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ALTHOUGH HIDDEN, CONFLICTS EXIST OVER ALL THREE DAYS

António Pinto Ribeiro

This weekend is the 41st *Festa do Avante*. The festival is organised by the official newspaper of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and declares itself “the greatest cultural event in the country.” This claim positions the *Festa* as non-partisan, popular tradition, which to a degree explains its relative longevity and success: thousands attend every year. The *Festa*’s well-known dimension of militant communist mobilization, and the posture of international solidarity assumed by its management as well as by the artists involved renders it, however, a professional and international affair. When



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the *Festa* began four decades ago, these attributes were very uncommon in the world of artistic programming. Its wide-ranging music and artistic programme, incorporating non-European musical genres and repertoires (today often mistakenly named 'world music'), has appealed to very diverse audiences. The *Festa*'s programme owes a great deal to Ruben de Carvalho. Carvalho is a member of the PCP Central Committee, but also one of the pioneer cultural programmers in Portugal.

The *Festa do Avante* is, however, a political instrument which retains the markings of the European communist movement. Like other festivals organised by other Communist Parties, it remains an important stage for the visibility of European communists. We can compare the *Festa do Avante* with the *Fête de L'Humanité* in France, created in 1930 in the context of the Popular Front. In the intervening decades the *Fête* has undergone several changes in format as the French Communist Party (PCF) itself has changed. In 1999 the *Fête* ceased to be run by the PCF at all and became a festival of world causes with a very eclectic line-up organized by a range of left-leaning associations and parties. Another example is the *Festa de l'Unità*, organised by the Italian Communist Party from 1945. This event, too, has undergone many changes in content and organization – even its name has changed – but it has retained for almost a century the peculiarity of being a festival held in many different Italian cities.

Although these different festivals have evolved in very different ways, they have enough in common for us to think of them together as European communist festivals. By genealogy they are associated with ancestral festive calendars and with religious or pagan agricultural festivals. It is no coincidence that these events happen (with winter spin-offs) in late summer – regeneration time – and although there are always one or several programmers involved, programming is taken on as collective work, like traditional festivals with no single declared instigator.

The Enlightenment debate between Diderot and Rousseau on the role of nature and culture in forming the citizen seems far away, but here we seem to find a synthesis. The festivities of the European Communist Parties are militant and pedagogical cultural activities typically carried out, if not in the midst of nature and in parks, at least in the open air. This fits with Rousseau's precept when he states: "It is in the fresh air, it is underneath the sky that you must gather and give yourselves up to the sweet sentiment of your happiness [...] plant a stake, crowned in flowers, in the middle of a square, gather the public there and you will have a party. Even better: turn the spectators into spectacle; make the public actors themselves; let each person see themselves and love themselves in the others so that all be better united." (1)



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In the case of the *Festa do Avante*, this idea of the idyllic meeting between man and nature at the time of the feast is palpable in an article published in the newspaper *Avante* in 2012 by the militant historian Miguel Urbano Rodrigues. He describes the festival that began in 1990 to be held on a farm south of the Tagus: “the Quinta da Atalaia, a former agricultural farm, on the south Bank of the Tagus estuary, a green and quiet corner of serene beauty.”

Nevertheless, for all that these organizations claim the status of popular festivals they have important distinctions from the festivals of non-explicitly partisan organizations. Despite their range of cultural and eclectic programming, only the Communist Party festivals claim the fight against ‘cultural hegemony’ as their objective. This concept is key to António Gramsci’s theory of power, and names a process by which states destroyed traditional and popular cultural practices and controlled the media. One form of resistance to this hegemony is in the intervention of intellectuals and in a process of cultural education in which the Party can play a leading role. This is one way of understanding the festivals’ vast programs of debates, international exhibitions, fairs and book launches. According to the organisers themselves, these events address both political causes from every era and works that deconstruct cultural hegemony itself.

This distinction is particularly pertinent in the case of the *Festa do Avante* given a certain continuity of political management in its history. José Neves studies this in a recent article (2), summarising the *Festa* as “an anticipation of a post-conflict age, an age of the end of the war between peoples and the end of the struggle between classes. It is, in fact, an archetype of a post-revolutionary society often celebrated by communists and even their opponents.” (3) Neves argues that the *Festa* has been able to construct itself as a utopian time-space for two principal reasons, among others. Firstly, because the work of putting the event together depends on free militant work and therefore stands apart from processes of capitalist exploitation. Secondly, because of the variety of activities the *Festa* incorporates - from concerts to gymnastics and gastronomy. “Its programme fits all of this together smoothly, with no dissent emerging from gender conflict or minority voices. Perhaps this is because the *Festa* has become an annual pacifist celebration and has a global participation under the slogan of revolutionary internationalism.”

Creating this illusion of a post-utopian world that conceals war has a price: the absence in those three days and in that space of any type of explicit conflict, even contradiction: there is no place for the



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conflict of generations, gender, music, of tents of national and international producers, and so on. Only in the closing address by the secretary-general does real life return to combat, contradiction and even war. The logic underpinning this temporal utopianism reveals itself in the way the trauma is concealed and memory, or many memories, are excluded from the programme. Having consulted various of the *Festa's* programmes, it is surprising that notwithstanding the proliferation of activities, two themes are practically absent. These are colonialism and post-colonialism. Yes, there are declarations of solidarity with the stabilized narratives of the struggles for independence carried out by movements or parties of Marxist inspiration, just as there are tributes to heroes of these movements. Many artists and writers from those new African countries participate. But the analysis of colonialism itself is absent to such an extent that in the twelfth *Festa*, in 1988, "Communists celebrated 600 years of the Portuguese throughout the world" without any criticism at all of this process of expansion. An exhibition on the 'Discoveries' was put on, preceded by another on the Cosmos, attended both by the Soviet astronaut Vladimir Soloviev and by pieces of Sputnik. There are no debates or activities focussed on the genesis of the independence movements or on negritude or pan-Africanism. The PCF's *Fête de l'Humanité* suffers from the same problem, not least because of the PCF's ambiguous relationship with Algerian independence. In the same way, the questions of trauma from the Colonial Wars, decolonization and *retornados* were always absent from the contribution of Communist Parties to the construction of new narratives about colonization and its genesis in imperial European history.

Similarly absent are debates and references to the problematic of postcolonialism and to its various authors of broadly Marxist inspiration, with the exception of a slight nod to Amílcar Cabral. He, however, is presented more as the hero of the struggle than as a crucial theorist of pan-Africanism and what would become postcolonialism. As part of a contemporary approach to deconstructing cultural hegemony, it would be good to see intellectuals intervening in the question of (revisiting) colonial memories in the present context. Furthermore, it is not possible for intellectual work seeking to produce new knowledge to occlude the Soviet state's own responsibility for the colonization of all the now-republics of the former USSR and its satellites.

Indeed, amnesia about this historical fact may be devastating, in the short term, to these former colonies (some of which have already been reoccupied) as Katerina Brezínová clearly foresees. "Post-communist Europe, whose national imaginaries are still strongly marked by the heritage of German Romanticism, is witnessing new, emerging forms of Modernity that may or may not resemble the



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experience of Western Europe. In some countries of the region important local counter-currents are forming against the new realities of this difference. We will be in a better position to understand some of these current conflicting trends by taking seriously the violent reaction against migration and multiculturalism and the resurgence of ethnic and religious intolerance ...” (4) To continue the *Festa* in its current vein might seem like a post-revolutionary utopia but it is neither a credible nor relevant to all the peoples of the world.

(1) J.J. Rousseau, «Discours», *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris : Armand Aubré, 1832, p.235.

(2) [José Neves, «A militância comunista enquanto prática utópica- da resistência antifascista à sociedade pós-disciplinar », *Ler História* \[Online\], 69 | 2016, colocado online no dia 11 Março 2017, consultado no dia 22 Março 2018.](#)

(3) [Ibidem.](#)

(4) Katerina Brezinova, “Polémica em torno da diversidade? A República Checa pós-comunista face às novas realidades da diferença”. in, António Pinto Ribeiro (Org.), *Podemos viver sem o outro? As possibilidades e os limites da interculturalidade*, Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2009, pp.123-4.

Translated by [Alexandra Reza](#)

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WHAT CAN A BOOK DO

Ana Tironi

Some time ago, a book fell into my hands that had been written by a couple of French psychoanalysts, who for thirty years has been studying, from real cases, the connection between personal or collective trauma and madness. The book is entitled *Histoire et trauma: La folie des guerres*, (History and trauma: the folly of war) by Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière. It is a fascinating and complex work that, through the prism of multiple histories analyzed by therapists of different currents and from different places, emphasizes the need to historicize, that is, to remember with others, the blind spots that remain in people's lives after a trauma. In other words, the only way to reconstruct the individual and social narrative is for these shadowy areas to be brought into daylight and to become real. According to the authors themselves, reflecting on the complexity of the dilemma, "what cannot be said cannot be silenced either." All of us at some point in our lives feel relief when it is possible to share something that affects us. We realize that whoever hears us, in addition to understanding us, validates and legitimizes what we are feeling with their gaze or words, thus confirming that we are not crazy.

This book had a particular resonance for me, since reading it coincided with a new job that I had as historian in the *Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Archive of the Vicariate of Solidarity) in Santiago de Chile. My work consisted in investigating and updating the information from the judicial proceedings documented by this institution, in defence of the victims of human rights violations in Chile between 1973 and 1990. The *Fundación de Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (The Foundation for Documenting and Archiving the Vicariate of Solidarity) was created in 1992, to deal with and collect the information and files of the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (the Vicariate of Solidarity), as well as of the organization that preceded it, the *Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile* (the Cooperation Committee for Peace in Chile).

The Vicaría Archives, whose budget is limited, and is run on the selflessness of those who work there, has preserved relevant documents from the Chilean history of this period, and above all, has been a fundamental source of support for the victims and their families in their search for truth and reparation.

Although much time has passed since those political events occurred, many people visit and make use of the archive. First of all, survivors themselves, who search for the evidence of their pain. But the families, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, of victims as well as torturers, go there too, seeking knowledge and facts involving their relatives. There are also the researchers and the students who attend the Archive knowing that there are still many stories that must be told. In today's world, human rights archives play a pivotal role in the societies in which they emerge. Besides collaborating with justice systems, these archives preserve memory and allow the following generations to revisit their history, in order to understand their fears and so begin a process of reparation. It can be said that for many citizens these archives are an essential source to remember moments that cause them suffering even though they have not lived them.

Until now, I had only heard of the concept of post-memory. For me, this concept is extremely pertinent and it has become pressing for me to understand it. Post-memory emerges within memory studies and seeks to understand the traumatic effects inherited by later generations from those who suffered the direct effects of wars, dictatorships, and social or racial repressions. This late memory, complex and always conflictual and painful, can affect both individuals and society as a whole.

This concept was coined by Marianne Hirsch, as a way of understanding the generation Holocaust children of which she is part. In her book *The Generation of Post-memory*, Hirsch explains her understanding of post-memory as

“the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Inherited memory differs from the recollections of those people themselves directly affected by the events”.

I constantly return to Hirsch's definition of post-memory and I think that in Chile there are many stories that have not yet been told. Perhaps it is the theatre-world that leads in the production of those narratives, in that it has taken these reflections to the stage, thus allowing the public to establish a relationship with the country's wounds as well as their own. I am thinking, in particular, of names such as Guillermo Calderón and his works *Escuela*, *Mateluna* and *Discursos* (School, Mateluna, and Speeches) among others.

Works of literature and journalism have also been published that seek to research and narrate this painful stage of Chilean history from the perspective of the subjects who have lived it. Sofia Tupper Coll's work *Historias de clandestinidad : Cuatro testimonios (1973-1990)*, (Clandestine Stories: Four Testimonies (1973-1990)) makes clear in the first pages that "My intention is not to tell the truth. My commitment is to report the facts in the words of the protagonists themselves."

And for those who think this is all in past, and that it is not worth getting stuck in a story that happened over forty years ago, William Faulkner's words – "The past is never dead. It is not even past" – are an important reminder. And so I invite you to see how this past continues in the present day in Chile: the past resurfaces in the National Assembly, in the words of the deputy Ignacio Urritua, who accused the victims of human rights violations of being "terrorists with grants." But this past is also present in the response of Alejandro Fabres, detained and tortured at the age of 16, in the *Letters* section of the *El Mercurio* newspaper (21.4.18): "Sometimes it is difficult to forget. Sometimes we want to do it, but when characters such as you appear to call us terrorists for opposing a civil-military dictatorship, and because we defended ourselves from those who tried to kill us at any price, the memories remain [...] I hope sincerely and with all my heart that none of your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren or great-great-grandchildren have to experience a place of torture."

Last year at the National Archive I attended the launch of a book, *Purísima de Louquén* (Purísima of Louquén), by Hernán Bustos. Surrounded by the author's family and friends, I could feel the restorative effect that a story can engender. The book tells the life of Purísima Elena Muñoz de Maureira, wife of Sergio Maureira Lillo and mother of Rodolfo Antonio, Sergio Miguel, Segundo Armando and José Manuel. All her family were detained and disappeared in 1973. The bodies were discovered in 1978 at the execution site known as the Hornos de Lonquén (The Ovens of Lonquén). This fact has marked our entire generation. Nothing could be ambiguous, nothing could be relativized, and no honest person looking around could escape what had been lived in these furnaces, symbols of horror. It is a piercing book, a testimony to pain, injustice and barbarism. But it is also a beautiful testimony to a woman who can continue to live after hell thanks to her family's love, and to shared sorrow and joy.

It is in this way that a book can produce in us many reactions that even we do not understand. A book can lead us to read more books; a book awakens sleeping emotions; allows us to re-examine our history and sometimes reflect on how we want to continue our lives. All of this is what a book can do.



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Françoise Davoine and Jean Max Gaudilliere, *Historia y trauma, la locura de las guerras*, trans. Mariana Saúl, Fondo de cultura económica, Argentina, 2011.

Sofia Tupper Coll, *Historias de clandestinidad. Cuatro testimonios (1973-1990)*, Ediciones B, Chile, 2016.

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