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Editors' Introduction: Conflicts within the Crisis

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THIS THEMATIC SPECIAL ISSUE OF *SOCIAL JUSTICE* INVESTIGATES SOME OF THE MOST significant cycles of protest that have occurred across the globe since the current financial, economic, and political crisis started in 2007. It covers four European countries, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the UK, and one country involved in the Arab Spring, Egypt.

The financial crisis that erupted in 2007 with the defaults in the subprime mortgage market in the United States is still ongoing and has diffused to other countries across the globe as a consequence of a domino effect at both the geographical and systemic levels. On the one hand, the crisis from Europe has diffused to countries and continents including the so-called BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), which have all experienced a declining economic growth and problems with the export of their goods. On the other hand, the current crisis has become systemic, and the resutling economic shocks and fallouts have spread further across the financial sector. Within the "Eurozone" and the Mediterranean area, which are the focus of this thematic issue, the financial crisis has resulted in economic collapse (Greece, Spain, and Italy, to mention a few), crisis of political legitimacy (Egypt and Italy, for example), or has been used as an excuse for a further neoliberal restructuring of the welfare system (e.g., in UK, Greece, Italy). After a brief period in which it seemed that the neoliberal orthodoxy of the economic, financial, and political elites was threatened by the failures of the financial markets, national governments and supranational institutions such as the IMF and the BCE have turned again towards a neoliberal political agenda, reducing the sovereign debt through cuts in public spending and austerity plans rather through taxes on financial transactions and big corporations or the regulation of the financial sector. What has been experienced in many countries is a regressive retrenchment and commitment to nineteenth-century liberal economic principles and values, with the consequent erosion of social rights and social justice. At the same time, the global and unlimited power of finance and capital has continued unfettered, and to all intents and purposes the

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national governments and the executives of parliamentary democracies regard the human consequences of such economic model as peripheral or collateral damages.

To the extent that this global crisis and the attempts to solve it have resulted in the biggest drop in living standards in many countries since World War II, over the past few years protest has spread across the planet in a way unseen since the great revolutions in Europe during the mid nineteenth century or the mass mobilizations of the 1960s. From the uprisings in some Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria to the protests in Greece, the UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal, US, Canada, Chile, and other Southern American countries, social conflict has assumed different forms, expressing various discontents and involving a variety of social actors. The current mobilizations appear unique in terms of scale, dynamism, and constituencies, and one may question whether what we are witnessing here is a rebirth of history rather then its end.

This special issue investigates some of the responses that collective movements and the civil society have given to the economic and political crises in Greece, Spain, Italy, the UK, and Egypt. In the four European countries the crisis has had a violent impact upon the standard of living of the population and has brought a dramatic increase in unemployment, particularly among young people, women, and migrants. Although the uprising in Egypt was not the first revolt of the Arab spring, it has inspired successive struggles and protests in the Mediterranean region and has assumed a great geopolitical relevance in the area.

We have chosen to give this issue the title of "Conflicts within the Crisis" for several reasons. First, although the cycles of protests analyzed in these papers were not coordinated, not even at a national level, they signal the existence of common crises that cut across the globe. Second, these conflicts have developed both in relation *to* and *within* the crises, in the sense that they have turned these economic and political crises into a powerful tool to develop new agendas, subjectivities, and organizational processes. Finally, the recent crisis is made of a plurality of crises that involve the economic and financial systems and the political sphere, in particular the representative sphere. Similarly, the conflicts described here are a plurality of struggles that have assumed different shapes according to the characteristics of each country.

The articles collected in this special issue address key themes in the research on social movements and locate themselves within these debates. First, drawing upon *resource mobilization* theory, these articles show that social movements can only emerge in the presence of preexistent organizational networks. These organizational networks are often latent and unnoticed, but ready to emerge and become active at anytime. Protests and mobilizations may be a constant feature of all societies and epochs, but their overt manifestation requires more than contrasting interests among individuals and groups (Ruggiero and Montagna 2008). The variety of collective movements that emerged in Egypt, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the UK are not just

the result of frustration and discontent linked to the ongoing economic crisis, but rather a consequence of the protesters' strength and capacity to mobilize. Second, in line with the *political process* approach, the articles show the importance of external variables such as the political and institutional environment in the social movements' capacity to emerge and transform themselves. Broadly speaking, the political process approach focuses on how the degree of openness or closure of a political system might facilitate or discourage the rise of social movements. Finally, the contributions included in this special issue show the close link between social movements and social change. At times protests and collective actions are not attempts to resist change, but rather to promote it through cultural and political innovation or the experimentation with new forms of life. Social movements, as Melucci (1996) wonderfully expressed, are *prophets* of the present. They speak before change happens and announce what is taking shape. The revolution in Egypt, the anti-austerity mobilizations in Greece and the UK, the migrant protests in Italy, and the Spanish Indignados are not a *reaction* to the economic and political crisis of these countries but a *response* to it. They signal some of its main features and provide alternatives. Each paper will analyze the economic and political context of a particular uprising, the way the political system has addressed the crisis, the collective response to it, the subjectivities involved, the forms of organizations chosen, and the issues raised by the protesters.

In his article on the Egypt revolution, Paolo Gerbaudo focuses on some aspects of the organization of the movement between the fall of Hosni Mubarak, in February 2011, and the first months of office of the Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohammed Mursi, in the summer of 2012. This is an important period of time to understand the organizational dynamics of the revolutionary movement in the long term and bears some very useful lessons for Western anticapitalist social movements, which have drawn much inspiration in terms of tactics and forms of organization from Egyptian activists. What Gerbaudo describes and analyzes is how the cult of leaderlessness and self-organization, which was a key feature of the Egyptian uprising up to the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, has brought about a progressive marginalization of the revolutionary movement because of the joint pressure exercised by highly organized and structured forces like the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the defeats experienced by the revolutionary movement during this phase have soon inspired an organizational rethinking that has led to the creation of new parties and formal organizations, and therefore to more solid foundations for future mobilizations for social justice and civil liberties. Indeed, a decree of November 22, 2012 in which President Morsi stripped the judiciary of any right to challenge his decisions, thus hugely expanding his unchecked powers, has led to angry and violent protests in Cairo. It has also led a coalition of leftist groups formed under the leadership of Mohamed ElBaradei to get the decree annulled—successfully achieved on December 8—and has spurred a call for the referendum on the draft

constitution set for December 15 to be suspended on grounds of unconstitutionality. Such developments suggest that during the long transitional period, opposition groups from the Left have come to recognize that the cult of leaderlessness and self-organization that characterized the Egyptian revolution before the fall of Hosni Mubarak could be strategically turned into a more coordinated organizational form. Certainly the decree of November 22 acted as a catalyst for such a change, albeit this process is still unfolding and its history is yet to be written and understood.

Dimitris Dalakoglou provides an analysis of the three main dimensions of the process of neoliberalization and social crisis experienced by Greece during the 1990s and 2000s. The first dimension relates to the emergence of new precarious social groups, particularly documented and undocumented migrants and unemployed and underemployed youths who have been suffering new levels of marginalization. As Dalakoglou argues, these new forms of precarious labor and economic marginalization are closely linked to emerging trends of spatial segregation. For instance, significant portions of the center of Athens gradually fell into decay and more precarious social groups started replacing the previous, more affluent dwellers who were moving out of these areas. The second dimension explored by Dalakoglou is neoliberal urban (re)development, which was initially part of the so-called "national project" associated with the 2004 Athens Olympics and subsequently developed across Greece and in neighboring Balkan countries. The final dimension is the emergence of new types of state violence, which intensified during the 2000s with the appearance of new police tactics and apparatuses of direct physical violence. Here Dalakoglou analyzes the extreme coercion often used by the Greek state and the police in their attempts to enforce the exclusion of "others"—e.g., migrants, political activists, and other groups constructed as deviant and "non-Greek."

In his piece on migrant protests in Italy, Nicola Montagna shows that conflicts within the crisis can assume a variety of forms and involve a variety of social subjects. In particular he focuses on the struggles of migrants, who have emerged as a new and largely self-organized political actor. On the one hand, these mobilizations show that the current economic crisis is also a crisis of labor, exemplified by the growing expansion of a dual labor market characterized by extreme precariousness and lack of rights. The migrants' struggles have made even more apparent that the link between labor and citizenship, social production and reproduction, is stronger in the current phase of economic crisis. On the other hand, these mobilizations have brought to light the indifference of the political authorities to the migrants' claims—notwithstanding the growing numbers of migrant workers and their incorporation in both the formal and informal Italian economy—and the lack of understanding of these claims on the part of institutional actors including the traditional Left, the unions, and the church. As this article shows, these mobilizations have largely grown out of the autonomous initiative of migrant workers, leading ot the emergence of a new political subjectivity.

In their article Gareth Brown, Emma Dowling, David Harvie, and Keir Milburn argue that the protests and movements that emerged in the UK since the students' revolt in autumn 2010 can be better understood as a response to a *crisis of care* rather than anti-austerity or anti-cuts movements, as they have been commonly interpreted. Such a crisis has been precipitated by the economic downturn and the cuts imposed by the UK government. As the authors explain, the crisis of care is also a crisis of political representation, since an increasing number of social sectors are realizing that the nexus of state and capital does not promote, protect, or even consider their needs or interests. Although the current economic and political crisis that has developed out of the financial crisis is commonly interpreted as a crisis of economic growth or some kind of moral crisis, it is actually most aptly read as a crisis of social reproduction: a crisis in the ability of individuals and communities to reproduce their livelihoods.

The economic and financial crisis in Spain and the emergence of the Indignados movement are the focus of the collective contribution by Universidad Nomada, Barcelona. According to the authors, the current European crisis is the result of a process of exploitation and dispossession brought about by financial capitalism. The subaltern integration of Spain into the European Union led to the emergence of a new model of oligarchic governance based on the precarization of social life, the dismantling of the welfare system, and the proliferation of forms of corruption and speculation, and this is causing a rupture between society and political institutions. Whereas the latter are trying to control and discipline the new modes of social production based on creativity and cooperation, the former is producing a new form of social insurrection based on networks, expression (and not representation), and active listening. The protagonists of this social insurrection are part of a well-educated younger generation that has no housing, income, or employment and is not represented by the current political system.

As Mew argues in her concluding commentary, taken together these articles highlight the unrelenting and increasingly oligarchic commitment on the part of elite groups to the ideals and practice of neoliberal economics, which has wrecked havoc on earlier forms of liberal capitalism with their notions of social welfarism, social rights, and social justice. Mew's article highlights the violence associated with the crisis of finance capitalism and the associated crisis of the state. This violence, as Mew suggests, is linked not only to the physical force used by the state control agencies, but also to subjective and symbolic forms of violence associated with the lived experience of public sector cutbacks, unemployment, higher costs of living, and an increased sense of risk and insecurity.

In conclusion, however, the current crisis raises hopes for the future: albeit in different forms and with different outcomes, the mobilizations that have erupted across the globe show that an imaginative and novel re-engagement with politics is taking place within the public, often involving new constituencies and asserting new values.

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