

The future of the past of a cinematically mediated protest song

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Abstract

This paper concentrates on the recurrence of certain practices in history, as thematised in the Spanish Netflix television series, *Money Heist*, through the lenses of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the 'refrain', music, deterritorialisation, reterritorialisation and lines of flight, and of Derrida's deconstruction of 'context'. *Money Heist* narrates the daring attempt, by a group of 'criminals', to rob the Spanish Mint in Madrid of more than a billion of Euros, which they themselves proceed to print with the help of an experienced Mint machine operator. The leader of the robbers, 'The Professor', and his brother, Berlin, are shown in a scene where they sing an Italian revolutionary song, known as 'Bella Ciao' ('Goodbye Beautiful'), which dates back to the 19th century when exploited women, working in rice paddies in Italy, sang it in protest at their oppression, where its 'refrain' may be seen as having had therapeutic value. During the fascist reign of Mussolini in Italy, the song was taken up by people who resisted Mussolini's and the Nazis' rule. It recurs in the background in the course of the unfolding narrative, which turns out to be much more than just a bank-robbery film. Instead, it becomes apparent that it is itself, like the emblematic song, a protest film series, which has the hegemony of the current neoliberal regime in its sights.

KEYWORDS

cinema, Deleuze, Guattari, music, refrain

If it were really generally recognized that the continuation of exploitation which benefits only a small number of men is the source of present day social wretchedness; if every newspaper reader grasped that the preservation of the present order is the cause of all the wars, crimes, poverty, misery and murder he reads about; if these platitudes which not even people with an average knowledge of the world, let alone our learned men, understand because we have a marvellously functioning brain-washing apparatus, if these platitudes, I say, were even to penetrate the understanding of the lowest guardian of this order, mankind could be spared a terrible future (Horkheimer, 1978, p. 48).

1 | THE SONG AND THE TELEVISION SERIES

When considering 'the future of the past', it necessarily involves the present as the 'gateway' of the past to the future. Multiple things could be thematised along this trajectory, from natural ecologies as they existed before the commencement of the present human industry-driven ecological degradation, to the development or history of human institutions such as education, politics, art and architecture, either in general terms or with a focus on a specific event or artefact. The present paper belongs to the latter category. Via a specific artefact (a folk song), it concentrates on the recurrence of a certain set of practices – specifically socio-political resistance – in history, as thematised in a cinematic work of art; namely the Spanish Netflix television streaming series *Money Heist* (*La Casa de Papel*; *The House of Paper*) (Pina, 2017).

Briefly, *Money Heist* is the narrative of a group of 'thieves' who execute a daring plan to rob the Spanish Mint in Madrid of billions of Euros (and later, the Bank of Spain, of tonnes of gold), which they themselves, having occupied the building and taken the Mint employees hostage, proceed to print with the help of an experienced Mint machine operator. The robbery is orchestrated from a different location, near the Mint, where the leader of the robbers, simply called 'the Professor', has electronically mediated, visual access to the interior of the Mint; while his brother, code-name Berlin, leads the heist inside the building. The rest of the robbers are similarly code-named after cities, such as the female narrator – Tokyo; her boyfriend, the electronics expert – Rio; and her lady friend, the forgery expert – Nairobi. As might be expected, there are many setbacks in the execution of such a daring plan, where the Mint is soon surrounded by police, from the officers in the command tent to the snipers constantly observing the building for signs of movement. In the course of the unfolding narrative, it becomes apparent that the series is much more than just a story about a robbery. For example, when the Professor refers to himself and his hand-picked band of would-be robbers as 'the Resistance', and when the large numbers of people gathered outside the building and kept in check by the police start rooting for (and even dressing in the red cover-alls and Dali-masks used by) the robbers. Why would this be the case?

The explanatory leitmotif reveals itself when, in Episode 11 of the first season of *Money Heist*, the robbers break through the steel floor to the soil where they will start digging the tunnel to the Professor's hideout, and they start singing a song – which the Professor taught them – spontaneously in celebration of their progress (see Bella Ciao Full Song, 2020). In Episode 13 of the same season, the Professor and Berlin are shown in a flashback scene preceding the heist, where they sing this same Italian protest song (see Bella Ciao/*La Casa de Papel*, 2018), known as 'Bella Ciao' ('Goodbye Beautiful'), and the audience is informed that Sergio's grandfather (who fought against the Italian fascists) taught him the song. Very significantly, for the theme of the series, at the end of the same episode (13) scenes from the Great Depression of the 1930s are shown – people lining up at banks, of bankers and of workers in line at soup kitchens – graphically displaying the contrast between the rich and the poor in the history of the world. This interacts audio-visually and semantically with the song, *Bella Ciao*, which dates back to the 19th century when exploited women working in the *padroni's* rice paddy fields in northern Italy sang it as an expression of protest at their plight, having to work for long hours at minimal remuneration under difficult conditions. During the fascist reign of Mussolini in Italy, the song was taken up, with different lyrics, by people who resisted

Mussolini's rule (Bella Ciao, 2018; Silverman, 2011). In the series, the song also plays during the escape of the thieves from the Mint at the end of the second season (in the finale pointedly titled 'Bella Ciao'), with conspicuous symbolic ties to the theme of liberation that attaches to the earlier historical contexts where it was sung. (In passing, it is noteworthy that, in the course of citizens in European countries – particularly Italy – experiencing 'lockdown' to combat the spread of the deadly novel coronavirus that has precipitated a global pandemic [March 2020], Bella Ciao has been sung from balconies of apartment complexes [see Bella Ciao, 2020]).

The song recurs several times in the background in the course of the unfolding narrative, like a refrain emphasising that the series surpasses the category of a bank-heist television/film series. Instead, it becomes apparent that it is itself, like the emblematic song, a protest television series, which has the hegemony, or perhaps global tyranny, of the current (economic-political) neoliberal regime in its sights. Apart from those scenes where the Professor refers to himself and his band of robbers as the 'Resistance', and apart from the scene, near the beginning of the third season, where they drop 140 million Euros, Robin Hood style, on ecstatic people on the streets of Madrid from blimps, there is a scene where this is made explicit, in Episode 8 of Season 2 (about 41 min into the episode). Here Raquel (the police inspector with whom the Professor has fallen in love, and vice versa) stands with her hands bound after trying unsuccessfully to arrest the Professor, and he says to her:

It would've been a lot easier for me if none of this happened. It was the only... the only crack in an otherwise perfect plan. A plan that was perfect and no longer is. You know why? Because even if this all goes well... even if it all goes well, I'll be... I'll be fucked. Because I won't see you again. Think it was my plan to fall in love with the inspector in charge?

Raquel interjects:

I don't want to hear you anymore!

But the Professor continues:

You don't want to hear me? Why don't you want to hear me? Because I'm a bad guy? You've been taught to see everything as good or bad. But what we're doing is okay to you when other people do it. In the year 2011 the European Central Bank made 171 billion Euros out of nowhere. Just like we're doing. Only bigger. One hundred eighty-five billion in 2012. One hundred forty-five billion Euros in 2013. Do you know where all that money went? To the banks. Directly from the factory... to the pockets of the rich. Did anyone say... that the European Central Bank was a thief? 'Liquidity injections', they called it. And they pulled it out of nowhere. Out of nowhere.

The Professor turns around and fetches a 50 Euro-note from a bundle on his desk. Returning to Raquel he holds it up before her and asks:

What's this?

Tearing up the note he continues:

This is nothing, Raquel. It is paper. It's paper, you see! It's paper. I'm making a liquidity injection... but not for the bankers. I'm doing it here... in the real economy. With this group of... of losers, which is what we are, Raquel. To get away from it all. Don't you want to get away?

It is noticeable that, just as the song, *Bella Ciao*, contains the refrain – ‘Oh *Bella Ciao*, *Bella Ciao*, *Bella Ciao* *Caio*’ (*Bella Ciao* Full Song, 2020; *Bella Ciao/La Casa de Papel*, 2018; *The History of Bella Ciao*, from *La Casa de Papel*, 2019) – so, too, we witness the ‘refrain’ of repeated bank ‘bailouts’ in recent history, and not only the ones in Europe that the Professor cites. Who can forget the historically massive bank bailout of US\$700 billion in the United States after the start of the 2008 financial crisis (see *Emergency Economic Stabilization Act* 2008, 2020), when bankers went home with big bonuses while many people lost their homes? (see Freifeld, 2009) The concept of the ‘refrain’ will be put to work to come to grips with both of these axes of the present investigation into the significance of the (historically) recurrent use of the resistance-song – *Bella Ciao* – and the repeated instances of financial oppression. But, first, one should note that there are two sets of lyrics of the song; the first as sung by the rice paddy women-workers in 19th century Italy, and the second as sung by the members of the Resistance in fascist Italy in the 1940s. The English translation of the first version goes like this:

In the morning I got up
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao (Goodbye beautiful)
In the morning I got up
To the paddy rice fields, I have to go.

And between insects and mosquitoes
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
and between insects and mosquitoes
a hard work I have to work.

The boss is standing with his cane
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
the boss is standing with his cane
and we work with our backs curved.

Oh my god, what a torment
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
oh my god, what a torment
as I call you every morning.

And every hour that we pass here
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
and every hour that we pass here
we lose our youth.

But the day will come when us all
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
but the day will come when us all
will work in freedom.

The partisan version (English translation), on the other hand, seems far closer to our own time in meaning, which is probably why it is used in the *Money Heist* series (see ‘Melody’ under *Bella Ciao* – Wikipedia):

One morning I awakened,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao! (Goodbye beautiful)

One morning I awakened
And I found the invader.

Oh partisan carry me away,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
oh partisan carry me away
Because I feel death approaching.

And if I die as a partisan,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
and if I die as a partisan
then you must bury me.

Bury me up in the mountain,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
bury me up in the mountain
under the shade of a beautiful flower.

And all those who shall pass,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
and all those who shall pass
will tell me "what a beautiful flower."

This is the flower of the partisan,
oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao
this is the flower of the partisan
who died for freedom.

In sum, and anticipating the interpretive analysis to follow, one might say that the narrative instantiates the pursuit, on the part of the 'robbers', of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a 'line of flight', which offers itself as a possibility to be actualised right in the heart of the 'state apparatus'; namely the financial system that maintains it. The song, *Bella Ciao*, renews and sustains this line of flight as the narrative unfolds. Lorraine (2010) situated the concept of 'line of flight' in relation to the rest of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual apparatus as follows:

Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a vocabulary that emphasises how things connect rather than how they 'are', and tendencies that could evolve in creative mutations rather than a 'reality' that is an inversion of the past. He and Guattari prefer to consider things not as substances, but as assemblages or multiplicities, focusing on things in terms of unfolding forces – bodies and their powers to affect and be affected – rather than static essences. A 'line of flight' is a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or 'virtual') that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond (p. 47).

The last sentence in this quotation reads like an abstract summary of *Money Heist* (more on this below). Another elucidation of lines of flight in relation to 'deterritorialisation' will make what follows more intelligible. Parr (2010) described it like this:

Perhaps deterritorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change. In so far as it operates as a line of flight, deterritorialisation indicates the creative potential of an assemblage. So, to deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organisations (p. 69).

With this in mind, the narrative of *Money Heist*, and the role of the song, *Bella Ciao* – in this narrative – may be understood at two levels: intra-cinematically, the robbery represents an initiation of a ‘line of flight’ with the task of deterritorialising society as presented there, and the song is a deterritorialising expression of this line of flight. Extra-cinematically, as a television series, *Money Heist* could possibly serve to set in motion a ‘line of flight’ that could, potentially, incrementally deterritorialise extant society, depending on the reception of viewers worldwide, emancipating them from the suffocating hegemony of neoliberalism.

2 | DETERRITORIALISATION, SCHIZOANALYSIS AND ASSEMBLAGE

Before giving attention to the ‘refrain’, one has to note that for Deleuze and Guattari (1987), ‘deterritorialization’ seems to mean the undoing of any kind of (unproductive) stasis – of the kind that is inseparable from the process of identification and the setting free, along a ‘line of flight’ (pp. 116–117), of what they think of as ‘desiring-production’, which is what the true state of the world as *becoming* is. It goes hand-in-hand with ‘decoding’ (of ‘flows’, which constitute the process of becoming) and is the opposite of reterritorialization, which is said to ‘arrest the process’, albeit only temporarily, by reinscribing something in a bounded ‘territory’ of some kind (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 382). As such, deterritorialisation is part and parcel of what they understand by (the task of) ‘schizoanalysis’, which they describe as: ‘*Psychoanalysis settles on the imaginary and structural representatives of reterritorialization, while schizoanalysis follows the machinic indices of deterritorialization*’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 316; italics in original). Schizoanalysis, which is their answer to the kind of psychoanalysis that promotes ego-identification with static images of all kinds – that of the state, the party, of capital, or the corporation – is precisely what promotes freedom from attachment to power.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) attribute a revolutionary role to schizoanalysis, through a ‘schizoid revolutionary pole’, distinct from its countervailing pole of ‘libidinal investment’, to wit, a ‘paranoiac, reactionary and fascisizing pole’ (p. 366). From their elaboration it appears that schizoanalysis can lead to the subversion of a certain variety of power which displays a degree of ‘fascism’ (broadly, the concentration of power in a small group as its agents). It is significant that, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the ‘fascisizing pole’ of libidinal investment is ‘defined by subjugated groups’ (p. 367), such as, arguably, consumers across the world today, who are subjugated by the financial mechanism of, among other things, *debt* (Deleuze, 1992; Hardt & Negri, 2012); while the ‘schizoid revolutionary pole’ is marked by ‘subject groups’ (those striving to deterritorialise concentrations of hegemonic power, like the ‘assemblage’ of ‘robbers’ in *Money Heist*). They admit that this distinction is still problematical: the schizoid investment could prove to be utopian, instead of being capable of ‘real(ly)’ investing the ‘sociohistorical field’ – a possibility facing every attempt to replace ‘fascist’ power with power shared among everyone, as in Hardt and Negri’s (2005) ‘multitude’. Their intent is clear, however: schizoanalysis is conceived of as overthrowing the social and psychic shackles that all kinds of territorialisations and (re-)codings ((re-)investing certain relevant institutions and practices with power through symbolic coding) of social life impose on people, subordinating them to the domination of some or other anaesthetising identification, from undisguised political totalitarianism and the suffocating tentacles of bureaucracy to an ostensibly ‘free’ market system which captivates and subjugates people no less than overt dictatorship through the mechanisms that are inseparable from it. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) demonstrated that capital is a thoroughly paradoxical process: the ‘capitalist machine deterritorializes’ (p. 34) flows to extract ‘surplus value’ from them – as reflected earlier in Marx and Engels’s (1985) famous phrase, ‘...all that is solid,

melts into air' (pp. 83–84); but simultaneously, what they call 'its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order', strenuously 'reterritorialize' the conquered domains.

From this perspective, the song – *Bella Ciao* – as well as the television series – *Money Heist* – can be understood as potentially initiating a deterritorialising, schizoanalytic process or line of flight, of subverting viewers' attachments to power of all kinds, particularly that which depends on identifying with the markers and symbols of capital, such as the names and logos of banks or corporations, or of fashion and cosmetics houses; keeping in mind that capital needs, and depends upon, the state's institutions to shore up and defend its assets through a process of reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). In the series, the police represent the reterritorialising state, and Raquel is the only one among its members who, through her love for Sergio (the Professor), eventually grasps the truth about capital as the major signifier for the ruling power in the world, namely neoliberalism. Through its agents, this power incrementally strengthens its grip on society, even when ordinary people – those represented by the robbers in *Money Heist* and symbolically by the song, *Bella Ciao* – are conspicuously suffering severely (see Carter, 2020).

Furthermore, the band of 'robbers' instantiates what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) think of as an assemblage, which they characterise as something multi-faceted:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away (p. 88, italics in original).

It is not difficult to conceive of the Professor and his group of bank robbers as such an assemblage in terms of bodies whose actions and passions are graphically conveyed in audio-visual terms, accompanied by their 'acts and statements' (such as when they communicate with the police, mostly through the Professor), and the 'incorporeal transformations' affected by bodily actions (such as mint-employee Monica's libidinal transformation in the course of her being physically nursed by 'robber' Denver after being shot in the leg by him, paradoxically to save her life). Clearly, assemblages are complex – especially when one realises, on reflection, that every member of the group is an assemblage-subject in her or his own right (Olivier, 2017); insofar as the 'subject' does not precede any interactive relations or connections, but is *itself* the always changing, reconfiguring *product* of such interrelations. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote: '...a subject is never the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation' (p. 130).

Needless to stress, not only does every member of the group of protagonists undergo multiple, ongoing changes in their own assemblage-constitution as a result of the interactions among themselves and between themselves and the hostages (like Monica), but also through their interactions with the police and the largely supportive members of the public. No such transformation is more radical than those on the part of Monica (who falls in love with Denver and vice versa), and of Raquel, the police inspector in charge of the police operation (who eventually, via many twists and turns, becomes enamoured of the Professor, and vice versa). This illustrates that assemblages are in principle open, instead of closed, and new connections are constantly being established between (and within) assemblages and their environments. Put differently, they are subject to deterritorialisations (along lines of flight) and stabilising reterritorialisations. In this respect the song, *Bella Ciao*, functions as a kind of nodal aperture through which schizoanalytically active, deterritorialising 'lines of flight' take off; but also, simultaneously, as temporarily stabilising motif for the members of the group to assert their territory, fraught as it may be (as shown in the scene where they sing *Bella Ciao* and dance with joy at breaking through to soil in their quest to dig an escape tunnel). In short, if one thinks of *Money Heist's* narrative intra-cinematically in musical terms, *Bella Ciao* constitutes a refrain of sorts, which is intermittently deterritorialised (and reterritorialised), while reciprocally

performing these functions itself as well regarding the actions of characters. As will be demonstrated below, the song also has a deterritorialising (and therapeutic) function at an extra-cinematic, socio-historical level.

3 | THE REFRAIN

Turning to the significance of the refrain, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described music as 'the active, creative operation, which consists of deterritorializing the refrain' (p. 300). Hence, the 'deterritorialisation' of the 'refrain' is inseparable from music, according to them. What does this mean? Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also defined music 'as a problem of content and expression':

What does music deal with, what is the content indissociable from sound expression? It is hard to say, but it is something: a child dies, a child plays, a woman is born, a woman dies, a bird arrives, a bird flies off. We wish to say that these are not accidental themes in music (even if it is possible to multiply examples), much less imitative exercises, they are something essential (p. 299).

One might wonder why music is so often concerned with death. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argued that this is because of 'the 'danger' inherent in any line that escapes, in any line of flight or creative deterritorialization: the danger of veering towards destruction, towards abolition' (p. 299). Needless to point out, the narrative of *Money Heist* exemplifies such a turning 'towards [self-]destruction' on the part of the 'thieves', and it is noticeable that this is inscribed in the song, *Bella Ciao* – witness the lyrics (among others), '...I feel death approaching', and 'this is the flower of the partisan who died for freedom'. Deleuze scholar Ian Buchanan (2004) goes as far as stating that death, as an encounter with the moment of intersection between the 'line of flight' and the 'line of abolition', is 'a necessary dimension of music, or the sound assemblage' (p. 15). He nuances this further in a manner that is highly pertinent to the present theme, given the narrative contexts in which *Bella Ciao* is sung, either by the characters, or in the background:

Music doesn't awaken a death instinct, that isn't why it gives us a taste for death; it confronts death, stares it in the face. This is why the refrain is the content proper to music: the refrain is our means of erecting hastily if needs be a portable territory that *can* secure us in troubled situations. We whistle in the dark to keep the phantoms of our minds' imagining at bay; we sing as we march off to war to give us not merely courage but an intimation of immortality; we hum as we work to lighten our burden. In every case, our music-making is expressive inasmuch as it serves to construct a territory. That territory defends against the anxieties, fears, pressures we feel; it doesn't do away with them, of course, but it gives them a different form (Buchanan, 2004, pp. 15–16).

In *Money Heist* as audio-visual cinematic art, where *Bella Ciao* concentrates in itself as music the deterritorialised refrain 'oh bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao, ciao, ciao' – a refrain deterritorialised from its previous territorialisations in the female rice paddy-workers' singing, and that of the members of the resistance – this paradigmatic song of resistance clears a therapeutic territory, however ephemerally, where we can confront intimations of death incarnated in earthly sufferings. But it is not only here that *Bella Ciao* constitutes a 'portable territory that can secure us in troubled situations'; it also does so in every one of the astonishingly many renditions of the song by recording artists in the original Italian as well as in many other languages (see *Bella Ciao*), and in other films where it has been inserted, such as *The Two Popes* (Meirelles, 2019). Just how paradoxical the relationship between music and the refrain is as far as the 'dialectic' between deterritorialisation and territorialisation is concerned, is evident from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) observation, that:

Music is a creative, active operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain. Whereas the refrain is essentially territorial, territorializing, or reterritorializing, music makes it a deterritorialized content for a deterritorializing form of expression (p. 300).

The paradox consists in the fact that music – here, the song, *Bella Ciao* – deterritorialises the refrain, which in turn has a deterritorialising function as a ‘form of expression’ (witness the occasions on which the refrain as part of the song has functioned as a ‘line of flight’ in relation to conditions of oppression and exploitation); yet, it can only do so because in itself it is ‘essentially territorial, territorializing’. If this were not the case, the refrain could not protect us therapeutically from our fears, anxieties and uncertainties in the manner shown by Buchanan, above, which does not mean that this sheltering role that it plays necessarily succeeds in keeping death at bay, even if it gives one courage in the face of death through its therapeutic form. This is poignantly demonstrated in the following eulogy by musician Kevin Abraham (2020) that contextualises the simultaneous deterritorialising and reterritorialising role of *Bella Ciao* in relation to the Kurdish resistance to oppression in contemporary Turkey:

On The Life of Helin Bolek

I want to tell you a story about a band called Grup Yorum, and a young singer named Helin Bolek.

The group was formed in late 1985, by four university students, who combined Turkish and Kurdish folk styles to deliver topical messages, often satirical, and anti-government. They sang in Turkish, but also in Kurdish.

Now, in Turkey, Kurdish culture is suppressed. Has been for ages. The Kurdish language is as good as banned in any public place. So are most aspects of its traditional culture, including dress, stories, singing and music styles. So the act of singing in Kurdish is a protest in itself, and it takes a brave person to do it in Turkey. So. Fast forward a few years, and Grup Yorum are now one of the most popular bands in Turkey, with massive album sales, and concerts attended by hundreds of thousands of people.

The Turkish authorities are not happy, and the members of the band have been detained and even tortured more than once or twice. In 2016, the group was banned outright. No more performances, no playing of their music. Jail time for the members.

These days, protest performance is a rarity in Western popular music. It's more about branding and celebrity than about fighting for a cause. For Grup Yorum, however, the cause was everything.

And it evolved from a core group of four into something much bigger. It became a collective, really. It had a huge pool of committed people involved, and a rotating membership of volunteers coming from the arts and performance fraternity. They became a revolutionary organization, and their concerts were akin to rallies where songs were sung about the struggle for freedom, the difficulties of daily life, and of course, international solidarity. On top of that, the Grup organized direct civil action as a means of protesting government policy. Pretty serious commitment for a band, not so? So why is Helin important?

Well, she and fellow Band member Ibrahim Gokcek, were jailed after the 2016 crackdown on their group.

In June 2019, they both simultaneously launched a hunger strike while in prison. That was 288 days ago.

The two demanded that the band be allowed to resume concerts, that all jailed band members be released and that criminal cases against the group be dropped. In November, they were both released but continued the hunger strike from their homes. In a statement, Helin declared that theirs was a death strike. She would not eat unless all their demands were met. She meant it.

Yesterday, Helin died. She was 28.

Ibrahim will surely follow soon.

In the video I've chosen for you, you can see her dressed in white, as the group, plus others, sing a Turkish version of that great Italian song of partisan resistance, 'Bella ciao' - which means 'Goodbye Beautiful': <https://youtu.be/Qwbh6ZHEiUc>

This may seem counter-productive, as far as the outcome of Helin's resistance to Turkish oppression is concerned; she died, after all, did she not? But, as stated above, the 'territorialising protection' that the song, *Bella Ciao* - and particularly its refrain, with its therapeutic enfolding of the singer(s) in its sheltering rhythm - extends to those who gain courage by singing it, is no guarantee that one will prevail against death. In Helin's case (and if Kevin is correct, probably in Ibrahim's too) that was not the case. But does that mean that she 'lost everything' in a manner of speaking? I would argue that she did not, and that the therapeutic value of sharing the song (see the video at the link provided by Abraham [2020]) with others - an assemblage of resistance against oppressive rule - before her death is all the more deterritorialising along the line of flight that her (and others') resistance set in motion, keeping in mind that the function of the refrain is to reterritorialise by furnishing the singers with a 'portable', therapeutically protective zone.

Perhaps this would seem less counter-intuitive in light of the following. Jacques Lacan distinguished between two alternatives in situations where one faces an ineluctable ethical choice: what he calls the mugger's choice and the revolutionary's choice, respectively. The former has the form, Your money or your life, and instantiates a lose-lose option, because whatever you choose, you would lose something. The revolutionary's choice has the form, Freedom or death, and represents a win-win option. How so? Because, according to Lacan, in *both* cases you would win your freedom from oppression, no matter how counter-intuitive it may seem. Referring to the revolutionary's choice, Copjec (2002) phrases this felicitously:

In the second example, however, by choosing one does *not* automatically lose what is not chosen, but instead *wins* some of it. Lacan attributes the difference between the two examples to the appearance of death in the second. It is through the introduction of the 'lethal factor,' as he puts it, that the revolutionary choice opens the possibility of an act about which it is improper to say that it sacrifices freedom, that it loses it to the structure of alienation. The choice of death gains freedom. This point is utterly incomprehensible unless one assumes that the death one opts for in the second example is not the same one that is avoided in the first. That is, at the point at which death intersects freedom - which is to say, at the point at which it intersects the *subject* - it ceases to be conceivable in literal or biological terms (p. 17).

In Helin's case (as in that of many others in history; think of Spartacus, or of Ché Guevara, or in fiction, of Sophocles's *Antigone*), the choice of freedom may have ended in death for the individual concerned, but a death-in-freedom and for freedom, by implication also for others. This, too has a deterritorialising, schizoanalytic and

therefore therapeutic function, not only for the person who faces her or his death 'resolutely', as Heidegger (1978) might put it, but also, perhaps especially, for those who stay behind. In *Money Heist*, this is demonstrated on at least three occasions, when first Moscow, then Berlin and, finally, Nairobi, die at the hands of the police (Moscow and Berlin) and the chief of security at the Bank of Spain (Nairobi). Unavoidably, there is sadness and grief on the part of the remaining robbers, but there is also resolve to persevere with their project, so that these people would not have died in vain. In other words, their death, in freedom, inspires the others to strive for freedom while alive, knowing well that they may also perish. It is precisely this which imparts significance to their singing of *Bella Ciao*, the refrain of which, as Buchanan pointed out (regarding refrains), imparts to one a protective – or therapeutic – embrace. This has to be fleshed out.

4 | THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF THE REFRAIN

It will be remembered that Buchanan (2004) was quoted above, to the effect that death, as a confrontation with the point of intersection between the line of flight and the line of abolition is 'a necessary dimension of music, or the sound assemblage', and that '...it [music] confronts death, stares it in the face' (p. 15). Further, that 'This is why the refrain is the content proper to music: the refrain is our means of erecting hastily if needs be a portable territory that can secure us in troubled situations' (Buchanan, 2004, p. 15). If we think this together with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) remark (above), that music, as an 'active operation' deterritorialises (liberates) the refrain, while the latter is 'essentially territorial' (p. 300), and as such (re-)territorialises (stabilises) the musical flow, what strikes one here is the therapeutic dialectic, or perhaps reciprocity, between music's deterritorialising function and the (re-)territorialising role of the refrain. Buchanan also stated that such a '...territory defends against the anxieties, fears, pressures we feel; it doesn't do away with them, of course, but it gives them a different form' (p. 15). Why is this important to note? Because, just as music requires the refrain's territorialising effect to be able to continue along its creative flight, so, too, no one can live in a constant, uninterrupted state of flux. As the judicious insertion of (the singing of) *Bella Ciao* at specific junctures in the cinematic narrative demonstrates, there are times – in this unfolding fictional scenario, but also in our own lives – when a therapeutic, schizoanalytically freedom-promoting line of flight needs to be interrupted by an equally therapeutic, reterritorialising moment, constituted by the refrain, lest the line of flight metamorphoses into self-destruction or abolition (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In this regard, Buchanan (2004) issues a timely reminder that 'reterritorialisation is a compensation and substitute for deterritorialisation' (p. 14), and he refers to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) important observation, that:

Reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality: it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as a new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well (p. 174).

This is significant because it disabuses one of the metaphysical longing for a return to an absolute origin of sorts – no reterritorialisation can effect that; but what it can, and does, do, is to reinscribe a stabilising element into a headlong musical flight, or (in socio-political terms) orient one's present efforts at overcoming an oppressive or exploitative state of affairs according to a 'new territoriality', a process instantiated figuratively by the refrain in *Bella Ciao*. Needless to spell out, this has far-reaching political implications. After all, as the dialectic between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisations in music, via the refrain, above (minus any chance of reaching a primordial territory of sorts), indicates, by analogy no political process of challenging a hegemonic system through deterritorialising lines of flight could be predicated on attaining a final, unshakeable territory of any kind. The (ideological) stasis marking the latter would be tantamount to political death-in-life, of which the Nazis' fascism in Germany and Stalinist dictatorial communism in Russia during the first half of the 20th century are embodiments.

Even so-called democracies can fall prey to ideological freezing of democratic processes, as one is witnessing today, according to some thinkers (Han, 2017; Olivier, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Hence the all-important reciprocity between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation(s), in a never-ending historical process or development that corresponds to what was argued above regarding this process in music (in relation to the refrain). However, as I shall show below, under neoliberal capitalist rule the spurious impression has been created that such salutary deterritorialisation and reterritorialisations do occur; something of which anyone with an interest in political emancipation in these terms should be disabused.

5 | THE FUTURE OF THE PAST OF BELLA CIAO

It is not difficult to understand why this song, *Bella Ciao*, continually reinserts itself into new historical contexts (such as the one in Turkey, referred to above) when the time is auspicious for its repeated deterritorialisation from past contexts, to carry out its work, anew, of reterritorialisation, to provide protection and succour against various forms of suffering. What has been written above pertains (mainly) to the song's integral role *as music that deterritorialises the refrain*, in the television series, *Money Heist*, where it signifies a narrative line of flight, vindicating the 'band of thieves' in their attempt to carry out their daring pseudo-robbery (they print the money anew) of a symbol of capitalist hegemony, namely the Spanish Mint. This might be labelled the present of the past of *Bella Ciao*, and in so far as the television series has been slated to continue with a fifth season, probably to be streamed online in 2021 (as filming has been interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic), one can cogently talk about the future of the past of *Bella Ciao*. But the implications of such a description do not end there, because the lyrics of resistance of the partisan version of the song have not been scrutinised, and to understand their significance for resistance a little detour via the work of Jacques Derrida on context is called for.

In 'Signature event context', Derrida (Derrida, 1982) raised the question of context and provided a provisional answer:

are the prerequisites of a context ever absolutely determinable?... Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of the context? Does not the notion of context harbor, behind a certain confusion, very determined philosophical presuppositions? To state it now in the most summary fashion, I would like to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather in what way its determination is never certain or saturated (p. 310).

It should be kept in mind that Derrida is relating context to the idea of *structural* non-saturation, which is important for grasping the history of *Bella Ciao*'s successive deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations accompanying its recurrent insertions in different socio-historical contexts. It is not a matter of any *factual* or empirical impossibility of saturating or determining (in the sense of agreeing on the conditions for *full*, mutual understanding of the song's meaning in) such a context within which it is reterritorialised. Rather, it is because of the structural conditions of possibility of communication, interpretation and understanding within any and all contexts, that full saturation of significance or meaning is unachievable. What Derrida demonstrates in persuasive, if complex detail, is that the very conditions that make communication (of meaning) or mutual understanding within any context possible, also make it impossible (or ruin its finality), so that the object of understanding (e.g., the song, *Bella Ciao*) is never interpretively saturated; that is, definitively, conclusively, or exhaustively drained of any (further) meaning or significance that it might conceivably have in future contexts.

Turning to a paradigmatic traditional-philosophical interpretation of *writing* in the work of Condillac, Derrida (1982) uncovers all the usual conventional postures on Condillac's part. These include the belief that writing is a kind of (delayed) communication, that picturing is a proto-writing that leads to properly graphic, written communication, which is in its turn the expression of ideas (implying that writing serves thought), that *absence* of an

interlocutor is what generates the invention of writing, and that Condillac thinks of writing as a restricted or mechanical economy of meaning – where the most efficient graphic investment of the writer is recovered in the reader's decoding of the writing.

For present purposes, the important thing for understanding how a song can be wrested from its context of provenance and still be susceptible to subsequent, meaningful iterations, is to note that the idea of absence (obviously of the addressee in communication) introduced by Condillac is not as self-evident as it seems. As Derrida pointed out, *absence* (of an interlocutor, or an audience) is a *structural* determinant of all writing, in fact, of all language, including inescapably ambiguous speech and songs' lyrics, and not merely something contingently empirical which writing compensates for. Yet, as something that supplements communicational presence, writing not only breaches it, but paradoxically ensures communicability or decipherability in the *absence* of the writer, as well as of any addressee or audience through its *iterability* or repeatability. Hence Derrida's (1982) remark: 'A writing that was not structurally legible – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing' (p. 315). Furthermore:

This implies that there is no code – an organon of iterability – that is structurally secret. The possibility of repeating, and therefore of identifying, marks is implied in every code, making of it a communicable, transmittable, decipherable grid that is iterable for a third party, and thus for any possible user in general. All writing, therefore, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, 'death' or the possibility of the 'death' of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark... (Derrida, 1982, pp. 315–316).

This statement comprises the gist of the matter concerning the structural indeterminability or non-saturation of contexts. It entails nothing less than the 'radical destruction... of every context as a protocol of a code' (Derrida, 1982, p. 316). What this means, is that one is not uniquely privileged in being able to decode or understand something in the context that ostensibly supplies the 'code' for comprehending it – such as the situation of the women working in the rice paddies of the Po valley of Italy to which (by all accounts) the first version of Bella Ciao's lyrics can be traced. The *specific* context is, therefore, not indispensable for understanding the sign-sequence constituting the message in question. Because all signs constituting written texts are by their very nature *iterable*, the proto-context of their articulation is not essential for them to be deciphered by a third party. To be sure, the latter could use various strategies for decoding the sign-sequence, such as reconstructing the historical circumstances of its emergence, or the theoretical framework of its articulation. But whatever the case may be, the message (here, the lyrics of Bella Ciao), having been removed from the context of its provenance, is unavoidably grafted onto a new context within which it will engender new meaning. The latter will either be compatible with or enrich its earlier meaning or in extreme cases it will contradict or clash with it. In either case, (new) meaning is generated.

Derrida's (1982) claim that '...a written sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context...', and that: 'This force of breaking is not an accidental predicate, but the very structure of the written...' (p. 317), leads to the insight, that signs are 'abandoned' to an 'essential drifting' as soon as they have been produced by a so-called author. Put differently, the sign (or signifier) remains legible in the absence of its author. Furthermore, apart from the external context of its production, there is the internal semiotic context – such as a painting, a song, a theory, or a novel – from which a sign can be removed and re-inscribed somewhere else:

there is no less a force of breaking by virtue of its essential iterability; one can always lift a written syntagma from the interlocking chain in which it is caught or given without making it lose every possibility of functioning, if not every possibility of 'communicating', precisely. Eventually, one may

recognise other such possibilities in it by inscribing or grafting it into other chains. No context can enclose it (Derrida, 1982, p. 317).

It should be obvious that these features of the relation between signs, writing, and contexts can be expanded to *all* language in the broadest sense, including the lyrics of songs, whether they are written or sung. After all, for anything to be decipherable – whether sung, written, spoken, filmed or painted – it has to display the structure of a chain of signifiers, such as words or images of some kind. This is the constant in question, and it applies to the lyrics of *Bella Ciao* as much as to anything else that resembles a chain of signifiers (see Derrida, 1978 for a succinct corroboration of this insight in a different context).

To sum up, the future of the past of *Bella Ciao* remains rooted in the ineradicable iterability (i.e., repeatability, in new or future contexts) of the song, which seems to be at least partly, if not mainly, a function of the lyrics. I would also argue that it is particularly those of the later, partisan version which lend themselves to being transferred from one historical situation, where resistance of some kind appears to be called for, to another that resonates with such a need. One must grant, however, that these lyrics would probably not have the same power to transcend the earlier historical context(s) on which the song gained a noticeable purchase, if it were not for the manner in which they were conjoined with the song's moving refrain. It is, after all, the manner in which it is sung – the refrain, deterritorialised by the music – that lends it its irresistible force. How else can one explain the plethora of recordings of the song, and its capacity to be resurrected in a diversity of situations where the need for therapeutic emancipation, in various guises, manifests itself (see *Bella Ciao*), including the current historical era, where neoliberal capitalism is arguably widely perceived as being the source of (financial) oppression and suffering? The reception of the television series, *Money Heist*, testifies to this (*Money Heist*, 2020). After posing the question, 'Why does everyone love this show?' Pauline Bock (2018) of *New Statesman* commented:

It started to make sense once the heist operators sang 'Bella Ciao'. Because El Profesor, the mastermind, wants the operation to send a message to the people, he teaches his gang this popular Italian song, which was sung by the partisans fighting fascism during World War II, and has become a revolutionary anthem. Throughout the show, the song carries their hopes of resistance – it's not about the money as much as it is about what money represents. Because the gang are printing their own notes, they aren't technically stealing from anyone – a brilliant trick which they hope will gain them public *support*. They don't think themselves as bad guys, but as revolutionaries against an unjust [sic] system.

The first part of the show, halfway through the story of the heist, ends on a montage of real footage of money and what it represents – shots of bills being printed, factory workers sorting coins, crowds on Wall Street and in banks, stocks increasing then decreasing on graphs, the screaming front pages of newspapers. Notes fly in the air, jobless people march in the streets, and credits roll while 'Bella Ciao' plays. For all its silliness, 'La Casa de Papel' hit the jackpot by offering a not-so-subtle but striking allegory of revolt against capitalism.

Given Bock's (and other commentators') observations linking the series with public perception of the capitalist system (see *Money Heist*, 2020), particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis, this paper would be remiss if it did not, in conclusion, point to a significant correlation. The correlation in question is that between the 'refrain' that has been shown to be integral to the song, *Bella Ciao*, and (given its thematic relevance) its critical narrative role in the television series, *Money Heist*, on the one hand, and what might be conceived of as a 'historical refrain' of exploitation, on the other.

6 | CONCLUSION: AGAINST A HISTORICAL 'REFRAIN' OF EXPLOITATION

Extrapolating from what was written above on the function of the 'refrain' in *Money Heist*, particularly insofar as the revolutionary song, *Bella Ciao*, marks the site of repeated deterritorialisations, followed by reterritorialisations and more deterritorialisations, in different social or cultural (cinematic and/or musical) contexts, it is tempting to construct a corresponding sequence of refrains in (recent) socio-political and economic history. In this regard it is interesting to note that, in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri (2005) elaborated on the events that preceded and eventually culminated in the French Revolution of the 18th century. What they recount is a litany of ignored signs and symptoms, showing that the general populace in France was getting extremely restive as a result of years of neglect and oppression by those in governing positions serving the interests of the aristocracy and royalty. In such a light, they propose that one should consider the growing list of global protests and demands against the current 'imperial system' (what they call 'Empire'; Hardt & Negri, 2001) as the contemporary counterpart of this encompassing 'list of grievances' that anticipated the French Revolution. In other words, resembling a refrain of sorts, deterritorialised by the flow of history, today things are looking very similar to 18th century France, but on a global scale.

First, there was the global financial crisis of 2007/2008, triggered by the so-called subprime mortgage debacle in America (where low-income home-owners had been lured into what appeared to be cheap home loans, but with escalating repayments) which resulted in millions of people losing their homes and tent cities appearing in Florida and California, as well as banks like Lehman Brothers collapsing (Harvey, 2010). To cut to the chase: it soon became clear that without a prodigious government financial rescue package, confidence in the neoliberal financial system would be fatally eroded, and when a group of influential Treasury officials and bankers demanded a US\$700 billion bailout of the financial system, lest markets collapse completely, President George W. Bush yielded without a fight. To add insult to injury, there was no oversight built into the rescue deal for the institutions regarded as 'too big to fail' (Harvey, 2010, p. 5). The true magnitude of this 'refrain of exploitation' of ordinary people by those in power comes into focus where Harvey (2010) observed, *à propos* of the 2008 bailout:

The term 'national bail-out' is inaccurate. Taxpayers are simply bailing out the banks, the capitalist class, forgiving them their debts, their transgressions, and only theirs. The money goes to the banks but so far in the US not to the homeowners who have been foreclosed upon or to the population at large. And the banks are using the money, not to lend to anybody but to reduce their leveraging and to buy other banks. They are busy consolidating their power. This unequal treatment has prompted a surge of populist political anger from those living in the basement against the financial institutions, even as the right wing and many in the media castigate irresponsible and feckless homeowners who bit off more than they could chew. Tepid measures to help the people, far too late, are then proposed to fend off what could be a serious legitimization crisis for the future of capitalist-class ruling power (pp. 30–31).

This refrain of abuse of taxpayers, who are ironically called upon periodically to rescue the rich, is bound to continue, judging by Harvey's (2010) remark that the very same speculative malpractices that caused the crisis are already in full swing again: 'The leveraging that got us into the crisis has resumed big time as if nothing has happened' (p. 219). Small wonder that, a few years after the crisis struck, in response to a question from BBC's Paul Mason, renowned Spanish-American sociologist Manuel Castells (2012) could report about the 'rise of new economic cultures' that:

It is fundamental because it triggers a crisis of trust in the two big powers of our world: the political system and the financial system.

People don't trust where they put their money and they don't trust those who they delegate in terms of their vote.

Needless to emphasise, *Money Heist*, with its emblematic use of *Bella Ciao*, is an allegorical cinematic manifestation of this fundamental distrust of bankers and politicians as representatives of these two powerful institutions, and significantly, this has come in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, where the rich made sure that it was ordinary, working class people who bore the brunt of the economic suffering. Now, 15 years after Hardt and Negri (2005) published *Multitude*, the global situation resembles that in 18th century France even more, so that one can legitimately ask, using the parlance of the fictional Professor and his bunch of thieves, 'Where is the Resistance?' For how long will ordinary people tolerate the refrain of the elites of this world riding roughshod over them during times of economic hardship? As I write, during the 2020 novel coronavirus pandemic sweeping through the world, billions of dollars have been set aside as stimulus packages to kick-start the American, European and other countries' economies, which sounds promising – as long as one temporarily ignores the fact that no hard look at the long-term viability of the world's economic model itself is being undertaken (see Olivier, 2020a, 2020b). But this is only until one investigates where all this financial liquidity will be going. Reich (2020), for example, wrote scathingly about American Republican senators' view that the money earmarked for working-class American families (relatively small amounts, between US\$600 and \$1200 in unemployment benefits) would create 'moral hazard' in the sense that it might just encourage the recipients 'to leave the workforce'. In contrast, Reich observed, these conservatives do not find it morally worrying when corporations and their CEOs are treated to unconscionable amounts, and he raises the question:

Why is moral hazard a problem when it comes to millions of jobless Americans who can't even collect \$600 in unemployment benefits, but not a problem when it comes to CEOs who have borrowed to the hilt, used the money to artificially boost share prices, and pocketed \$20m a year?

Giving the vast majority of Americans a bit more cushion against the downside risks they face surely poses less harm than giving CEOs a cushion against the risks they take with the entire economy.

Examples like these constitute a kind of negative refrain because this time it is not deterritorialisation of a certain motif, for the sake of a creative, therapeutic reterritorialisation, which is at stake. From the outset, it seems to me, it is economic deterritorialisation in the sense of freeing up very large amounts of money *by fiat* – out of nowhere, as the Professor would say – only to engage in reterritorialisation in the shape of the consolidation of financial power on the part of the world's elites. A blatant example of this is highlighted by Zach Carter (2020) in the context of the American bailout of big companies and banks, initiated by Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, because of the negative economic effects of the on-going coronavirus pandemic:

there is something fundamentally rotten about a financial order in which top government officials allow the super rich to keep cashing in as working people are thrown to the bread lines.

And it's not just bank shareholders who are going to feast on cash payouts while millions of Americans find themselves unemployed...A lot of firms are about to lay off a bunch of workers to cut costs while sending checks to their shareholders.

We live in a democracy, not a mathematical equation. Who does your government fight for – you, or the super rich? Today, as unemployment has skyrocketed to the highest level since the Great Depression almost overnight, the top economic regulator in America is protecting the rights of big banks to keep funneling cash to the wealthiest people in the country.

The repeatedly deterritorialised refrain of the song, *Bella Ciao* (in *Money Heist* and elsewhere) corresponds with occurrences – or historical refrains – like these instances of economic injustice, which are evidently anything but

isolated events. Given the popularity of *Money Heist* and the fact that it has been identified as a rallying point against capitalism (Bock, 2018; Money Heist, 2020), it is not far-fetched to say that, together with Castells' (2012) research findings concerning growing mistrust of banks and politicians, it is symptomatic of deep dissatisfaction with the current amalgamation of dominant economic and political practices known as neoliberalism. Add to these Harvey's (2010) exposé of the outrageous appropriation of public funds to rescue the profligate banking system during the 2008 financial crisis, and the critical commentaries on the current refrain of this malpractice, and it would appear that the future of the past of *Bella Ciao* as song of resistance is likely to harbour more event-specific deterritorialisations of its refrain(s). As such these manifestations of bitter resentment parallel the accumulation of grievances prior to the French revolution that Hardt and Negri (2005) compared to contemporary protests. One is tempted to perceive in all of this the possibility, or opportunity, to jettison a fundamentally unjust, exploitative economic system once and for all. After all, despite the astounding capacity of capitalism to turn its periodic crises into opportunities for further growth (Harvey, 2010), there must be some point at which it would falter. In Harvey's words (2010):

At some point quantitative changes lead to qualitative shifts and we need to take seriously the idea that we may be at exactly such an inflexion point in the history of capitalism. Questioning the future of capitalism itself as an adequate social system ought, therefore, to be in the forefront of current debate.

Yet there appears to be little appetite for such discussion, even as conventional mantras regarding the perfectibility of humanity with the help of free markets and free trade, private property and personal responsibility and low taxes and minimalist state involvement in social provision sound increasingly hollow. A crisis of legitimacy looms (p. 217).

The question is whether social actors, today, have the resources of will, courage, perseverance and inventiveness to reject and replace neoliberal capitalism with another economic system – one that would do economic and material justice to the redistribution of wealth. It should not be necessary to revert to commandeering the apparatus of a mint, as the fictional band of thieves does in *Money Heist*, in order for such a redistribution to be actualised. It should be possible that the future of the past of *Bella Ciao* is one where it will be sung victoriously and in celebration, and not merely to express resistance to an inhuman system of exploitation that inflicts financial and material suffering on millions of people.

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