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Post-crisis politics, social resistance,
and equality policy paths:
New social movements
and forms of citizens' cooperation
for solidarity



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FOR SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

The financial crisis and the anti-austerity social mobilizations generated new questions and concerns with regards to the sufficiency of earlier analytic frameworks in the studies of social movements and contentious politics. By providing an overview of the literature on social movements in the aftermath of the financial crisis, this report outlines recent attempts dedicated to framing the contemporary issues of social, economic and geopolitical inequalities within and also beyond the academic domain. As categories of mobilization, the people or the citizenry are extremely diverse and far-reaching, but the main social profile of protest waves after the crisis still seem to coagulate around the shared experiences of precarious populations, produced by neoliberal forms of governance. After the crisis, populist movements (whether more inclined to the left or the right) established anti-establishment platforms and they mobilized parts of society that have been politically marginalized beforehand. However, their program of popular sovereignty did not entail guarantees for a clear-cut program on social justice, as the reassertion of citizens' participation could be diverted and channeled into both exclusionary and inclusionary agendas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The financial crisis and the anti-austerity social mobilizations generated new questions and concerns with regards to the sufficiency of earlier analytic frameworks in the studies of social movements and contentious politics. This report dwells on the capacities and qualities of social and political responses to equality policy measures throughout the crisis years in Europe by approaching scholarship on resistance politics in a wider geographical and theoretical scope.

According to De Genova and others, we are witnessing a permanent proliferation of crises and a language of emergency as a defining feature of our contemporary existence (see: De Genova and Tazzioli, 2016; De Genova, 2017). Moments of crisis and various forms of social criticism are intertwined and mutually provoke one another. In other words, the manifestations of the crisis (such as the economic crisis, the migrant or refugee crisis, the crisis of government and control in the EU) intersect with an epistemic crisis with regards to the concepts and strategies that are supposed to guide our scholarly efforts to understand the ongoing transformations. Any postulating about a specific crisis entails retrospective or comparative judgement of what went wrong, as it also allows for new types of resistance in the name of 'how it should be/have been' (see: Loftsdóttir, Smith and Hipfl, 2018).

For instance, social criticism has a role in acting against the political regimes that aim to depoliticize the current manifestations of crisis by presenting neoliberal austerity as self-evident and

closing the spaces of dissent (see: Alexandrakis 2016: 248-49). On the one hand, the reverberations of the crisis through various fields of academic research also bring a heightened awareness of earlier academic involvement in the legitimization and hence the maintenance of a previous social, economic and political order that now seems to be collapsing. On the other hand, the resulting criticism may also indicate certain pathways for the future in terms of academic as well as emerging political agendas. In fact, as moments of crisis can make already existing contradictions more visible, they can also be the point of departure for elaborating new forms of sociality, knowledge, dissent and networks of solidarity (see for example: Rakopoulos 2015).

By providing an overview of the literature on social movements in the aftermath of the economic crisis, this paper outlines recent attempts dedicated to framing the contemporary issues of social, economic and geopolitical inequalities within and also beyond the academic domain. In such conditions, the quest for new pathways of analysis, policy-making and intervention may give rise to a sense of urgency among the commentators who are inclined to accept certain buzzwords as analytic concepts at a face-value – even if their actual relevance and utility vary from one social category and context to the other. To avoid this pitfall, this paper pays special attention to 1) the similarities and divergences between the trajectories of movements in different states and world regions, 2) the social categories they seek to represent, such as race, ethnicity, class and gender, and 3) the scales they target while pursuing their actions, such as the local, the national or transnational levels.

The report highlights the links between organized social resistance and new forms of politics that 1) aim to give voice to marginalized, or previously depoliticized social categories, 2) foster the causes of social justice beyond the interests of capital, and 3) rely on emerging forms of solidarity as their main driving force beyond nationalism or ethno-racial exclusivity (including environmentalism, precarity and social insecurity). These initiatives may inform large-scale policy responses to the crisis and contribute in the long run to the redefinition of the political. The report aims to understand the main directions taken by scholarly accounts that respond to these movements and to the re-articulations of the social justice agenda.

In general terms, the scope of collective action in such mobilizations may be articulated in terms of values and principles or rights, including social injustices and suffering. These divergent articulations assume different social and political visions: the concept of social injustices pertains to the outcomes of hierarchy and inequality while the language of rights refers more tightly to the fulfillment of social, human and personal needs. In a broad sense, the engagement with issues of values and principles gained new impetus in the wave of social mobilizations after 2008, due to the need of re-articulating not just the notion of certain social rights to fight for but the shared values that movements rest upon. For example, in recent Spanish mobilizations the notion of solidarity was a main engine that brought protesters into association by addressing common experiences (such as the sense of worthlessness opposed to worth) instead of the strict concepts of class and labor that were familiar from the tradition of working class-organization (see: Narotzky 2016). The claims and demands on the basis of solidarity were also central themes of negotiations in the course of the migration and refugee crisis in Europe and beyond. This paper interrogates the shifting contexts of social movements and activism in response to the crisis by providing an overview of recent publications that conceptualize social movements after the crisis with the aim of renewing the analytic and theoretical toolkit of scholarship.

2. MOVEMENTS AND EPISTEMOLOGIES

The reverberations of the global crisis have brought a series of challenges to social movements as well as to those scholars who engage with the history and analysis of these mobilizations. Recent mobilizations (addressing a wide range of issues including neoliberal governance, precarity, increasing inequalities, corruption, or the discrimination against the vulnerable) brought new affective connections into being and they all seemed to problematize the categories of political alliance. Accordingly, participants of the Occupy movement responded critically to a general crisis of representative politics as political representatives seemed to be captured by economic elites, necessitating direct forms of intervention by movement actors – such as standing up against financial institutions or holding assembly meetings in order to take back the control of their lives. The search for alternative democracies outside dominant forms was inspired by democratic practices among subaltern peoples that allow for ways to rebuild society from below (Razsa-Kurnik 2012: 239-40). These new assemblages of actors and communities (as arrangements of heterogeneous elements that is more than a sum of its parts) became conducive to emerging new conceptions of political participation that went beyond the familiar communitarian or proceduralist formations and eventually sought to articulate the demands of the people as such.

As categories of mobilization, the people or the citizenry are extremely diverse and far-reaching, but the main social profile of this recent protest wave still seem to coagulate around the shared experiences of precarious populations, produced by neoliberal forms of governance in various world regions and across racialized and gendered hierarchies. According to this framing, diverse protesting subjects seemed to be united by a shared stance of victimhood and betrayal at the first place, a primarily negative identity based on what they are lacking instead of what they possess in common. The idea of citizenship is articulated as a matter of collective loss and recovery when it comes to the issue of expanding control over arrogant elites. At the same time, “(a)s present neoliberal regimes increasingly – albeit differentially – expose people to the injuries of poverty, demoralization, and racism, a performative politics of protest emerges, one that mobilizes the potentiality of calling into question and perhaps transforming such injurious interpellations” (ibid 251, for a critical review on the uses of precarity as a concept, see: Millar 2017).

Following the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, resurgent social movements in North America and many parts of Europe stood up against capitalism as such, or expressed discontent with regards to the crisis of democratic capitalism in general and the EU super-polity in particular, as an outcome of neoliberal austerity after the post-war era of welfare. As it is elaborated further in this paper, multiple cleavages divide movement agendas – and the underlying social experiences – between the eastern and western parts, as well as the centers and peripheries of Europe. For example, the issues of austerity, indebtedness or unemployment were articulated as exceptional forms of injustice in relation to inherited ideas of the welfare state, social security or the norm of wage work in most of Western and Southern Europe, while most of these developments were rather reminiscent of a recent postsocialist past in Eastern Europe. As an outcome, Eastern European protest movements after the crisis were

primarily aiming to reach certain ideals of normality ‘yet-to-come’, as part of a package of inherited and unfulfilled promises (see: Dzenovska 2017, Gagyí 2015). Still, as it was suggested by participants of the Slovenian Occupy movement, economic liberalization, European integration and democratic consolidation have ceased to remain self-evident goals in the light of the political and economic crisis (Razsa-Kurnik 2012: 24).

The crisis from 2008 onwards also marked a decisive turning point in the dominant forms of scholarship on social movements as it exposed scholars’ previous epistemological disregard concerning the decisive role of capitalist transformations among the causes or outcomes of social change and as the engines behind waves of collective unrest (see: Cini et al 2017). According to Mezzandra and Gago, the previous scholarship on new social movements (and the respective movements also) have largely abandoned the issues of material conditions, labor and capital, while they were focusing on struggles revolving around identities, cultural matters or the symbolic aspects of mobilizations (2017: 481). The dynamics of political and economic crises and the mobilizations since 2008 in the US and Europe cannot be understood without involving capitalism in the framework of analysis. Involving these explanatory concepts might also be essential for understanding the ways in which European integration served as an attempt to pacify labor and to deploy market discipline in order to stabilize European societies – a policy which recurrently confronted oppositional and disruptive tendencies (Bailey et al 2017). European integration and the nascent of neoliberalism were mutually supportive in so far both of these processes relied on the market as a force that is capable to re-stabilize society (ibid 239). However, with the extended role of capital in the process of European integration, inequalities were growing within the EU both within individual states and between the core and periphery of the continent.

The post-industrial conditions of developed societies after the 1960s were contingent upon the removal of industry and industrial labor to other world regions. Nevertheless, in these contexts the concepts of class or exploitation pertained to broader meanings than the strictly industrial Western referents, including the subordinated, the subaltern and the rural or urban poor. Accordingly, beyond the issues of capitalist crisis in the developed world, engaged scholarly accounts also seek to elaborate their perspectives on the basis of an epistemic diversity inspired by decolonial criticism which takes into account the historical legacy of Eurocentrism with its inclinations to obscure the hierarchical global relations in which modern social forms and knowledge practices unfolded (see: Cox, L. – Nilsen, A. – Pleyers, G. 2017, also Gagyí 2015). Due to this legacy, putatively universal Western concepts and categories remained prevalent in the academic and policy-oriented discourses on world regions beyond Euro-America, even if they did not correspond to their prevalent social realities.

Accordingly, the standpoint of epistemic diversity aims to foster a global dialogue between alternative, marginal or subaltern histories of social mobilization as well as the critical reflections and analyses that they informed – as it was the case with liberation theology, rooted in the practices and transformative capacities of indigenous communities and the poor in Latin America; or the politics of the people and their autonomous struggle against oppression and exploitation in India under British rule (as documented by authors from the Subaltern Studies Project). While taking into account the positionalities of actors, the attempts for social and epistemological justice do not aim only for the recognition and emancipation of subordinated groups and their political projects, since that may end up with replacing one form of domination with another. Instead, the combined struggle for social and epistemic justice in the postcolonial (and post-socialist) world may also have lessons to the developed Western world. In the latter, social movement studies occupied a relatively marginal position in academic

terms until recently and scholars were less exposed to the need for direct engagement in emancipatory struggles dedicated to social change. As Mezzandra and Gago also pointed out, earlier accounts on the so-called new social movements were legitimizing a certain partition between movements and governments in so far they depicted the movements solely in the function of raising consciousness on specific issues and demands which were supposed to be picked up then by political parties and governments (2017: 481). Based on such criticism, the program of social and epistemological justice can inform the current quest for alternatives to the dominant global capitalist order in general, and also to the solely formal, institutional and state-centered visions of politics in particular. Mobilizations for community-based ownership or participatory models in political control are just a couple of instances among these ongoing struggles against exclusive and centralized decision-making as well as the commodification and dispossession of resources. In sum, these new accounts on social movements seem to echo the insights of the Comaroffs (2012) regarding the prospects of theorization from the sites of the Global South that have already heralded many of the developments which are becoming familiar to engaged scholars and activists alike in the contemporary West.

3. AUTONOMY, SOVEREIGNTY AND CITIZENSHIP

Since the crisis, global protests movements seem to share a common disinterest in conventional, formal or institutional politics, accompanied by the desire for acts of re-politicization by people who have been expelled from the prevailing political, economic and social order (Dzenovska-De Genova 2018). Accordingly, post-crisis movements were sharing a quest for new spaces, terrains and modes of political claim-making. One could witness a “multiplication of populist revolts” of different kinds (ibid 3) even if these mobilizations did not have clearly defined alternatives to the status quo. Regardless of their political orientations, they were inspired by a quest for a release from political alienation and economic dispossession, both of which were blamed on globalizing elites disconnected from the actual concerns of the people as a political category in the making during mobilizations (ibid 2). Especially in the European and North-American mobilizations, the quest for new spaces and subjects of revolt were also accompanied by the search for critical innovations and inspirations from the Global South (or other non-Western regions) as well as various subaltern and marginal groups, their strategies of coping and enabling hope and survival. These interests were not independent of the intellectual or academic support enjoyed by these movements.

Latin-America is one of the world regions that occupies a prominent position in analytic accounts on the movements of subordinated classes in the Global South and the potential sources of inspiration for social mobilizations elsewhere (such as in countries of Southern Europe, like Spain or Greece). Moreover, as it is familiar from the critical studies of the contemporary crisis-ridden Europe, the last decade was also marked by a general turn to the right in Latin-America after the end of a political cycle with progressive governments that failed to maintain a constructive dialogue with social movements – even if the latter had a decisive role in paving their way to power beforehand (Mezzandra-Gago 2017: 477-8). In a broad sense, the Latin-American lesson on social movements seems to be twofold. First, it emphasizes the need to rethink autonomy as a politicized concept that upholds the prospects of

social change and forms of resistance to neoliberal restructuring without separating the social and the political domains, or refusing the engagement with party politics, the government and the state (ibid 481-82). Second, the respective Latin-American cases suggest that such a renewed quest for autonomy is to be rooted in popular economies, the everyday struggles for livelihood that is not limited to wage labor but include women, migrants, or the formally unemployed (see: Gago 2017). The concept of a popular economy implies the politicization of cooperation, solidarity and the reproduction of social life; as these acts unfold in everyday struggles instead of just voicing demands that are to be fulfilled by policy measures. At the level of practice, these popular struggles include the ones against privatizations, de-regulations or precarious living conditions, while aiming for the right to land, housing and work, as well as the networked control of urban resources and infrastructures. In the meantime, at the level of analysis these struggles call for refuting the putative victimhood status (or miserability) of popular classes – defined solely in terms of exclusion or marginality – and rather point at the various prospects of their agency and political engagement.

In locations as Istanbul, Athens or Madrid, solidarity activities – such as open kitchens – expressed resentment to austerity as well as a “sense of care and cooperation despite forces driving individuation and competition”; in other words, the “sense of a different life” (Alexandrakis ed 2016: 253.) Diminishing public protection services and the resulting sense of anxiety and betrayal by the state (that merely serves financial capitalist interests) were among the main driving forces behind protest movements in Spain and elsewhere. With precarious working conditions, declining incomes, increasing mortgages and other forms of credit, many households had to adapt to more precarious living conditions while relying on their networks of private solidarity to provide some degree of social security (Bailey et al 2017). In this context, earlier social movements – mostly rooted in the anti-globalization struggles around the turn of the millennium – were seeking to build cooperation with impoverished actors who were not able to express their demands for material improvement in formal institutions of representation. In the case of Spain, issues such as austerity, evictions and cuts in welfare, health and education provoked protest movements that took the form civil disobedience as well as local democratic assemblies dedicated to sharing lived experiences, strategies of resistance and possible solutions (Bailey et al 2017: 243-4).

As an expression of social discontent, these mobilizations resorted to calls for basic resources as well as respect, recognition and dignity in order to address both the issues of inequalities and injustices (Narotzky 2016). Accordingly, sovereignty served as a key concept that expressed people’s discontent towards state policies of austerity as well as the interrelated political and economic elites positioned beyond the control of the state or the electorate. In the midst of growing unemployment and uncertainty, more and more people had to return to “personalized or institutional forms of dependency” (mutual obligations, solidarity and support) even if this is precisely the condition which was supposed to be exceeded by so-called proper neoliberal subjects (ibid 75). As mentioned beforehand, the struggle for dignity implies the will to change the very moral frameworks that define the value of work, livelihood and people in society. Hence moral criticism and the striving for justice and the common good (including livelihood, household and social reproduction) predominate over the demands of working-class politics in these mobilizations. However, as Narotzky points out, the concept of dignity in itself provides no guarantee in terms of avoiding exclusivism, which is apparent in cases when social worth is defined as a competitive privilege at the price of the deprivation of putatively worthless others, as it is the case with current racist or nationalist initiatives. Such ambiguities of claims dedicated to shared dignity still call our attention to the rather thin boundaries between populist claims that are targeted at

political and economic elites and the ones that are based on the denial of respect from the marginalized and subordinated.

Alongside with the concept of ‘autonomy’ and ‘sovereignty’, ‘citizenship’ was another key concept of social mobilizations against austerity and irresponsibility by political and economic elites following the outbreak of the financial crisis. (Gerbaudo 2016) Similarly to the development of protest movements in Latin America, the framework of citizenship was aimed at the articulation of a common or popular in response to the abuses of power. This framework eventually helped to foster an integration of divergent subjects and protest demands, such as the ones related to unemployment, debt, precarious work, corruption or cuts in public expenditures. In other words, it marked a reformist change of orientation compared to earlier initiatives that either rejected any engagement with the state (in the name of autonomism or horizontalism), or the ones that resorted to strictly class-based demands (as with the classical referents of the labor movement). During the protests in Greece or Spain, the claims of the citizenry were aiming for grassroots control on political institutions in the name of ‘state-based direct democracy’ (including referenda or other popular political initiatives). Either it is understood as a category of analysis or as a watchword that serves social mobilization; the return to citizenship necessitates new definitions that connect the elements of different intellectual and political traditions related to the concept (including liberal, republican-collectivist and social democratic understandings). In the meantime, recent protest movements operate in the midst of a crisis that concerns the democratic legitimacy of institutions under neoliberal rule due to a widening gap between decision-makers and the society at large. This protest frame does not conceive the outcomes of the crisis as merely material or economic ones, but rather focuses on the rights of citizens and the political and eventually moral aspects of governance. For instance, this is the case with the refusal of oligarchs and corrupt politicians who serve the interests of financial capital instead of people who reclaim now popular forms of sovereignty.

The movements of migrants and refugees – as well as the initiatives against the increasing border restrictions – represent another layer of subaltern social mobilizations in the aftermath of the crisis. In fact, the acts of solidarity with migrants became a form of resistance against neo-nationalist populism, social exclusion and the general scapegoating of ‘others’ for the decreasing ‘native’ opportunities for education, employment and housing all over Europe. Demands for the rights of migrants, their freedom of movement and access to labor markets represent “global enactments of citizenship” in a transnational struggle of contentious politics, fostering new, counter-hegemonic forms of political subjectivity and community (Atac-Rygiel-Stierl 2016). The acts of citizenship refer to self-initiated practices (including protests, demonstrations, occupations and other performances) that are aiming for the politicization of marginal subjects by turning them into (activist) citizens – without necessarily owning authorized proofs of belonging (ibid: 532). According to Caglar’s case study on the asylum seeking struggles of a group of Roma (mainly from Romania) in Berlin, who possessed the freedom of movement but not that of labor mobility, the acts of citizenship refer to “moments when subjects constitute themselves as those making claims and asserting and imposing rights and obligations beyond the orders granted to them by law”, hence they are “enacting the contradictions and the inequalities of EU citizenship embodied” (2016: 655-6).

Based on the experience of protest against neoliberal governance in Athens, Alexandrakis suggested that a direct global street politics have paved the way for new collectivities, political alignments and assemblages (in the sense of an arrangement of heterogeneous elements) that can disrupt previously institutionalized political communities on the basis of affective connections at a micro-scale (2016).

Following the prefigurative patterns of social mobilization, the actual meaning of the collective form emerged from the relationships and unconventional action of participants, producing a unique mass effect as a democratic manifestation of the people, without erasing the differences between them (ibid: 3-9). In this context, new forms of politics and political mobilization seek to provide open ended alternatives to the present status-quo and to render critical agency to an enlarging category of precarious, “dispensable and disposable populations”. Prefigurative methods play a key role in these mobilizations responding to crises, as they operate “without guarantees and without programmed outcome” beyond the shared attempts to become “outside of oneself” as a mode of “desubjugation” (ibid 250). The direct democratic practices among participants of the Occupy movement were also aiming to bring together and transform social experiences in the form of a process of “becoming-other-than-one-now-is” (Razza-Kurnik 2012: 252).

As a continuation of crisis-ridden social mobilizations, popular sovereignty was one of the central claims in the programs of subsequent populist political party-formations in Southern European countries. As principally anti-establishment forces that stood up against the detachment or alienation of citizens from state institutions, the M5S in Italy and Podemos in Spain were both striving to reintegrate citizens in the State, making claims for the right to self-government in the midst of the crisis of democratic capitalism and fostering the direct participation of the people (as a totality) in decision-making processes (Gerbeaudo-Screti 2017). Corruption, clientelism, weakened public services or unemployment (especially among the youth) were among the shared concerns of these Southern European populist movements, in spite of their divergence on a left-right political spectrum. Accordingly, populist forms of claim-making are not the exclusive property of either left- or right-wing forces by any necessity. Instead, they can be deployed by any political formation that aims to address or speak in the name of a putatively universal subject. The quest for inspiration from marginalized places and subjects is a shared feature of critical scholarship and social movements in their attempts to tackle forms of dispossession as well as the already existing forms of hope and resistance, or to look at broader power structures from a standpoint that identifies itself with the underprivileged. As Dzenovska and De Genova argued, “marginalized people and places can be both ‘not quite’ in the sense that they do not live up to expectations of the ‘center,’ but they can also be sites of hope through which the ‘center’ wishes to reinvigorate its own political dreams, whether those of re-verifying the status quo or of ushering in radical change” (2018: 11). This is the reason why the authors are warning against the risks of selectivity and other wishful but misleading tendencies of accounts that focus on localities and social groups which exert precisely the kind of resistance, hope or grassroots politics that of scholars and activist intellectuals (and their audiences) would like to see (or that they can identify with). There is a similar tendency also with regards to competing definitions of the people that cannot be taken for granted in so far these ideas can serve as a mobilizing force both in socially exclusive and inclusive projects for mobilization.

As it was mentioned by several authors, the local scale might be the suitable one in order to acquire political impact, but the prioritization of the national level can also have limiting effects for mobilizations. Perhaps more importantly, these mobilizations also entail the risk of appropriation whereby initially the progressive causes brought forwards by social movements are taken over partially and selectively by nationalist, authoritarian or radical right wing forces. One main dilemma with regards to these protest frames and political vocabularies is related to the prospects of popular control at the level of the nation state and national citizenship while structural causes of the economic inequalities

and political procedures in question are global by definition. Even if the outcomes of the crisis are global and not merely domestic, we have witnessed an increasing preoccupation with the state and the national level of political and policy-intervention, manifested in calls for state action, efforts to recuperate the sovereignty of nation-states as well as social movements and mobilizations that aim to reinforce the ties between states and their citizens. As international bodies of decision making (including the EU) are regularly criticized for their unstable foundations or lack of legitimacy, “state agencies must seek local solutions to globally generated problems”, which leads to renewed obsessions with security and the reinstallation of “law and order” that culminates in state aggression to protect majorities against marginal groups as the prime subjects of scapegoating and moral panics (ibid 18-20).

In fact, it is not the first time that the role of the state as a putative unifying container of a nation turns out to be problematic in the midst of increasing cultural diversity and migration in Europe or elsewhere. To put it differently, the projects of reclaiming the state have to face at least two main challenges in contemporary Europe. One of them is about the prospects of acting upon the state – while the state is itself a dependent actor in unequal relations on a global scale. Another one is related to the management of diversity within or at the level of the state. Similarly to the distinctions between left and right-wing populist formations, we may also distinguish exclusionary or inclusionary populisms in general. Both of them may oppose corrupted elites that captured the state apparatus and are responsible for the economic and political crisis. However, the first one aims to represent culturally homogeneous units with actively policed boundaries; while the second denotes above all a socio-economic category of belonging in spite of ethnic or cultural difference (see: Gerbeaudo and Screti, 2017). Podemos in Spain and the M5S in Italy represent these two different versions of populism in post-crisis Europe. Podemos stood up for migrants and refugees in the name of an inclusive view of the nation state and a struggle against racism. M5S exploited the existing fears of immigration and social insecurity by making claims for a state that is solely for the Italians. Right wing forms of populism could generate support among the ‘native European’ workers, embracing welfare chauvinism and disaffection towards the EU as the main forms of claim-making instead of broader emancipatory demands. Instead of the further immersion in leftist melancholia, the current forms of social suffering and the increasing risks of nationalist disintegration are calling for new incentives that are aiming for a reconstruction of Europe from below (see Bailey et al 2017: 247).

To sum it up: after the crisis, populist movements established anti-establishment platforms and they mobilized parts of society that have been politically marginalized beforehand. However, their program of popular sovereignty did not entail guarantees for a clear-cut program on social justice, as the reassertion of citizens’ participation could be diverted and channeled into both exclusionary and inclusionary agendas (as the Italian and the Spanish cases suggest, besides other instances from Central and Eastern Europe). Moreover, populist movements after the crisis have introduced various methods dedicated to direct democracy – including online referenda or other grassroots initiatives for social and political control – in order to foster more authentic connections between representatives and those that they represent. Paradoxically, the alternative ways to accumulate popular legitimacy are easy to manipulate by political entrepreneurs due to the crisis of democratic representation that these methods were initially supposed to ameliorate. Therefore, similarly to the practical challenges of rethinking and indeed re-building democracy, the category of the people denotes another domain of struggles and competing definitions either as an enclosed community or as a unit that is grounded on solidarity beyond the demarcations of identity politics (Alexandrakis ed 2016: 255).

4. EUROPEAN BOUNDARIES AND DIFFERENCES

As the process of European integration unfolded in a crisis-ridden economic and political space, the divisions between different states and regions of Europe seemed to become only more tangible. Such divisions within Europe are informed by certain historically evolved, idealized notions of Europeanness as a set of qualities that seem to be distributed in an uneven way between different places, states or people, hence some of them appear to have more, and others seem to have less of it. The ongoing crisis-talk has shifted from economic to social concerns in a way that has reinforced the public preoccupation with boundaries and differences, and scapegoating became a main reaction to the sense of resource shrinking. Accordingly, the compatibility of Southern and Eastern European countries was both questioned with European ideals in crisis rhetoric; the issues of migration triggered widespread debates on deservingness or the distribution of welfare and support; and the moral panic about Roma influx from the postsocialist periphery finally led to their expulsion from the national body (Loftsdóttir-Smith-Hipfl eds 2018: 5-11). Although to different degrees and in divergent contexts, but the processes of racialization or re-racialization are at stake in all such instances, due to tensions over resources that are translated into discourses referring to culture as the explanation for the behavioral traits and moral worth of the marginalized (ibid 8). For example, based on the same logic of racialization, the category of Eastern European can be used to denote not fully or not-yet European spaces or populations (see also: Dzenovska 2017). Engagement with humanitarian intervention and development have been conducive to the creation of a European or Western subject, established on the basis of doing good in the rest of the world. However, in contemporary crisis-ridden context, the humanitarian logic is turned back onto the nation in Europe that is conceived to be weak, or to be in crisis and in need of support. Social anxieties of this kind were exploited by right-wing populist parties and political entrepreneurs who portray white or native majorities in the position of victimhood and in the midst of scarcity and invasion by others. Especially in Eastern European states, political refusal of migrant inclusion and solidarity have taken place in the name of self-determination and self-preservation as claims that are based on the idioms of the (somewhat still unrecognized) historical victimhood of the national collectivity that has to be prioritized in opposition to the compassion for suffering of others (see: Dzenovska 2017). At the same time, openly racist or racialized versions of refusal represent only one version in a wider set of arguments for boundaries and against openness, all of which claim to have already too many claimants for rights and welfare. A similar point can be also made on the seemingly more neutral or bureaucratic grounds regarding the lack of infrastructures and governmental incapacities to guarantee the maintenance of viable polities, the basic quality of life or a coherent sense of self for all (ibid 303). According, the backlash against multiculturalism and minority rights on the one hand, and the politics of deservingness instead of social justice and equality on the other are both conducive to new and old differences that are drawn between groups or more or less developed spaces (Loftsdóttir-Smith-Hipfl eds 2018: 12-15).

The internal peripheries of Europe and the EU seem to occupy a rather ambiguous location both on the map of mobilizations following the crisis and in the field of the related academic scholarship. The decay of the welfare state provides a history that is lurking behind the recent mobilizations in the Western world (and the recent literature about them). According to this narration, the Keynesian social pact was based on the idea that economic inequality may be accepted in so far the equality of political participation can serve as a form of control over the economic and political elites. As the Fordist-Keynesian agreement between labor and capital has ceased to exist, ordinary citizens' exposure to the brute forms of dispossession, disinvestment and inequality turned out to be the prime causes of social discontent. Seen from this angle, the crisis may be depicted as the product of a certain demise of social democratic consensus which then gave rise to neoliberal policies. However, this narrative may be unsuitable to include regions where no Keynesian agreement existed beforehand, and where the resistance to neoliberalization took the shape of neo-nationalist and authoritarian forms.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In today's context, a main question regards the ways in which political and economic leaders manage to contain the outcomes of the prolonged and multiplied crisis, if we should expect newly emerging mass opposition to neoliberalism with attempts for rebuilding the state from below, or else, socially exclusivist and xenophobic forces are going to become even more powerful. In some states around the world we are witnessing an "authoritarian fix" as "a response to increased resistance and aspirations for alternatives to neoliberalism and imperialism since the financial crisis" (Ismail-Sangeeta 2018: 569-71), featured by neo-nationalism and the attempt to transpose economic insecurities into fears around national security (such as the threat of migration and terrorism) that the state can still claim to alleviate by the means of control. Among other agents of social mobilization and politicization, NGOs are strategically important, albeit ambivalent actors in this setting, since on the one hand, they have been well-established institutional actors of a depoliticized regime in which states were getting rid of their social duties by the means of outsourcing, while on the other hand they still might be able to build alliances against these states and their exclusivist policies. Legal restrictions against NGOs – regardless of their social or political orientation – on behalf authoritarian governments are part of this broader politics that aims to break down civil society opposition and the further quest for alternatives to the present status quo.

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