira; Sebastianism

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# Camera Fog; or, The Pendulum of Austerity in Contemporary Portugal

MARIA JOSÉ DE ABREU

One day in early 2012, Portuguese photographer Inês d'Orey was walking in the city of Oporto when she came across a graffiti stenciled on one of the walls of the Carlos Alberto Theatre. It consisted of a map of Portugal overwritten with the ochre-coloured words 'continuamos à espera que o nevoeiro passe' (we keep on waiting for the fog to pass) (Figure 1).

The graffiti inspired d'Orey to make a photography and video series she titled *Limbo*. A statement attached to d'Orey's work expresses it as follows: '*Limbo* contemplates what it is to exist in an indefinite and uncertain state', a reflexive perspective on 'a perplexed and outraged generation'.<sup>1</sup> It refers to what, since the outbreak of the 2007–08 financial crisis and the invigoration of the austerity state, is sometimes referred to as a 'precarious generation', also known in Portugal as *geração à rasca*. Shot in hazy, ethereal light, each photo in the series

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1 The statement, along with the photo and video work of the project can be found at Inês d'Orey's artist website <<http://www.inesdorey.com/index.php?/projectos/limbo/>> [accessed 6 December 2021].



Figure 1. Graffiti stenciled on the wall of the Carlos Alberto Theatre in Oporto, Portugal, 2012. Photo credit: Patricia Guarda.

shows a youngster immersed in a canopy of fog, and in an attitude of waiting. (See Figures 2–4.) Generated artificially by a fog-machine mostly within the setting of private homes, fog surrounds the human figure that is located at the centre of each photograph. *Limbo* both draws upon and inverts the classic rules of vignetting in photography, whereby the light marking the image's centre gradually shades off toward the edges. The framing that singularizes each photo is disrupted by the common thread of fog, creating an atmospheric continuum between all of the photographs.<sup>2</sup> Further — and despite its title — d'Orey unsettles more conventional understandings of limbo. To be in limbo often suggests an interruption or break in time, an interval — what classic anthropology termed liminality, as what lies 'between-and-betwixt'. However, d'Orey's alters the concept. As the phrase 'we are still waiting in the fog' evokes, limbo is not what suspends an

2 See Maria José de Abreu, 'Still Passing: Crisis, Youth and the Political Economy of Fog in Limbo', *Scapegoat: Landscape, Architecture, Political Economy*, 8 (May 2015), special issue *Weather*, pp. 60–70.



Figure 2. Inês d'Orey, *Limbo*, #05, 2012, 150 × 90 cm, Fine Art Photographic Print. Courtesy of the artist.

order of things but what *extends* a situation in time (a 'still waiting') indefinitely; indeed, because indefinitely, the time of waiting is also a weathered version of time: time rendered as an inscrutable horizon, time as fog.<sup>3</sup>

A sixteenth-century legend known as Sebastianism tells of a sovereign, the awaited messiah, who shall return through the fog in a moment of crisis to restore the country to its glorious destiny. The legend goes back to a foundational moment — or error — in the history of the Portuguese empire: the disappearing of the body of Sebastian, King of Portugal, while fighting the armies of Abd el-Malek in El-ksar-El-Kebir in northern Morocco on 4 August 1578. At just twenty-four years of age, Don Sebastian had been the darling of the Portuguese nobility, but his messianic crusading missions to North Africa would prove disastrous. Despite warnings from his closest allies, the king could not be swayed from invading Moorish territories to the south. The result was an enormous loss of human life, a severe economic crisis, and, as the king left no successor, loss of political autonomy to the rival Spanish court. Never to be found, Sebastian's body grew into a

3 As signified by the Portuguese word *tempo* which means both time and weather.



Figure 3. Inês d'Orey, *Limbo*, #08, 2012, 150 × 90 cm, Fine Art Photographic Print. Courtesy of the artist.

site of desire for returns, a messianic-like structure of waiting for what shall reappear through the fog of time; an indeterminate upcoming, paradoxically enclosed in a tomb located in the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos in Lisbon.

Repeatedly promised but always postponed, the attachment to the king's body marks a structure of expectation known throughout the Lusophone world. An epitaph next to Sebastian's tomb written by the Count of Ericeira lionizes the possibility that the tomb might in effect be empty. Written in Latin it augurs, *Conditur hoc tumulo, si vera est fama, sebastus quem tulit in Lybicis mors properata plagis nec dicas falli regem qui vivere credit pro lege extincto mors quasi vita fuit.* (In this tomb lies, if rumour be true, Sebastian, whom premature death took on the Lybian plains. Do not say that those are deceived who believe that the King is alive: for according to law, death is like life for he who has been killed.) Throughout the centuries, impostors would come forth and claim to be the missing one.<sup>4</sup> But just as people went on saluting these

4 See Mary Elizabeth Brooks, *A King for Portugal: The Madrigal Conspiracy 1594–95* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).



Figure 4. Inês d'Orey, *Limbo*, #11, 2012, 150 × 90 cm, Fine Art Photographic Print. Courtesy of the artist.

self-styled Sebastians, they would also send them off to the galleys.<sup>5</sup> Its messianic undertones functioned not only as a discourse about an autonomous past but it introduced a foundational narrative where loss, deferral and substitution became relevant notions in providing political and social agendas for the future.<sup>6</sup>

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- 5 The legend likewise inspired millenarian revolts, such as the famous example of Antônio Conselheiro who presented himself as Sebastian reincarnated leading up to the massacre of Canudos in the backlands of Sertão perpetrated by Brazil's republican armies of the early twentieth century. On the War of Canudos and the role of Sebastianism, see Robert Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Ashley Lebner (2021) 'After the Medium: Rereading Stories on a String and the War of Canudos', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 89.4 (December 2021), pp. 1290-1333. Lebner addresses the impact of Sebastianism and cordel poetry. Noteworthy is her critique of the concepts of medium and mediation in light of 'relation', a term she takes from the work of Marilyn Strathern. Lebner writes: 'I am suggesting we take seriously what it means to be unable to know what or whom the medium is' (p. 1296). While fog is not a camera, I am suggesting that we conceive of it as a 'time-weather' medium that confounds content and container, image and photo camera. D'Orey's *Limbo*, for me, renders that confounding precise, thereby framing the non-distinction between medium and message.
- 6 The legend of Sebastian's return in the future looks forward into the past to find it in the poetry of a sixteenth-century shoemaker and street poet named Gonçalo Anes Bandarra. In his prophetic verses, Bandarra predicted the arrival of a messiah, which although — or perhaps because — forbidden by the inquisition (for the popularity it

In 2006, as signs of the approaching financial crisis began to be felt, a national debate developed concerning the contents of Sebastian's tomb at Mosteiro Jerónimos in Belém-Lisbon. Publishing their findings in a local Portuguese journal, two renowned historians drew public attention to new documents found in the General Archive of Simiancas in Ceuta that attest to the *entrega del cuerpo del rey don Sebastian* (delivery of the body of King Sebastian) to the king of Spain, Felipe II, by Moroccan sheikh Mulei Ahmed on 10 December 1578.<sup>7</sup> In addition to this *acta*, the team also found a manuscript penned by the ambassador of the Spanish monarch confirming the arrival of the body from Morocco to the *Igreja da Trindade* in Ceuta before it was transferred to Lisbon four years later and, finally, a letter of the cardinal-King Dom Henrique addressed to Philip II thanking him for 'all the diligence undertaken by Philip II regarding the recuperation of the body'.<sup>8</sup> The weight of this new evidence — and the ensuing extensive media coverage — opened a public discussion regarding Sebastian and his legend. In line with the popularity of exhumations of historical personalities happening elsewhere at the time, the discussion focused upon how to scientifically verify the contents of the urn.

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gained among persecuted and converted Jews) were soon incorporated as a political shield against the Spanish rule over Portugal under Philip II. Fast-forward: one of Bandarra's prophetic dates for the return of the 'messiahs' was the year 1888, the year of the birth of Fernando Pessoa, which explains why Pessoa saw in himself the 'Desired' but with a twist! Pessoa's ambition was to build up a 'Fifth Empire' — an empire that is no longer territorial but spiritual, an empire delivered through language and poetic utterance, which, according to Pessoa, 'only a small nation could usefully fulfil' (Pessoa, *Sobre Portugal. Introdução ao problema nacional*, ed. by Maria Isabel Rocheta and Maria Paula Morão (Lisbon: Aticá, 1978), p. 225). And yet, what in Pessoa truly foregrounds any identification between his 'person' (that is, his Pessoa) with the desired messiah (that is, with the myth) is, paradoxically, the possibility to anchor that identification in what Pessoa calls a 'delirious lie', that is, in the false ground of unsedimented heteronomies. What makes Pessoa a Sebastian reincarnated is less the aspiration of filling up the vacuum left by the king, than the possibility of staging Sebastianism; less 'the desire to bring forth the figure of originary power' than to show that 'for every tale there is an encounter with the absence of origins'. See Rosalind C. Morris, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and its Mediums in Thailand* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 4.

7 See Emilio Rivas Calvo and Carlos D'Abreu, 'Alacazarquivir. El enigma (o el rescate del cuerpo d'el rey don Sebastian)', *Praça Velha, Revista Cultural da Cidade da Guarda*, 21 (July 2007), pp. 39–59.

8 See Manuel Leria and Ortíz de Saracho, 'El acta de entrega del cuerpo del rey don Sebastián', *Transfretana*, 7 (2001), pp. 135–44.

It was suggested to have a team of forensic anthropologists analyse the body's DNA and 'finish with the myth once and for all'. Progressives called upon the moral responsibility of the state 'to let the truth come out'. Renowned Portuguese historian José Matoso spoke of 'the need to give the myth a face'. But then there were those who repudiated the dissolution of the myth by 'morbid curiosity', advancing reasons of heritage associated with the ethos of a people.

Preparations to open the tomb for a forensic team were going ahead when, as a last moment decision, on 6 June 2006, a phone call from the national branch of the IPAR (Portuguese Institute for Architectonic Patronage) reached the headquarters of the University of Coimbra (where the team of forensic pathologists was based), cancelling the 'exhumation'. The minister of culture had changed his mind.<sup>9</sup> The state's last-minute prohibition fanned the fog of Sebastian all the more, perpetuating yet again what the poet Fernando Pessoa once called a 'postponed corpse that procreates' (*cadáver adiado que procria*), a death-to-come-but-not-yet.<sup>10</sup> In the following years, as the announcement of austerity packages by the state clashed with the vision of non-state intervention, releasing paradoxical demands of chastisement and extravagant entrepreneurialism, Portuguese society — and the youth in particular — opened the way to a limbo-fog atmospherics characteristic of Sebastianism. And it is that atmospherics that passes through the aperture of d'Orey's camera into the foggy image we see. How do climatic fog, messianic thought, and financial crisis combine in producing a 'precarious generation'? How to comprehend that in the very climax of fierce budgetary calculus under Troika and the austerity state, fog comes to occupy the centre of the picture as the most adequate medium to describe politics and existence?

What follows is an account of how fog connects to the ambivalent semantics of neoliberal austerity in contemporary Portugal. I will argue that fog is the atmospheric counterpart to a rhetorical game paradigmatic for contemporary governance. This game consists in the activation of a form of standstill without dialectics. By this I mean

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9 Personal communication with Eugénia Cunha, Aeroporto da Portela, 10 October 2010.

10 Fernando Pessoa, *Mensagem*, ed. by Fernando Cabral Martins (Lisbon: Planeta DeAgostini, 2006), p. 33.



a certain logic in governance by which opposites are reaffirmed — not, as dialectic thinking would have it, in order to elevate these to a third, but so as to hollow out the very terms that would secure that opposition. Unlike with modern frames of ideology in which critique involves exiting one's camp into a dialectical tension with an opposing camp, the logic I adumbrate here operates via a kind of torsion where those camps meet at the extremes to form a kind of circular continuum, not unlike the mythical figure of the snake devouring its own tail.

Writing in the context of Italy, Andrea Muehlebach encounters a similar anthropophagic rationale: 'How are we to understand', she asks, 'how leftists relate to the neoliberalism they so vehemently oppose?'<sup>11</sup> Muehlebach shows that this is due to the way in which those political camps meet in the hollowing space of the neoliberal moral state. Opposites entwine like a helix. They are sucked into the large hole that is the neoliberal state. It is the odd political tactic common to neoliberal governance by which opposites fold into the middle and proceed to make of this middle its own extremity. My argument is that this topological operation is compatible with a particular rhetorical figure: the contronym. Contronyms are words with two meanings contradicting each other, homonymous terms that harbour their opposite within themselves.<sup>12</sup> Examples of contronyms are 'swearing' (both an oath and an insult) or 'sanction' (both punishment and validation). Similarly, austerity is a key Janus-faced term in Portugal's governance, an aspect suggested by the definitional camp of the term austerity itself as

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11 Andrea Muehlebach, 'Complexio Oppositorum: Notes on the Left in Neoliberal Italy', *Public Culture*, 21.3 (2009), pp. 495–515 (p. 496).

12 See Christoph F. E. Holzhey, 'Weathering Ambivalences: Between Language and Physics', in *Weathering: Ecologies of Exposure*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 17 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), pp. 3–40, on the political and aesthetic valences of enantiosemic speech, particularly in its ties to weather. As Holzhey puts it: '[T]he OED definitions suggest that the verb "to weather" may be regarded, more radically, as enantiosemic, that is, as having mutually opposite meanings. Such words, which are their own antonyms, are more common than one might expect, and include in English, for instance, "to cleave" (to adhere or separate), "to sanction" (to approve or penalize/boycott), or "to rent" (to purchase use of something or sell it). The verb "to weather" is even more peculiar insofar as it can be said to be doubly enantiosemic and confound oppositions both of activity and quality: Usually signifying a deteriorating change, it can also mean, on the one hand, successfully opposing such a change and, on the other hand, undergoing a beneficial change.' (p. 15)

in the effect of a dryness of the tongue by virtue of it being soaked in wine. Where some might read the 'return of fog' as symptom of crisis, I tend to the performative undecidability internal to the semantics of austerity. I highlight how the term austerity becomes effective because of its capacity to both bring the past back and rehearse the means by which that past was denied.

Austerity was central to Portugal's *Estado Novo* ideology, a key pillar in the perpetuation of what would turn out to be the longest dictatorship in modern Western Europe. For the post-1974 generations, the revolution meant leaving behind the deep-rooted austerity state, its schemes and diplomacies of programmed poverty (through a systematic cultivation of the myth of honourable poverty) and the active embrace of a new era of prosperity. The official independence of Portugal's African colonies in 1975 was politically articulated as a necessary accompaniment to the reintegration of Portugal into a modernized Europe, particularly through the creation of economic pacts with the EEC (European Economic Community). By the late 1970s and 1980s, Portugal was like a parched land craving for its monetary monsoon, effectively enabled by the EU as it became one of its member states in 1986. But how to understand the fact that these liquidities, as deeply associated as they are with the long era of authoritarian rule, end up reappearing at the apex of neoliberalism? In channeling out voices from the field, I follow d'Orey in placing blurriness at the centre of a showing. My argument is that the formal structure of austerity is key to its semantic crossroads. Its efficacy resides not solely in its actual manifestation through policies — e.g., state cuts and shrinking welfare —, as markers of a specific context of crisis *in* time but also in the ambivalences already encoded in austerity, situating individuals in two simultaneous eras at once.

## 1: HOLLOW

Sitting at the round table at the kitchen of his family's home in Almada, João Augusto tells me about the oddity of reinhabiting his former bedroom. The bed that belonged to his brother was taken away so that he could have some more space in it for his adult self. He had repainted the walls a light blue, removing the previous light ochre coloration along with the glued rips of

paper and stickers of famous football players he and his brother had had plastered on the walls throughout the years. ‘Much to talk about’, he says, filling his glass with iced tap water from a jar, ‘so you want to know how is it for me to be back with my parents?’ João starts by saying that ‘it is only a temporary solution’ before he will be able to settle again on his own. At least his parents’ home is secure, they own the house, an inheritance ... (He drinks water, he offers me some. We both do.) In May 2011, João had to give up the flat in Benfica he had bought in 2004, a third floor in a four-story new building. That year alone, an average of seventeen houses per day were being devolved to banks. Not only did he lose his house, he was not yet out of debt, still owing the debt resulting from the difference between what the bank offered for taking the house back when acquiring the mortgage with Banco Espírito Santo in 2004. ‘Lines of credit?’, he nodded negatively, (because) ‘nothing about it is a line but a “ju-mb-le” (um ema-ra-nha-do)’, he continued, ‘just so you see, the bank takes back houses for a much lower price than the actual cost because banks themselves have run out of money. But because banks ran out of money they have to borrow [ever more expensive cash] from other institutions like the Banco Central Europeu, but [...] in order to do so, banks are using the state as guarantor. Now, [and a pause for water] the reason why the banks ran out of money is not because creditors [like himself] have failed to pay off mortgages and debts, but because “the state that takes the role of guarantor” for the bank loans itself owes millions to those banks, 50 million, which, by the way, is a third of the money that the Bank of Portugal owes to BCE. Do you see how twisted the whole business is, it’s like a revolving door ...? So, it is clear that we gentiles (a raia miúda) are the ones paying back, house by house, by house, by house, small business upon small business, et cetera, all in ruin, but behind it all is the state’s public debt to the banks. Why do you think the state encouraged *recibos verdes* (green receipts),<sup>13</sup> why do you think the state strangled the local industries? So, when the crisis comes up, we are unable to secure our jobs and our homes, and the cycle of austerity again begins. Job. No job. House. No house. It’s like *peixinho-de-rabo-na-boca*. (little fish with tail in mouth) [laughter]. I am a biologist by formation, I have a degree, so

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13 The official system of freelancing in Portugal created in the 1980s but aggressively implemented in 1992 by the government of the Social Democrat Cavaco Silva, whereby one can formally invoice clients and declare income for tax and social security purposes.

nothing of this world of finance was ever part of my world, you know. My father tried to discourage me from studying biology, saying I should rather be a dentist or a medical doctor if I'm interested in organic stuff or whatever ... Biology seemed like a non-thing to him, neither meat nor fish. Tofu ... [More laughter. Another pause for water]. I persisted and finished my studies with reasonable outcomes but then other opportunities came up and I began working as a computer programmer along with teaching biology to high school students. But with lecturing you never know which part of the country *they* will be sending you and I had bought my house in late 2004 so I started to invest more in web design with the help of one of those EC subsidies and eventually was hired on *recibo verdes* by a company in Vila-Franca-de-Xira. I enjoyed it a lot because it did not feel like my studies in biology had been a total waste but were helping me to think of the organization of the web, ideas of “cellular organization”, “growth”, “development”, “stimuli”, “response”, you know, there was something really *fixe* (cool) in thinking of computer websites as organic stuff. My labour contract had just been renewed for the third time when my boss told me (he winks meaning matching the rumours) that the company would shut down due to bankruptcy. Then it turned out it didn't, so I guess he just wanted to get rid of me, but then it changed leadership, so it's all very ... unclear. I tried to do some teaching again but was sent to a town outside Lisbon, too far from my residence but also too little [income] for the mortgage. I could do different things professionally ... And then with the austerity cuts in 2011 and after, the situation just went bad to worse. And worse. And worse ... like that feeling that I did the opposite of everything I should have ... So now I am here holding on, each day I go through a myriad of mood swings. My father says “Good morning, biologist ...” but I pay no heed ...? João brought freshly made coffee to the table and poured some in two cups. He straightened his back in the chair. Then he pointed to the fruit basket lying on top of the fridge as though it were some still life painting. Bananas, mandarins, grapes, kiwis. ‘Fruit flies have a peculiar nuptial behaviour’, he continued. ‘Previously, when a mate wanted to copulate, it would bring a nuptial gift along most likely a prey to seduce the other mate. Then natural selection determined it better to wrap up the gift with some organic stuff so as to potentiate the sexual act, but then, in time, mother nature said that in fact the wrapping is more important than the content. Some fruit flies started to disregard the need for prey altogether, offering only the wrapping. I think there is a parallel to where we stand today.

It is not the content that matters but the wrapping. The inside is hollow.'

## 2: NEVER WAS

Nuno Assunção is a thirty-five-year-old man with a degree in environmental sciences. In 2004, while still completing his master degree, Nuno started to work on a part-time basis as a conservation biologist for his university department in Algarve. He left his parents' home in Setúbal, a city in the south of Lisbon, and rented out a space in Faro. As an undergraduate student, he went to his parents' home during the weekends, where he also enrolled in a remunerated European Union-funded ICT training course 'in order to cover the basics' for what he saw as the tool for the future. He also took an English language course to improve his curriculum 'since one never knows' (whether one will go abroad or work for a foreign company, he meant). When the financial crisis broke out in 2007–08, he felt secure about becoming part of the permanent staff at his job at the university and so, in spite of the unfolding scenarios of the crisis, he bought a house with the help of a bank loan with a thirty-year mortgage contract. That same year he moved in with his girlfriend who worked for a local bank though she had a degree in psychology. In 2009, however, the scenario drastically changed for him and his partner workwise. While he had been promised he would be made permanent at his job (along with five other interdepartmental colleagues), he was fired from the university. His partner was able to hold on to her job for a while and in fact, began pulling strings to find a vacant place for him at the branch she worked for. She had heard they needed people with ICT knowledge and English would help in a tourist region like the Algarve. They were trying to stay in the city but nothing seemed to work out for Nuno. Eventually his father proposed that Nuno come back to Setúbal for a while. There was a possibility that he take a temporary job at the Lisbon Airport where they were asking for people with language skills such as English and Spanish. Nuno had to ponder things. The good years allowed the young couple to acquire two cars. Nuno could either keep on trying to find work in the south, stay at his parents' home, and drive daily to the airport, then drive down during the weekends to be with his girlfriend or, otherwise, move to Lisbon for the new job and take his girlfriend with him. There was also the possibility of her moving to her parents' home in the Algarve and him

moving to his folks', just for the time being, 'until things got more composed [até as coisas se comporem]: It was unclear what the best solution was in all that. When I met Nuno at Lisbon airport in late 2012, his girlfriend was still living in the Algarve. The situation had been a considerable obstacle for their relationship but now they were bound to each other by a mortgage they had to either pay or rescind. They had to reassess their feelings for one another. In the meantime, before making any radical decision, they rented the house in the Algarve to tourists. He surely missed the future that never was.

### 3: BACK-AND-FORTH

A. G., forty years old, is the sister of a longtime friend of mine. She studied Social Communication at the University of Beira Interior, a large student town in the hinterland, the central region of Portugal. During her graduate years, she gained a *curso profissional* from SENJOR followed by experience as a news reporter for a local radio station. In 2003 she started to work for a small cartoon-colour company as a PR agent in Lisbon, also sometimes drafting copy. Bankruptcy in that year led to the closing down of the company and a proposed exemption of the remaining liabilities.<sup>14</sup> The global ripples of 9/11. By then, she was established in Lisbon and 'to make it through' [para se safar] she found work at ADSE, the state-run health insurance agency. It was supposed to be only temporary until she found something in journalism, which is what she had studied. A little less than a year later, Alexandra and eighty-one other short-term contract employees were fired en masse over the phone ('they did not even bother to write a letter as they used to'). She went on the dole for a while, and soon after, in late 2003, joined her sister who was working as an urban planner for the city of Amsterdam. Once in Holland, she found a job as a childcarer and, parallel to that, decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in fashion design at the Rietveld Art Academy in Amsterdam. She felt pressured to improve her English because 'in Holland everybody speaks English anyways', but things were changing lately with the growing adherence to nationalistic populism there. She reasoned that learning English could be an asset for other places but learning Dutch would help her to put down roots in Holland. She decided for English but

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14 A system that allows waiving credits on insolvency in order that businesses might start afresh after a five-year hiatus.

soon found a need for Dutch as she was asked to temporarily teach an art class to young kids. She found a home in a squat in the city centre. The rent was low, but having lost her job as a childcarer and unable to find a more permanent job in Holland in either journalism or fashion (and ideally a combination of the two), in early 2012, she went back to Porto. She had high hopes that a degree in fashion design from the prestigious Rietveld Academy would improve her chances in Portugal. Even as the crisis mined the lives of many, there was a peculiar sense that it also called on imaginative opportunities; that rather than limit, the crisis-fog put a challenge to creativity, in harnessing the ability to see through it. And so, she left Holland and went to Oporto with a degree in fashion design. But 2012 was becoming the year of peak unemployment and hopes for a job where she could apply her new degree began to fade away. After a year working for a company dealing primarily with stylized furniture ('but aiming at textiles in the future') the business started to falter. Part-time workers were sent away, clients failed to pay for rendered services, salaries were reduced as subsidies dwindled. Gradually, the company was unable to cover basic expenses like water, internet, and electricity, leading to its closure; having returned from elsewhere, then, she was once again confronted with insolvency. Unable to support herself in Oporto, Alexandra moved into her parents' apartment in the city of Leiria, a town in the centre of the country. She would have to renounce her sense of adulthood and independence, but she would save money on food and shelter. From there she could try to make professional contacts in the business of textiles, to collect local traditional products, which she could remanufacture and relay by reconnecting with distributors and sellers in Holland. But despite initial positive reactions from some of these contacts, things never really took off. Where one business closed, many kept opening up. There was a rhythm: open-close; open-close, open ... An opportunity emerged to work in the library of a local penitentiary, but she saw it as potentially even more depressing. The question was: how to 'lateralize' her skills and furthermore what did 'lateralize' mean, in this case? Work on the skills she already had or adapt to whatever might provide better opportunities? Save money by working on a mundane job next door or use her free time to craft things, brand, and sell them, create a name, a style, perhaps back in Holland, where she had made some contacts with textile designers? But the days went by without bringing a sense of restitution, a redemptive outcome that in retrospect could explain decisions taken

in the throes of change. She would swing between hope and despair. She decided to get her driver's license, but it literally took her nowhere. Then one day she woke up and concluded that it had been a mistake to leave Holland, where, if nothing else, she could benefit from social security built on her previous work experience there. She moved once again to Amsterdam and enrolled in the system all over again. This time around she is taking a Dutch language course. It gives her a sense that she has come to stay, to lay down roots in one place. There won't be much use for the driver's license in Holland, where 'everybody rides a bicycle anyways'.

#### 4: RE-TORNADO

Joaquim Simão looks like he could be in his early thirties. He has incredibly affable eyes but bats them restlessly. He tells me that he was just back from Angola where he went to work for his father's brother who runs a business in the sector of civil construction. 'I went first to Luanda and then my brother and cousin followed up', he told me, reaching for his Super Bock beer at *Esplanada do Adamastor* in Lisbon. 'We lived in a pre-fabricated modular building in the eastern part of Luanda', he explained, 'where not only Portuguese migrants but also Brazilians and Macauenses lived. We shared the condominium. It was a good deal. We could make [do] because there you just don't have opportunities to spend money, unless you want to mingle with the high society, then you pay up to 200 Euros for an evening meal ... Things were going well, there is a big community of Portuguese in Angola, more than a hundred thousand came there since the crisis, well since 2011 ...' 'When did you move to Angola?' I asked. 'I went there with a contract for five years, just to allow time for the crisis here to pass, but now ... there is crisis there, too. I am now in my second year. 'The supermarkets', he said, 'have been emptied of basic things, from one moment to the other. No oil exported, no food imported. Basic goods are so expensive ... Angola was just a resource. A point of passage.' But now the question for him and his relatives was 'passage to where?' 'Here things go from bad to worse', he frowned, taking a big gulp of his beer. He paused, taking his thoughts someplace else. He asked about me. I said a few things but hurried to steer our conversation back to him. During his stay in Angola, he and his brother were called *retornados* by the locals several times. 'How can I even be a *retornado* if I have never been to Angola before, nor my father or grandfather?



They call me *retornado* simply because I am white and Portuguese. But guess what ... the whites who never left Angola after 1975 call us *retornados*, too. Those are the worst, because they feel that they were courageous enough to stay when the civil war broke out in Angola. The same in Mozambique, Guinea ... They think they are better because they did not return to Portugal. But in fact, they did not suffer the stigma that many who left Africa for Portugal in 1975 did. Anyways, I am not going back ...'. He would live from his savings, from hand to mouth. He had a cousin in Frankfurt who might lead him there. He would wait and see. It feels good to be back home for a while. 'Are you afraid of the future?' I asked him. 'If there is one, yes ...', he replied, awkwardly precise.

## 5: SHOES

I entered a shoe shop in Aveiro, a coastal city 59 kilometres south of Oporto, to ask about a pair of shoes on display. The shoes look like what during *Salazarismo* would be called *mestre-escola* type. The number on display did not quite fit and the seller, a man in his early thirties, fetched a smaller number from the depot. The shop would soon close for good, its owners were selling. There was an existential melancholy about the place, shoes devalued and unoccupied. The new size fit and we both approached the counter. I have known this shop placed just across Teatro Aveirense since I was a child. 'Why the closing sale?' The seller held the case containing the shoes and began: 'Local artisans are going extinct.' Waiting for a reaction on my part, he continued: 'Shoes have always been a strong article for Portugal's industry but now we are importing shoes and closing down our factories. In 2011 one would open the newspaper or turn on the TV to hear about daily updates of the austerity measures. Now [in 2016] you look around and see the demise of traditional businesses, lots of old homes are empty too. Look at what happened to *AV. Dr. Lourenço Peixinho*, to *Rua Direita*, this street here, it is a different thing today. Funny that people who come here describe our shoes as "austere", because their old-fashioned appearance reminds people of "other times" [he means those of the dictatorship]. A newer version of the "traditional article" is appearing, except that this new "made in Portugal" is no longer for locals but for tourists who come in search of *traditional things*.' As in, 'austerity' itself is now being branded? 'Yes, look at the traditional home-slippers (*chinelos*), which poor people used to make out of rags and

that are now being sold in Lisbon and Oporto for tourists as “typically Portuguese”. I have them here too on sale but they do not get sold because they are not properly rebranded as “traditional”. Well, it is traditional, too traditional ... That’s the problem. But I don’t blame people because you have to make do with what you can. [...] I know people who studied with me and would not do my job. It is too hard for them to admit that they are jobless. But I have always been a realist about these things ... I am happy to show you the report I am writing for ISCIA.<sup>15</sup> I have a list of austerity cuts with me. [...] In 2012, state workers lost the equivalent of two salaries (Christmas and summer holiday allowances). In the same year pensioners were left without two subsidies ... Shall I go on? Are you not living in Portugal? [...] In 2013, state workers were left without one of the subsidies and increased contributions to the *Caixa Geral de Aposentações* equivalent to a cut of around 14% of gross wages. You know what the minimal wage is *huh*, that it has been frozen because of the *memorando de entendimento* with the Troika? 565,83 Euros. Where did you say you are living ... Berlin ... okay, Berlin, Berlin: the general minimum wage is ... three times more than here, see? ... 2013: private workers’ cuts were equivalent to one of the subsidies. In 2013, there were cuts between 3.5% and 10% in state workers’ pensions above €1500. Same year, reduction in the number of civil servants by 2% per year. Same year, a total of 168 national public bodies and institutes were either extinct or forced to merge into bigger corporations; cuts in the amount of severance paid; cuts in sickness allowance; cuts in unemployment benefit. Same year, an elimination of four national holidays was decreed ... In 2012, VAT on electricity and gas rose from 6% to 23%. The average value of a family’s gas bill (including all taxes and fees) increased by 27% between July 2011 and July 2012. The electricity bill rose 8.8% between 2010 and 2012. Based on the INE survey on household spending, between 2005 and 2011, gas bills rose 76.6% and electricity 25%. With the new rent law coming into being, an increase of 3.36% in rent costs would affect around six hundred thousand families, which will result in hundreds of evictions. Public transport prices rose 20% between 2011 and 2012 ... You get the idea ... I am doing the math. I try to think where the numbers will lead us, to draw a path for me and my girlfriend, for both our families. I haven’t taken an academic degree to end up selling shoes but I can

reason why some shoes will sell, others not. Here!’ He hands me the shoes.

#### WHAT REMEDY?!

A well-known dictum inherited from the *Estado Novo* (1932–1974) authoritarian regime extols the ability to ‘amend and make do.’ A folk lesson in political economy, this disposition to embrace poverty with dignity (*pobres mas honrados*, another proverb goes) is frequently followed up by the phrase ‘what remedy?! (que remédio?!),’ a way of apostrophizing ‘what alternative is there?’ Who has spent a year in Portugal without at some point overhearing these expressions in public — on the bus or at the dining table? The verb *remediar* means to heal or plaster with poor means. Its semantic juxtaposing between healing (*remédio*/remedy) and repairing (*remendo*/patchwork), presumes that whatever remedy there may be will not truly cure, but merely ‘make up for.’ As a solution to the problem, it will never be the best that could come to pass but will always remain provisional, inadequate, derivative. The phrase ‘*Que remédio?*’ is above all apostrophic. It is the lyrical addressing of an absent saviour yet-to-come.

Echoing the times of financial turmoil that brought Salazar to power on 28 May 1926 as Portugal’s minister of finance, austerity was officially prescribed as the acrid fix to the financial crisis, the bitter cure to an economy going badly sick. Calls for austerity were so embarrassingly emblematic of other times that the only way to divert away from this fact was by maneuvering directly into it. In October 2011, a few months after winning the national elections that followed the bailout request to the European Troika, Portugal’s right-wing prime minister Pedro Passos Coelho stated that the country would only get out of its current predicament ‘by becoming poorer.’ ‘[Fortunately] Portuguese people,’ he proclaimed during another public appearance, ‘are immunized against austerity.’ It was a peculiar choice of words — ‘immunized against austerity’ — on the part of the chief-of-state. Everyone knew that at stake was the imputation of sanctions on people’s personal economies in the name of saving the public sector — the socialization of costs, as they called it, was but another name for the privatization of costs. But what is involved when the head-of-state rubs salt into the

still fresh wound on the body of citizens after nearly a half-century of severe economic contraction under Salazar's authoritarian regime? The logic is comparable to that of a trickster who, having lost all power to seduce his audience, is left with no choice but to reveal his trick in the hope that he will be able to trade off discredit for honesty. In being so patently direct, audiences go on looking elsewhere, perhaps deeper, failing to see that the trick consists in its very disclosure. The use of direct speech has an implosive effect that hollows out what it exposes.

And yet, if the trick works, it is because of historical leverage. The extraordinary longevity of Portugal's dictatorship (nearly half a century) and colonization (nearly five centuries) — indeed, the coordination between both throughout much of the twentieth century — had reached a vexing limit. Portugal's initiation into neoliberalism, in the second half of the 1980s, exploited the sense that its society had reached the extreme of extremes of an era, the utmost stage of a much prolonged situation under fascism a radical separation from which could only happen by an evocation of all the values and principles that were contrary to it: liberty, mobility, autonomy, meritocracy, all of which were premised on a return of republican standards of parliamentary democracy and entrepreneurial economics. Cries for autonomy and emancipation from fascism joined the struggles for independence and autonomy from stalled colonial rule. Freedom from old enduring patriarchal structures, a breaking away from long-term contracts as synonymous with stagnation, provincialism, and nepotism, the dynamization of occupations distributed geographically so as to overcome the notorious separation between littoral and interior, urban and rural, alongside a new emphasis on the circulation of capital, people, and skills: all of these features not only were ripe for being well received in post-1974 Portugal but also, I am arguing, were received in a manner that made explicit the dynamics of extremities as such. What became apparent was not only a society that was ready to flip from one ideology to another — from fascism to neoliberalism — but *how flipping itself could be used as a methodology of governance*, say, as part and parcel of the neoliberal ethos of entrepreneurship. Freedom, mobility, and autonomy were no longer just contents within ideology but principles of administration. Flexibility was not only a horizon to attain but a

methodology, not a means toward ends but a means to be ever more efficiently in the middle, or even in the midst; or, better yet, foggy mist.

Such was the logic behind the slippage of precarity as an emerging taxonomy during the financial crisis and afterwards. To live precariously came to mean both emancipation from older patriarchal orders and embracing neoliberal temporalities of work. The normalization of green receipts (*recibos verdes*), a system of short-term contracts partially sponsored by the European Community's special programmes — designed to upgrade less developed southern European countries such as Portugal, Spain, or Greece — stood out as valuable assets when posited against the contractual horizons of the older regime. A record rate of youth unemployment (47%) in 2012 was reached simultaneously with a record of highly qualified young professionals. The categorical distinction between 'job' and 'work' began to widen as young professionals felt reluctant to take up just any menial trade lest it be symptomatic of a personal failure. This is how, in avoiding downgrading their meritocratically acquired status, many decided to embrace voluntary work or philanthropic *assistencialismo* — ironically, as Andrea Muehlebach shows for the Italian case,<sup>16</sup> a much-welcomed initiative by the very austerity state that, in the form of three consecutive austerity packages, had put people in those situations in the first place. In the background appeared the time-worn ethos of charity, as institutions such as *Santa Casa da Misericordia* began to create their own network of benevolences through the coordination of governmental and non-governmental organizations, or the sponsoring of social programmes. Charitable assistance thus was aimed at those austerity hit the hardest, the very highly potentialized generation whose core ideal was to combat the logic that had dominated society under authoritarianism. It is as though the reality of fascism had blown the post-1974 generations with their backs to a future, except that this future, withering from a would-be telos, was now turning into a foggy midst.

Austerity and the restructuring of people's livelihoods to 'pay back' the European Troika was proof that the state had never been absent but (much like Sebastian in his tomb) active in its very absence. In

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16 Muehlebach, 'Complexio Oppositorum'.

the new context of economic drainage, calls to ‘get the house in order’ became imbued with a two-pronged ethical imperative. No longer only ‘to amend and make do’ as the *Estado Novo* motto had it, but also ‘go spend and enjoy’. In the 1990s, citizens were asked to both save and spend, a command that placed individuals at once in the ‘society of production’ and in the ‘society of consumption’, both attuned to the father imago of the bygone authoritarian austerity state and repudiating its legacy via the consumption rhetoric. The message was two-fold: refrain from buying *and* watch out for special sales. The crucial thing to understand about the notion of neoliberal austerity is not that it stood — and stands — for a contradiction, but the way in which those seemingly contradictory tendencies entered a torsion dynamic by which the neoliberal *donut* morphed into an austerity *cup*. Like in a topological system, the state’s agenda was to apply forms of transformation that would preserve elements in the very act of their deformation. Perhaps this explains why austerity resuscitated the old and already mentioned proverb *peixinho-de-rabo-na-boca* (little fish with tail in mouth) — a hollow system — as much as emblematic cuisine of the poor classes.

The logic here is pendular. In the rhythm of a seesaw, austerity created a confounding scenario. It was not about having a term exit the field through a logic of mutual exclusion, but having one term (authoritarianism) rub against its elected counterpart (neoliberalism) and, thereupon, having the (austerity) haze be released into the atmosphere as if through a fog machine: state *cum* no-state, future *cum* no-future, inside as outside, presence signifying no-presence, crisis also implying opportunity. It is as though the very reasons that ought to distinguish regimes — fascism and neoliberalism — met each other at the extreme limits of that distinction to form a contronym, a coexisting of opposites whose most emblematic sovereign figure could only be rendered through the well familiar undead status of Sebastian: its undecidable, speculative, and limbo-like existence, or else, its atmospheric counterpart, as fog.

Austerity, then, was no longer descriptive but performative. Not mere reaction to bounteous liquidity but an aridity already intrinsic to liquidness itself. Neoliberal flexibility is tricky because it hides itself by drawing attention to its praxis, its own mode of operation: to the production of scenarios, images, dreams, and fantasies, whose edges

it then proceeds to blur. Here, then, lies d'Orey's photographic operation. It is this sort of twister apparatus at the core of contemporary political life that makes authoritarianism and neoliberalism not rivals, but bedfellows. Such are the whirling grounds upon which the Portuguese state, in coordination with the market and the media, goes on sustaining the supposition that austerity interrupts neoliberalism, belying what I argue is, in effect, an intensification.<sup>17</sup> Such a topology relates to what Jamie Peck describes as the involvement of the state in its own 'serial underperformance', on the basis of which time and again the rhetoric of austerity — as drought or crisis — persists.<sup>18</sup> The state communicates an image, not of strength, but of vulnerability, turning the latter into its much-cherished apostrophe: 'What remedy?', the lyrical counterpart to the restless Sebastian.

In putting matters in terms of 'immunity to austerity', the state refers to the historical precedent of the dictatorship years. It does so to the extent it wants to recall the salvific role of the family in the old regime, while keeping intact the pressure to spend and enjoy that again leads to austerity. In tacitly suggesting that there is a link between past authoritarianism and present neoliberal governance, the minister implodes the field of signification anew. It is as though at the crest of the comparison between fascism and neoliberalism, he is able to disavow any equivalence between the two. He names the austerity beast, but so as to better ambiguate its contents.

Austerity becomes a borderline notion. In order to make it a borderline notion it is not enough to say that the Portuguese are familiar with austerity. For its ambiguity to be truly effective, austerity must be expressed as 'extremely familiar'. For, only in being 'extremized' can

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17 See Luis Mendes, 'Gentrificação turística em Lisboa: Neoliberalismo, financeirização e urbanismo austeritário em tempos de pós-crise capitalista 2008–2009', *Cadernos Metrópole*, 39 (2017), pp. 479–512; Luis Mendes and André Carmo, 'State-Led Gentrification in an Era of Neoliberal Urbanism: Examining the New Urban Lease Regime in Portugal', paper presented at the conference *Contested Cities: From Contested Cities to Global Urban Justice — Critical Dialogues*, Madrid, 4–7 July 2016, and available at the conference website <<http://contested-cities.net/working-papers/2016/state-led-gentrification-in-an-era-of-neoliberal-urbanism-examining-the-new-urban-lease-regime-in-portugal/>> [accessed 6 December 2021].

18 Jamie Peck, 'Austerity Urbanism: American Cities Under Extreme Economy', *City*, 16.6 (2012), pp. 626–56.

austerity flip into its opposite and reveal its contranymic nature. This dynamic allows the neoliberal austerity state to advance the agenda of its own undoing, its hollowing out.

#### PLANNED BACKWARDNESS

In her second preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt refers to the exceptional status ‘of Portugal, and her strange ability to continue a fight that other European colonial powers had had to give up’. For Arendt, such persistence ‘may be due to her national *backwardness* more than to Salazar’s dictatorship’. Arendt’s dissociation of the country’s ‘backwardness’ from its dictator serves her theoretical goal. Her thesis is that it was not out of weakness that the British ‘liquidated their colonial rule’ but by virtue of their sophistication (something Portugal lacked).<sup>19</sup> But Arendt overlooks how forward-looking ‘backwardness’ was in view of the goals of the *Estado Novo*. Corporatist in nature, the engineering of the regime was entirely construed toward one key objective: longevity. As historian Fernando Rosas puts it, from whatever side one wants to look into the machination of *Salazarismo*, one will come to the same realization about its extraordinary ability to endure.<sup>20</sup> To be able to wake up and say, with each passing day throughout forty-eight years, ‘the regime is *still here*’ was the regime’s true horizon.

Planned backwardness was central to the *Estado Novo* ideology on three fronts: a family ethos of responsibility, its foreign policy, and an investment in colonial rule. Salazar understood that through a tactical articulation of these aspects it would be possible to secure the durability of the regime. The price to be paid was a form of withdrawal on the economic, political, as well as military fronts. First appointed as minister of finance in the coup of 28 May 1926, António de Oliveira Salazar, a professor of economics at the University of Coimbra, went on gaining the trust of several groups, first the rural political elites (especially in southern Portugal), then the small but influential industrial

19 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. xvii.

20 Fernando Rosas, *Salazar e o poder. A arte de saber durar* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2013).



elites. Salazar repeated the core refrain regarding the fragile finances of Portugal, aggravated as they were by sixteen years of anarchy and political turmoil followed by the world financial crash of 1929. Attacking republicanism and monarchism alike, the two main disputed powers, Salazar constructed an authoritarian form of rule according to which he would have the absolute say in the spending of every governmental department. The press and the people called Salazar ‘the dictator of finances.’

Unlike other industrialized European nations which understood the role of the welfare state in the lead-up to modernization, the Portuguese Corporatist Social Security held key dimensions like health, education, social and national security to be subordinate to a general policy of austerity. Salazar removed from the previous constitution of the Republic of 1911 (as later from the social insurance model of 1919) the fundamental principle of the ‘right to public assistance’. In the new constitution of 1933, Salazar compensated for the privation of public assistance with a proliferation of tightly controlled corporatist bodies with a strong orientation towards charity. Charitable institutions would secure what for the *Estado Novo* was the central unit of society and governance: the family.

Crucial in this arrangement was the actuarial system. Pedro Teotónio Pereira was an expert on actuarial sciences whom Salazar hired to apply his vision of family welfare to the sector of the social security system. Pereira launched ‘The Portuguese Corporatist Social Welfare System’, a new series of legislations that shaped the relation between economic austerity and family responsibility. Drawing on the terms of the seventeenth-century Elizabethan Old Poor Law system, but with a notorious Catholic twist, Pereira created a model that pivoted around the corporatist integration of the family in pressing its members to survey each other in fighting idleness and to take responsibility for one another in case of misfortune.<sup>21</sup> Pereira stated that ‘once the worker no longer had to deal with the state and public money, which could easily allure abuses and bad desires, then he/she would regard the welfare organization of his/her professional household as a work of his/her

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21 Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

own, a result of his/her sacrifices, responsibility and hope.<sup>22</sup> As for the state, it would monitor the development of new bodies closely, define their technical aspects, helping to form an environment of solidarity, giving them indispensable reputation and solidity.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the role of the state was not to aid families but rather to coerce individuals to extend help to others within the family, their extended relatives, and, even more broadly, within their communities. Appeals to what Melinda Cooper calls ‘the ethos of family responsibility’ worked in tandem with charities like *Santa Casa da Misericórdia*, the *Irmandades*, *Casas dos Expostos* and *Mitra* in charge of controlling the spread of ‘bad’ indigency.<sup>24</sup>

Families were asked to both practice the virtue of poverty and to take on responsibility in assisting their kin. The result was a circular logic of familial dependency that unburdened the state of its responsibility to hamper and socialize risk, which, in turn, reinforced the privatization of care. That is, family responsibility and charity liberated the state from having to pay public welfare assistance. Because the family household was metonymically related to the nation (*pátria*), efforts from the private realm of families to garnish labour and assistance were posited as public goods. Austerity thus entered a spiraling scheme wherein each level justified the next without ever coming to define the true nature of its centre.

Austerity was not only a feature of the Social Security System but the basis of the larger *Estado Novo* establishment. Salazar renamed charity associations into ‘The Portuguese Corporatist Social Welfare System’ (PCSWS), institutional organs that drew on nineteenth-century liberal assistance of the Poor Laws in their non-inclusion of social security. Liberal assistance was available only for those who had the economic means and took the initiative to apply to the state. As a

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22 Pedro Teotónio Pereira, *A Batalha do Futuro* (Lisbon: Livraria Clássica, 1937), pp. 49–50 (my translation, M.J.de A.)

23 António Rafael Amaro, ‘The Late Construction of Portugal Welfare State: The Failure of the Social Corporatist State (1933–74)’, *Memoria y civilización*, 21 (2018), pp. 437–54.

24 See Marta de Matos, ‘Estado-providência em Portugal e as políticas sociais: Avaliação da implementação das cantinas sociais’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, ISCTE — Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, 2014) <<http://hdl.handle.net/10071/9008>> [accessed 8 December 2021].

liberal minister put it in 1867, the goal of state assistance was ‘not to prevent the fall but to provide for “after the fall” and even then, not for all falls’<sup>25</sup> with its skewed patterns of distributive care, well into the late 1970s, thanks to which the ideology of ‘remediate and make do’ appeared as part of an ethic of care and work.

The cultural significance of austerity was based on the historical relations held between Portugal, other European nations, and the colonies. The refusal of economic dependency vis-à-vis foreign nations translated into heroism on the basis of which the cult of austerity pivoted. One historical episode reappeared with particular vehemence during the 2011 economic bailout request of 78 million euros to the Troika. In 1927, Portugal was on the brink of economic collapse, the result of a combination of the effects of the Great War and the Great Economic Depression. Since the establishment of the First Republic on 5 October 1910 and until the coup of 1926, Portugal had gone through a period of great political turmoil, counting a total of forty-eight prime ministers and eight presidents. This instability, according to Salazar, reflected the evils of liberalism (e.g., individualism, parliamentarianism, capitalism, and socialism), which threatened the natural equilibrium of the traditional oligarchies. But despite economic depression and profound socio-political upheaval, the interim minister of finance at the time, conservative republican military general Artur Ivens Ferraz, personally went to Geneva to decline a large foreign loan negotiated under the auspices of the League of Nations. On his return to Portugal from his role as deputy of finance, General Ferraz was applauded by the crowds at the Rossio Square in Lisbon and congratulated as a true national hero.

In the refusal to obtain external financial help, Portugal delivered on what António Ferro, Salazar’s minister of propaganda, called ‘the myth of honourable poverty’. In effect, the cult of poverty was used as a screen to maintain the wealthy status of certain traditional families. Salazar engineered an odd form of manufactured backwardness with the aim of dissuading other nations from invading. At the same time,

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25 Cited in Maria Antónia Lopes, ‘Os pobres e a assistência publica’, in *História de Portugal*, ed. by José Mattoso, 8 vols (Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, 1993–94), v: *O liberalismo* (1993), pp. 500–15 (p. 503) (my translation, M.J.de A.).

Portugal rejected foreign help from the League of Nations so as not to create leverage or indebtedness to other European nations of the League (many of whom viewed aid as a fair trade for meddling with Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia).

Portugal had a bad reputation as administrator of its empire among other European nations. In Mozambique, for example, Portugal's settlements were largely nominal, with the colonial administration controlling little more than twenty-five percent of the entire territory. The same was true for the hinterland areas. Portugal went on launching expensive military campaigns to contain some of the independence movements then flaring up in the region. But as these counter-independence initiatives ended up consuming most of the available fiscal resources of the state, Portugal resorted to outsourcing schemes in some of its overseas territories, granting the economic exploitation and the direct administration of huge regions to foreign chartered companies.<sup>26</sup> This form of 'corporate feudalism' exposed Portugal's own limitations in dealing with its colonies.

European nations like England, Brussels, or Germany related to Portugal not as a colonial power but as kind of a semi-colony, itself in need of guidance and patronage from other colonial empires. The British Ultimatum of 1890 demanded that the Portuguese give up the inner lands between Angola and Mozambique (what is currently Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi), in order to allow the British to build a major north-south railway linking Cairo to Cape Town. The years immediately following this concession to the British saw a massive wave of protests, ultimately leading, as mentioned above, to the conditions that would place Salazar in power. Against the background of Sebastianism, Salazar was idolized as the messiah of finances, a cult that most recently, in 2017, was nostalgically revitalized when Portugal's state television, in collaboration with the BBC, called for a national vote to elect the greatest personality in history: Salazar won an indisputable first place with 41% of the vote.

The *Estado Novo* corporatist system put in place a model beyond liberalism and socialism; it was a third-way tactic, one also

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26 Malyne Newitt, *Portugal's Third Empire: Portugal in Africa in the Last Hundred Years* (London: C. Hurst, 1981), p. 78.

adopted by ordoliberalism, the German variant of economic liberalism, of the post-war period. Unlike the latter, however, Portugal's *Estado Novo* banned both the welfare state and political democracy. Historian António Amaro is thus right in stating that Portugal would only experience the welfare state by the time neoliberalism was beginning to wither under its own success.<sup>27</sup> The same could be said of its embrace of parliamentary democracy. This trend dovetailed the disposition, after many years under state despotic authoritarianism, to associate progressiveness with decreasing state intervention. Terms such as freedom, private initiative, autonomy, and non-patriarchal meritocracy, which erupted out of the 1974 Carnation Revolution and in the months and years afterwards, jumped onto the neoliberal wagon regardless of the fact that its philosophy was running on tracks laid by countries which had had very different histories than Portugal.

Almost overnight, Portugal went from a long period of fascist rule to aggressive neoliberalism. To prove the temporariness of the austerity crisis, officials set out to calendarize it according to the best predictions of liquidation. It would climb in the course of 2011, reach its peak in 2012, and begin its decline in 2013. Such forecasts allowed the contemporary state to communicate two points: firstly, that it was in full control of things,<sup>28</sup> and secondly, that austerity, like the years of liquidity instigating it, was but a short-term phenomenon. Austerity, too, was an aperture in time, an ephemeral portal in the diaphragm of the machine — certainly in d'Orey's camera-work — through which the messiah might reappear, shrouded in a fog.

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27 Amaro, 'The Late Construction of Portugal Welfare State'.

28 As Angela Mitropoulos reasons in 'Oikopolitics, and Storms', *The Global South*, 3.1 (2009), pp. 66–82.

Maria José de Abreu, 'Camera Fog; or, The Pendulum of Austerity in Contemporary Portugal', in *Errans: Going Astray, Being Adrift, Coming to Nothing*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, *Cultural Inquiry*, 24 (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2022), pp. 113–40 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-24\\_5](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-24_5)>

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