Generation, regeneration and social transformation: linking theory, policy and engagement

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Abstract

The idea of working on 'generation' and 'regeneration' in the context of policy arose when the European Union launched the Next Generation EU recovery plan as a way out of COVID crisis, thus resorting to a concept that East African societies based on generational class systems have been using as reference of their main main institutional set-up. Inspired by the Rhetoric culture school, attention shifted to the cognitive structures and correlations that 'generation' and 'regeneration' evocate, for appropriate and constructive use in policy and action. This special issue collects applied ethnographic studies on the implementation of EU programmes, long-term ethnography of Candomblè religion, a study on the role of the gadaa generational class systems of the Oromo (Ethiopia), ethnography on car theft in Kanaky (New Caledonia), a collaborative ethnography of the *dônga* stick duelling practiced by the Mursi (Ethiopia), and a long-term ethnographic study of divination in Hamar (Ethiopia). The comparative review of the use of 'generation' and 'regeneration' in these ethnographies shows that both represent the link between past and future, providing condensed expressions of continuity of key values. Generation evokes the reproduction of society, the process of knowledge transfer, education and cultural transmission, as linked to a specific identity group or polity. Regeneration is instead activated in response to some sort of unpredictable disturbing element that breaks the normal flow of events, either as an ongoing necessity or on occasion of crises. As such, regeneration allows the idea of change and social transformation.

Keywords: Generation; Regeneration; Siaa; Gadaa; Rhetoric culture

Generation as revived policy issue

The idea of working on "generation" and "regeneration" in the context of policy arose when the European Union launched the *Next Generation EU* recovery plan, the attempt to overcome the pandemic crisis by re-founding the Union along the lines that were already defined in policy documents that had already been adopted by the EU. The official main webpage dedicated to the recovery plan clearly outlines the key new values: «make it [the EU] Green, Digital, Healthy, Strong, Equal»[1]. The concept of "next generation" metonymically evocates the mainstream international definition of environmentally sustainable development[2]. EU environmental policy, such as the *European Green Deal*[3], and the correlated *EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030* and *Farm to Fork Strategy,* is built upon the

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[1] https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en (accessed 16/052023).

[2] In 1987, the *Brundtland report* define sustainable development as «development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs».

[3] One third of the *NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan* budget was dedicated to the implementation of the *EU Green Deal*.

attempt to meet the internationally agreed targets, thus addressing the concerns about the apocalyptic future scenario that scholars, scientists and social movements have been predicting for decades. Read in its entirety, the public presentation of the recovery plan also implied a process of social and economic transformation that we can perhaps better qualify in terms of "regeneration": at the time of the deep pandemic crisis, the recovery plan was meant to reformulate the desirable values of the past for a new, refunded future.

I was surprised that at the level of public communication the EU was backing its paradigmatic change of policy resorting to "generation" as main rhetorical concept, the same that several East African pre-colonial societies have used for their main institutional set-up. The *gadaa* institution of the Oromo[4] was chosen by Bernardi (1985) as paradigmatic representation of generational class systems. This institution works by defining five generational lines, each composed of a sequence of generational classes. Each individual is positioned in the generational class next to his father's one. Every 8 years, a *gadaa* period, the five generational lines rotate in taking up the leading ritual and political responsibility for the whole country, with officers that were selected and trained since childhood. Accordingly, the same generational line returns to power 40 years after. Recent contributions by Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam (2004; 2020) have shown that the Oromo combine the generational arrangement, based on the idea of circular "return" of historical events (see also Legesse 1973), with the idea of cyclical recurrence of political/social/cosmological/environmental crises that force society to reformulate and regenerate itself[5]. The two authors accordingly speak of "spiral" conception of time, since crises produce a break and a shift in the circle, with an open-ended effect. I have elsewhere considered the analogies between the cosmological crisis as conceived by the Oromo – calling people to reformulate old values in new contexts – with the symbolism enhanced in Italy during the COVID pandemic, strongly evoking images of "social death" and catastrophic scenarios (Bassi forthcoming). These ideas have for long been discussed in anthropology, albeit under a variety of different headings and theories, including myth of eternal return, entropy, purification rituals, crisis of presence, millenarianism, nativistic and revitalisation movements, apocalyptic narratives. The question then shifted to "generation" and "regeneration" as cultural universals, to their evocative powers, to the basics meanings that they encapsulate and that can be used either in rhetorical constructions of public discourse or in institutional symbolism. Rhetoric culture theory has clearly shown how tropes – metaphors, chiasmus, hyperboles… – channel thought along certain patterns, and are therefore used for special effects in communication (Strecker and Tyler 2009; Hariman et al 2022). In dialogic perspective, this is how new social meanings and values are built and communicated (Bassi 2018). The focus then is not on the direct, fixed and transcultural meanings of generation and regeneration. When the creative or the decision-making elite of a political community resorts to them, they do not communicate concepts that are *per se* universal, but rather they use cognitive structures and correlations – such us the link between past and present, continuity and change… – whose specific meaning depend on the ethnographic context.

In order to explore such issues, two panels were called at the conferences organised by the *Società Italiana di Antropologia Culturale* (SIAC) and the *Società Italiana di Antropologia Applicata* (SIAA) in 2021[6], inviting for theoretical elaborations on generation and regeneration as trope and on anthropological theories of time, in connection with ethnographic explorations drawn from the

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[4] *Gadaa* practically operates in territorial sections of the Oromo – the largest linguistic group in east Africa -, but almost all Oromo sections adopt this institution, at least at the symbolic or ritual level.

[5] These crises occur on occasion of combinations of different calendrical cycles, all related to the basic *gadaa* generational social structuring of time.

[6] The IX national conference of SIAA (2021) was as a whole dedicated to the theme "Next Generation: Anthropological Perspectives".

21st century. Since only one abstract was presented for the first event, on that occasion we could not organise any panel. During the second event only ethnographic cases from Ethiopia were presented. *Antropologia Pubblica* then proceeded with an open call, whose response has broadened the comparative base of this special issue. We are here presenting articles whose ethnographic design or research itinerary was conceived in terms of fundamental, applied or engaged research.

The articles of the collection

Marta Villa's and Enrico Petrangeli's contributions are both derived from ethnographic research built in the process of implementing EU funded programs on rural (territorial) development. The ECOVINEGOALS (Ecological Vineyards Governance Activities for Landscape's Strategies) project that has involved Marta Villa as main researcher for the component based in Trento Province (Italy) was directly developed in response to an Interreg call of the European Commission, before the COVID pandemic. Enrico Petrangeli participated in the local collective efforts to submit a proposal in response to *National Plan Borghi PNRR-MIC 21* call, designed to promote the «social and cultural regeneration of small historical *borghi* (villages)» (Petrangeli *infra* in this special issue), with financial resources from the *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, the Italian formulation of *Next Generation EU.* In this second case, the call is the result of intermediate elaboration of the EU policy at Italian level.

Federico Bigaran, one of the main developers of the ECOVINEGOALS proposal[7], clearly states that the proposal was designed and implemented with the explicit attempt to respond to the guiding principles of the mentioned EU policy, with a major component on "regeneration" (of agricultural vineyards and landscape practices) and inter-generational transmission of knowledge. To this aim, Villa has applied a range of ethnographic technics in the Cembra Valley, including photo-elicitation using historical landscape images during participatory meetings, to collectively develop action plans that could be shared across the generations and beyond the agricultural stakeholders. In this regard, Villa notes that, in line with the EU objectives, communities that were already engaged as legally recognised and operative rural commons[8] showed higher capacity and inclination towards sustainably use of natural resources.

Petrangeli's article provides an example of reflexive ethnography and textual analysis of a process that took place, due to COVID restrictions, mainly in remote modality. The ethnographer outlines both contradictions that were intrinsic to the formulation of the call and problems of interpretation on the side of the actors involved in developing the proposal. The extremely short time available to respond to the call forced the actors to build on networks that were already established through previous projects, and to opportunistically proceed in reversal modality, not by looking to the available patrimony and collectively deciding what would be required to trigger the cultural and social regeneration of the *borghi*, but rather by starting from the indicators used for the evaluation of the proposals and think what could possibly be done in the available time, within a very small technical-political circle. Even with this modality, the technical team struggled in understanding what is meant by "regeneration", a word used 88 times in the call but never defined. This is where we can identify a clear difference between the ECOVINEGOALS proposal, for which direct reference to

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[7] At the time of the project formulation and implementation Federico Bigaran was the governmental official in charge of the project unit based in Trentino Province.

[8] In the Cembra Valley there are rural commons that through 2005 Provincial law on regulation of civic uses have been recognised as ASUC (Amministrazioni Separate di Uso Civico). Today, the National Law 168/2017 is producing a redefinition of the ASUC in terms of "dominio collettivo". Villa is also engaged in long term historical and anthropological research on rural commons in Trentino.

"regeneration" as clearly defined in EU policy did not produce any ambiguity, and the MIC-21, where the intermediate elaboration of the call at national level brought interpretation derived from internal narratives. Petrangeli elaborates at length about the choice of the word *borghi* rather than *villaggio* (village), a highly debated theme in Italy. *Borghi*, in fact, evokes a particular interpretation of "regenerative" projects that refers to the aesthetic and touristic valorisation of sites and historical buildings – what we could call "regeneration" of physical space – rather than place-based development, a culturally and socially grounded process of reformulation by the community, based on the specificity of the locality – what we could qualify as "regeneration" of practices and relations in line with new values and opportunities.

Daniela Calvo's long term ethnography of Candomblè religious rituals and world view in Brasil and Italy brings the attention on emic ideas of "regeneration". Through an articulated analysis of rituals, ceremonies, feasts, myths, deities and spiritual beings, Calvo illustrates the interconnectedness between natural, human and spiritual processes. Specific conceptions related to the cycle of life and death and to the conceptualisation of the **àṣẹ** sacred force are key connecting factors. **Àṣẹ** is a mystical principle expressing the common divine origin of all beings. As it happens with other conceptualisations of cosmo-socio-political forces identified among African, Polynesian and native American peoples, its flow assures harmony, wellbeing, and continuity and renovation of life, but it is also subject to dangerous irregularities and to degradation[9]. Accordingly, **àṣẹ** is subject to constant "regenerative" ritual attention. In line with Balandier's theory of "entropy" (1967), regeneration here is not considered as a response to an anomoulus or a long-term cyclical crisis as in the case of the Oromo calendrical cycles, but an ongoing necessity, addressed in regular symbolic and ritual practices. Yet, Calvo extended her ethnography to the COVID pandemics, and presented convincing evidence that Candomblè practitioners have interpreted it – and ritually dealt with it – as a major crisis, induced by «years of humans' predatory action on nature, pollution and destruction of forests and ecosystems», a condition that broke the «balance of humans' relationship with nature» (Calvo *infra* in this special issue).

Haftee Wako's article provides an account of his study on the role that the *gadaa* generational class system of the Oromo has played as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in mitigating inter-ethnic conflict among agro-pastoral communities in southern Ethiopia. Since the incorporation of Oromo-land into the Ethiopian empire[10], the *gadaa* system has been ostracised by the Ethiopian state authorities, but it remained operative as a working institution in the pastoral southern lowlands. With the adoption multinational federalism in 1995, this customary institution went through an endogenous process of revival throughout the whole of the newly established Oromia Regional State, up to achieving recognition as an "indigenous democratic socio-political system" under the Unesco list of intangible cultural heritage. Even though the *gadaa* has been operating independently form the governmental system, Haftee's research shows that it played a key peace-making and reconciliatory role by applying customary reconciliation mechanisms in new situations. The key question here is why an institution that has for long been marginalised in the modern arena continue to receive much attention and respect from the citizens. Building on the literature, the author outlines the relevance of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Africa. Differently from the western-derived mechanisms that are normally enhanced by NGOs, the international community and State actors, they are rooted in the social, economic and cultural milieu of the area of conflict occurrence, and «can provide context-specific solutions that can effectively be applied alongside conventional ap-

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[9] In addition to the Polynesian and Melanesian *mana* and the Iroquoian *orenda* mentioned by the author, we may recall the *mahano* among the Nyoro of Uganda, the *kér* among the Alur of Uganda, the *swèm* among the Tiv of Nigeria, the *nam* among Mossi of Burkina Faso (Balandier 1967), and the *ayaana* among the Oromo of Ethiopia (Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam 2020).

[10] Second half of the Nineteenth century.

proaches» (Wako *infra* in this special issue). In the case of *gadaa*, the conflict resolution component is part of an encompassing institution that has in "generation" its leading principle. Social and political responsibilities are formally handed over from generation to generation, with offices entrusted to persons that have gone through a life-long normative, symbolic and ethical training (Bassi 2005)[11]. As shown by Haftee's research, the active role in addressing serious conflicts that have affected the area was taken by the *abbaa gadaa* and other officers, as part of their responsibility towards the people. We can therefore assume that the specific customary knowledge that has been acquired through the generations is at the roots of the continuity of the relevance and effectiveness of *gadaa*, either as conflict resolution mechanism or, in a broader sense, as living institution. In terms of policy, the author invites the international community to support the process for improving the institutionalisation of *gadaa* in modern governance.

Martino Miceli presents his ethnography on car theft in Kanaky (New Caledonia). This apparently criminal practice is discussed by the author in terms of socialising activity in the effort of defining new political and social identities in the struggle for achieving independence from France. Indeed, the article seems to depict the inception of a generational class system, with the internal dynamics and meanings of such systems but without the formalised ritual structure. The notion of "generation" is brought by the elders themselves, self-addressing as "Generation 84", in opposition to the new (current) generation of youths, negatively qualified in terms of the techniques they use to steal cars, in their view manifesting a deterioration of values. For both generations, stealing cars is considered a transitional (I would say even formative or educational) practice of youth-hood, interpreted as a male socialising activity by Miceli[12]. "Generation 84" claims the honour of having introduced car stealing (including the car-jacking variant), considered as an enforced act of restitution for the abuses of colonisation: it was implemented only against non-indigenous persons, outside the tribal areas, cars were only temporary used for personal needs and then abandoned or burnt (it was not a profit making activity), and the youths stealing the car were respecting the car's owner privacy by avoiding entering their home. The political connotation of this practice is explicitly marked by the adoption of the "Generation 84" denomination, with a clear reference to the nationalistic struggle that led to the 1984-1988 turmoil. In order to make sense of the ongoing process, Miceli identifies in the colonial settings the roots of a crisis of intergenerational transmission, and, with it, a break in the process of social reproduction. This led to the definition of a new "generation", forged by the nationalist struggle and new socialising and educational modalities, with the possibility for the youths, and the following renovated generations, to build a trans-tribal, indigenous and antagonist (in the broader political field) identity.

Shauna LaTosky and Olisarali Olibui provide a fascinating piece of collaborative anthropology. Olisarali is in fact an educator native to the Mursi (Mun) speaking pastoral community, a minority group in southern Ethiopia. Being an experienced practitioner of *dônga* stick duelling, he is at same time a competent witness and an activist engaged in conserving and promoting this form of ritual duelling. Education and cultural contact are the dominant features of this paper too, particularly in Olisarale's perspective. The imposition of the ban on *dônga* ritual stick duelling, a practice stigmatised by the Ethiopian authorities for its content of "dangerous" violence, is intertwined with a story of abuses of minority rights related to hydroelectric and agricultural development in this peripheral area of Ethiopia (Bassi 2019). Building on David Turton's early ethnography of *dônga,* the authors

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[11] I wish to thank Elfneh Udessa Bariso for his presentation at the 2021 SIAA panel on *The Gadaa lifelong learning framework: Its potential for the sociocultural and educational transformations*.

[12] Similar "anti-social" behaviours, marked by aggressivity and degrees of violence addressed outside the group – for instance warriorhood –, also qualify the allowed activities of the classes of the youths in several age-class systems (Bernardi 1985).

go deep into the social meaning of this practice, a ritualised way to solve the conflict that constantly emerges across various Mursi sub-groups and individuals: if not addressed in a controlled way, conflict may break into truly violent forms that would destroy the social fabric of the society. We find here resonance of the motif presented by Calvo in relation to Candomblé, being *dônga* a ritual practice that allows control of entropy as an ongoing necessity, a constant regenerator of peaceful relations. However, this ritual practice also has a strong educational function by keeping youths engaged in physical training while stimulating self-control, self-restraint, martial capacity, and promoting socialisation of both male and female. Once the role of *dônga* as a peace-making performative ritual is clarified, Olisarali efforts to represent it in a drama for performance at the main theatre of Addis Ababa (the far capital of Ethiopia) can be understood in terms of trans-cultural pedagogic initiative for mutual understandings and a way to re-compose the endangered relations between the Ethiopian state and the Mursi. The theatre performance representing the *dônga* on the stage, with Ethiopians as active audience, is metonymically conceived by Olisarali as itself being a regenerative ritual duelling, at a larger, and new, societal scale, what he calls 'the biggest *dônga'* he ever engaged. Ivo Strecker describes the range of divination technics used among the Hamar – another agro-pastoral group of southern Ethiopia – many of which are shared throughout Southern Ethiopia and beyond. In this article Strecker is drawing the path to a new theoretical approach for the interpretation of divination in general. He starts from a theme that in anthropology has often been recalled in relation to magic, the idea that divination helps to address the uncertainty, or "vicissitudes", of life[13]. But Strecker discusses the divinatory practices applying motifs derived from the rhetoric culture school, especially Stephen Tyler's Intention-Convention-Performance model on the progressive construction and adjustment of discourse or speech. Divination among the Hamar is in fact ethnographically described as a culture-specific form of communication, a devise capable to involve actors in a shared exercise of production and consumption of meanings. It stimulates analogical thought by the symbols evoked with the different divinatory technics, engaging people in a "reflective creativity" exercise, requiring adjustments in a back and forward constant movement. The Intention is common "awareness of human frailty", for which ordinary social Conventions may not provide an adequate answer, leading the community to reflect about appropriate action, or Performance. The link between these three interrelated aspects of divination is especially evident when considering Hamar political discourse, consisting in a «never-ending spiral from informal conversation to divination, to oratory, to blessing and cursing» (Strecker *infra* in this special issue). The political process is set in motion when "the usual routine" is threatened, by "sickness, drought, internal or external conflict" (Strecker *infra* in this special issue). Again, as in the case of Candomblè and *dônga,* we find here a codified practice that is constantly activated to respond to the unavailable elements of social and cosmological disorder: divinatory practices are an instrument that helps in «regenerating and re-strengthening the social fabric» (Strecker *infra* in this special issue).

On theory and practice

Applied anthropology has often been downplayed as mere instrumental application of notions and theory generated through "true" ethnography, fundamental research that is free from the conditioning and constraints that practical objectives inevitably insert in the research cycle. In connection with the fact that ethnography is epistemologically grounded in social practice, we rather note that new branches of the discipline, with articulated new theoretical propositions, developed through deep insights gained by engaged anthropologists. Educational anthropology, anthropology of development and medical anthropology are cases in point. During the initiatives promoted by the

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[13] See, for instance, Malinowski's response to Frazer's evolutionary model on magic, religion and science (1948).

Italian Association of Applied Anthropology we have often drawn attention on the relevance of the bi-directional correlation between theory and applied, or engaged, anthropology: just as theory informs policy and action, action and engagement informs theory. If we really want to understand the practical situations we engage with, we need to identify relevant theory, and eventually to develop new propositions.

It is relatively easy to explicate the first half of the chiasmus. Policy is directly derived from theoretical enunciations, models and assumptions, and all the authors of the articles of this collection have made more or less explicit use of theory, often of combinations of different theoretical insights from various disciplines. The EU environmental policy is grounded in environmental and ecological science; the ECOVINEGOALS was designed using agro-ecology, and Villa implemented her applied field work having in mind anthropological theory on landscape and common action; the formulation of *National Plan Borghi PNRR-MIC 21* call was mediated by mainstream economic theory, with Petrangeli's critical analysis based on linguistic theory; Calvo dealt with indigenous ontologies; Haftee Wako made large use of theory of conflict; Miceli's analysis was inspired by Gramsci's "crisis and the critics of modernity" and Balandier's delineation of the "colonial situation"; LaTosky and Olisarali Olibui based their analysis on structural-functional theory, aesthetics and pedagogy; and Strecker on rhetoric culture and other cultural theory. Anthropologists are very aware that making sense of their field-records is one of the main challenges of a methodology that does not proceed by falsifying and validating pre-selected theories. We see that almost all authors, either working within the dynamics of project implementation (applied anthropology), or in various ways engaged in collaborative processes with the community (engaged or action anthropology), or mainly concerned with theoretical issues (fundamental research) have been linking data and theory in "hermeneutical" modality, with movement from field experience to theory, and back to practice, and forward to other meaningful theory.

The second half of the chiasmus is a bit more difficult to define. In this special issue, we are concerned with explicating inner meanings and cognitive structures implied in "generation" and "regeneration", for appropriate and constructive use in policy and action. The ethnography here presented shows that such concepts have recently been used in the titles and formulation of EU policy, both at European and national level; at the emic level, the Oromo have been using "generation" as the framing principle of *gadaa*, their main institutional settings, and "regeneration" (of the whole *gadaa* long-term calendrical cycle) on occasion of crisis requiring transformation; the Kanak too have been referring to "generation" as a way to signal a new time, marked by crisis and a transformed ethnic identity. At the etic level, in this special issue scholars have used "regeneration" to make sense of various ritual practices and notions, in Candomblè religion, with the performative *dônga* duelling and divination. In all these three cases "regeneration" refers to the need to respond to unpredictable and ongoing processes of socio-political-cosmological degeneration, or disturbance, corresponding to Balandier's "entropy" or, following Strecker, what we could also call "socio-cosmological vicissitudes".

The cases here discussed seems to indicate that both "generation" and "regeneration" express the link between past and future, but with different patterns of continuity. We may here recall Abner Cohen's intuition on the role of symbolism in conveying the idea of stability and continuity to groups and polities, without which "social life cannot exist" (Cohen 1969: 220). "Generation" responds to the same need, and it is intimately linked, as noted by Miceli, to social reproduction. In the case of the EU environmental policy, "generation" evokes the possibility to achieve continuity in the material dimension of life, the natural environment in its various declinations. Having to do with the fundamental issue of the basic conditions for life or death, in this mode of thought there is a fundamental cosmological dimension. In this sense I am not surprised to find analogies on the ideas of

interdependence of humans with other beings and vital processes – and worries about our future for the lost equilibrium – between the conclusions of the scientific reasoning that ultimately led to the formulation of the EU environmental policy and the interpretation of the COVID pandemic based on Candomblé indigenous ontology.

"Generation" implies continuity and social reproduction also in the sense of cultural transmission, in modalities that are perhaps still best expressed by the Herderian parallel concepts of *bildung* ("education", "formation", in the sense of active process of mutual construction of values and knowledge) and *tradition* (inter-generation transmission of knowledge, not as conservative behaviours, but as a continuous process of merging old with new elements in specific contexts) (Barnard 1969). I have discussed these elements with reference to the *gadaa* generational classes of the Oromo, but the issue of intergeneration knowledge transfer was also a central activity of the ECOVINEGOALS project, with an interesting reversal of attitude, being the older generation more oriented towards a "modernising" approach to resource exploitation, and the younger one more "conservative", in the sense of being aware about environmental issues, in line with the new European values.

Reference to Herder allows introducing a third theme related to "generation": the link to a specific identity group, or polity. The notion of "Generation 84" (and the following ones) was introduced when the identity of the Kanak changed in the broader inter-ethnic field, on occasion of a new beginning, with the new connotations of the Kanak as a social entity not anymore primarily qualified by their tribal segments, but united in the anti-colonial struggle. Most likely, also the new calendrical long-term cycles of the Oromo were characterised by new identity configurations.

If "generation" emphasises, in "regeneration" we can read a dimension of renovation, some innovation that is collectively adopted in response to some sort of unpredictable disturbing element that breaks the normal flow of events, in the social, political, ideological, economic or cosmological sphere. We have seen this to be a continuous need, but there is also a second reading, related to the notion of crisis. Crisis is the underlining situation of the *borghi* requiring "regeneration" of the physical space for economic purposes, crisis and cataclysm qualify the passages of era among the Oromo, and it was a crisis of social reproduction in Kanaky that led to the emergence of a new generation. It is probably also the COVID crisis that led to a renovated European Union, with a *Next Generation EU* recovery plan that can also be read – in analogy with the case of "Generation 84" – as the "Generation 1" of a refunded EU polity.

Drawing from the Oromo worldview, we are tempted to theorise that sense of crisis, chaos and cataclysm are functional to the elaboration and proposition of new syntheses, in an ever-changing social, political, technological and ecological environment. "Generation" and "regeneration" are then condensed expressions of continuity of key values. Whereas "generation" more directly refer to "transmission", "regeneration" allows the idea of change and social transformation.

The attempt here made to explore links between theory, policy and engagement reflects the vision of the SIAA that does not separate theory from application, or fundamental research from action. The association is constantly engaged in stimulating debate on new methodological and interdisciplinary tools and practices, and, hopefully, in increasingly producing theory out of the applied and engaged experiences. We are aware of the challenges ahead, aware about the deep crisis we are in, expressed in the Candomblè interpretation of COVID, by the Oromo awareness that the *gadaa* cycle of the Borana-Oromo has come to an end (Megerssa, Kassam 2020), in the widespread feeling of despair due to the ever-increasing catastrophic events related to climate change and to pandemics, in the hecatombs of migration due to global inequalities, widespread wars and systematic abuses of human rights, and in the return of inter-State territorial conquest with a new 21st century nuclear threat dimension. We are also aware that theoretical orientations may not be enough to face the current situation, and therefore we are thankful for Strecker's invitation to cultivate our capacity to think, like

the Hamar with their divinatory devises, «reflectively, analogically, symbolically or, more broadly, rhetorically in order to persuade ourselves and others of what may be the right ways to act in the critical and particularly daunting situations we are facing now» (Strecker *infra* in this special issue).

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