

Introduction

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On a global scale, the last few years have come to be characterised by growing financial and economic crises which, in turn, have led to notable socioeconomic impacts on various European countries and elsewhere. The wave effect of the 2008 financial crisis in the US influenced the global financial economy, having particularly impacted a number of European countries, starting with the collapse of the financial system in Iceland, followed by Ireland, Greece and Portugal. The escalation of these crises led to the adoption of austerity measures by national governments, followed by the administering of financial assistance programmes under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission (EC). These three institutions, which came to be known as the Troika, were viewed by many as the ‘institutional faces of austerity’; they inspired different demands by emergent social movements as well as individuals who would not otherwise be politically active and engaged. This is the case with Portugal, where, in comparison to other countries, ‘public sphere’ political and civic participation has traditionally been weak, replaced instead by a more prominent role on the part of traditional political actors, namely political parties and trade unions (Cabral 2014). This lack of tradition in extra-institutional participation, however, changed with the escalation of the economic crisis and resulting economic and social consequences, which stirred up new forms of public participation and protest.

The emergence of new forms of protest and new collective actors defines what has been termed as a ‘new cycle of contention’ (Baumgarten 2013;

Accornero and Pinto 2015), characterised by a ‘new structure of political opportunities’ (Tarrow 2011). This new cycle of protest started in 2011, culminated in 2012–2013, and started to progressively decrease from the second half of 2013 to 2014. This was a period characterised by significantly strong public participation, with a broad repertoire of participation ranging from mass demonstrations and sit-ins to public place occupations, among others. The emergence of new collective actors created to give voice to claims against the adoption of austerity measures by the government was one of its chief features, along with the goal of mobilising people who were not habitually connected with acts of political engagement. Digital media appears as a crucial resource for informal participation and mobilisation here (Campos, Pereira and Simões 2016; Campos, Simões and Pereira 2018; Simões et al. 2018). This new cycle of protest was also characterised by the prominent role of young individuals, who became the face of wider discontentment, as was visible during the 12 March 2011 ‘Geração à Rasca’ (Desperate Generation) protest march, one of the most important in recent years. This was predominantly due to the growth of youth unemployment and job insecurity, as well as the reduction of state social support and lack of job opportunities (Carmo, Cantante and Alves 2014). Although such protests were intergenerational in nature, young people seemed to epitomise the socioeconomic consequences of the crisis as well as being the face of what was an ever-growing disbelief in the political system. This prominence of youth was felt not only in Europe (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Sloam 2014) but around the world (Ancelevici et al. 2016; Tejerina et al. 2013), a pattern suggesting the importance of younger generations as drivers of social change (Feixa and Nofre 2013).

This book focuses on the many ways in which protests are connected to crisis, centring on the main consequence of economic crises: precariousness. There are many possible responses to the impacts of economic instability, protests being regarded as one of them. How people chose to go beyond institutional systems to present their grievances and demand solutions is an issue that is addressed in different ways throughout this volume.

Precariousness and protest are two distinct phenomena. If the former is related to contractual restrictions and labour vulnerabilities that affect the individual’s socioeconomic condition, the latter rises from a generalised discontentment regarding the political and economic situation of a given country and the repercussions such situations may have on people’s lives. At the same time, however, it is important to point that the two are also partially associated, not only because we often witness an escalation of both phenomena when financial and economic crises take their toll on society, but, above all, because the battle against precariousness has been one of the

main issues on the agenda of new social movements. The relation between socioeconomic conditions and mobilisation had been absent from most debates on public participation and social movements until recently (Della Porta 2015; Ancelovici et al. 2016). The crisis was not only the trigger of different protest actions, but also took the issue of social inequality into the centre of the debate on social movements and civic engagement, bringing 'the economy back to the analysis of mobilisation' (Tejerina et al. 2013: 385).

The fact that austerity presents itself as a 'socially transversal phenomenon' makes recent protests 'new' in comparison to traditional class-based cleavages which sustained previous grievances (Della Porta 2015). Keeping in mind the reconfiguration of the social recruitment of the 'oppressed', therefore, it is within this scope that we might understand theoretical proposals such as the emergence of a 'precariat class' (Standing 2014), of which youth represents an important segment (Sloam 2014).

Nevertheless, since mid-2013 the decrease in the frequency and strength of protests organised by new social movements in Portuguese society that emerged in 2011-2012 has been evident, especially in the case of mass demonstrations with a significant public impact. This decreasing trend is due to a number of factors, two of which are worth highlighting: first, a growing sensation of disenchantment and disappointment among activists in regard to new social movements' abilities to actually implement 'participatory democracy' or to remain active beyond momentary events without the help of traditional political actors (such as political parties or unions), thus pushing 'ordinary citizens' away from the public sphere; second, with a few exceptions, the notion that social protests have had no real impact on the political sphere, thus highlighting the inefficacy of such movements in influencing institutional systems, consequently leading to their inability to deliver results or mobilise new members. Still, it should be acknowledged that 'micro-protest actions' (such as public debates, assemblies or small demonstrations) connected to specific issues (e.g. debates about how to overcome public debt), often organised by mobilised activists, have maintained their visibility during the now low period of participation, a trend that may be termed as the 'aftermath of anti-austerity protests'.

Regardless of the decrease of social protests after mid-2013, the levels of precariousness and inequality did not come to an end (Carmo and Cantante 2015). This was particularly noticeable, as well as dramatic, among the young. This situation affects how younger generations deal with their own future. In this context, Portugal is a particularly interesting case study, as it captures distinctive and even contradictory trends.

After four years under an intense adjustment programme, Portugal witnessed a change in its national government composition which has been

supported for the past four years (from November 2015 until October 2019) by left-wing parties. This change has brought hope to the population, with the implementation of changes to policy orientations that aim to develop a plan for economic regeneration, as well as the recovery of the standard of living among the Portuguese. Regardless of this fact, however, the Portuguese continue to live in a socially and economically vulnerable situation.

This book sets out to question if in fact social protests can really influence a 'post-austerity turn' or if, on the contrary, we are experiencing a kind of numbness of social protests that coexists with the persistence of structural problems such as inequality, unemployment and precariousness that undermines the future, particularly among the youth (Carmo, Cantante and Alves 2014). We posit that a 'post-austerity transition' will only take place if the structural problems that compromise the future are reversed. We may consider this issue in a more 'normative' way, focusing on the practical consequences and responses that arise at different levels (economic, social, political, etc.), or in a more 'positivist' way, focusing on identifying and describing the intervening factors in the understanding of the question.

In their analyses, the authors of this book take into account different approaches and dimensions. In some cases, they examine the economic and social consequences of the crisis on precariousness (either in general or focusing specifically on young people); in others, they present a more political focus, either analysing the reconfiguration of the political system – with the emergence of new political actors and the reorganisation of power relations between existing ones – or taking into consideration the responses coming from outside the institutional system, through anti-austerity claims translated into various forms of collective action, including the use of digital resources for political mobilisation.

It is our aim to analyse these issues, focusing on the Portuguese reality, and combining broader comparative perspectives drawn from case studies pertinent to other European countries. We underline the fact that this edited book gathers the contributions of different researchers who, although they hail from a variety of European countries, are all based in Portuguese scientific institutions and have all been working continuously on the central topics of this book. The volume presents a diversity of perspectives and points of view regarding the issues of precariousness and protest produced by the authors, all of whom possess very distinct scientific and personal backgrounds (see biographical notes).

We should point out that Portugal is a particularly interesting case study due to the fact that it has been the target of a rigid austerity programme, similar to other countries such as Greece or Spain, all of which were hit by measures that have had a tremendous impact on the working

population, including, above all, young workers. After years of hardship, Portugal is now living under a new political climate, with a national government, supported by left-wing parties, that has implemented a programme anticipating the replacement of most austerity measures. This political reconfiguration, which is unique in the context of the European Union, is one we consider worthy of scientific study and debate. Are we actually moving to a post-austerity phase? What are the social consequences of such a change regarding the youth population? These are two core questions behind this book's narrative, addressed in each chapter, though in different ways. With Portugal as the central case study, therefore, we set out to explore and analyse these issues.

Book Overview

The book is divided in two parts. The first part – ‘Youth Precariousness, Work and Collective Action’ – focuses on situations of labour precariousness as applied to Portuguese youth population and this population's relationship with different forms of collective action. The chapters pay special attention to the impacts of the economic crisis and the austerity programme in relation to social conditions, that started to worsen after 2008. The chapters will further explore other dimensions that link precariousness with new mechanisms of social practices and representations, such as constructed perceptions concerning the future, political alternatives, and mobilisation around new forms of activism. We should note that although the same protest events (for instance, the ‘Desperate Generation’) are mentioned in several chapters, their review is appropriate since these mass public protests had a huge impact on a structural level, not only because they defined the anti-austerity cycle at different times, but also due to the fact that from an analytical point of view, they acted as reference points when it came to locating the different analytical perspectives (from interviews to document analysis) to be approached. In this sense, even though a common narrative is presented, each of the authors will provide their own views, offering differing relevance to different sides of the story.

The first two chapters define a broader scenario for the ensuing discussion, providing a portrait of youth precariousness in Portugal by analysing youth's social situation. While chapter 1 (Renato Carmo and Ana Matias) explores different situations of youth precariousness within the labour market, focusing on young adults' transitions to work and their responses in terms of protest, chapter 2 (Magda Nico) looks at precariousness as related to young people's recent life trajectories in the labour market, examining

the ambivalences of this situation as the ‘new normal’. Together, these two chapters allow us to situate the discussion that follows on the problem of examining different forms of collective action. This issue is explored either by analysing specific precarious workers’ organisations, created outside the institutional political system, that have played an important role in the organisation of major protest events (chapter 3, Nuno Alves and David Cairns), or through the observation of the role played by traditional trade unions in organising main events during the protest cycle (chapter 4, Dora Fonseca). The complex and ambivalent relation between these two types of collective actors, usually representing opposite poles with regard to politics (non-institutional vs. institutional), constitutes one of the originalities of the Portuguese case. Traditional trade unions have found a way to ‘harmonise’ their relationship with anti-austerity social movements (AASMs), just as much as AASMs managed to ‘coexist peacefully’ with trade unions by being present or cooperating with them on key protest occasions. In a different but complementary perspective, chapter 5 (José Soeiro) examines how precarious workers appear as a ‘collective actor’ that stands out as a new class – the ‘precariat’ – engaged in a common struggle and in reaching a ‘collective consciousness’. Although the context of the crisis appeared to be auspicious to creating new political parties (like, for instance, *Podemos* in Spain), in the Portuguese case no new parties were formed that came out directly from the protest movements.¹ In that sense, this ‘precarious class consciousness’ remains attached in terms of collective action either to emergent social movements or traditional trade unions which became major players in enacting precarious workers’ grievances.

The second part – ‘Protest, Media and Democracy’ – is centred on the topic of protests and their multiples types of expression. In addition to research centring on recent manifestations in Portugal, particular attention will also be paid to the new conceptualisations of activism that make use of distinct digital tools and platforms through which online and offline networks become articulated in multiple and complex ways. Another aim of this section is to observe the new social movement forms of protest and activism, drawing comparisons with the more traditional methods of civic participation in Portugal, dating back to the establishment of democracy by the ‘Carnation Revolution’ of 1974.

Chapter 6 (Guya Accornero), which opens the second part of the book, offers a broader picture of the recent contention cycle by revisiting the reverberations of the 1970s revolutionary period in Portugal, comparing these with the anti-austerity protests that occurred four decades later. In tracing this temporal arc, the analysis not only draws parallels between the two periods, but also contextualises the current protest cycle. The variety of

expression and modes of protest organisation is then explored in chapter 7 (Britta Baumgarten) through an analysis of forms of action and organisation of social movements as part of the survival strategies adopted after the anti-austerity period – a time period in which young people played an influential role. These reconfigurations of protest are also captured via the examination of ‘new grammars’ as utilised by existing groups and movements. In chapter 8 (José Alberto Vasconcelos Simões and Ricardo Campos), the issue is assessed from the point of view of the role played by digital media in the new cycle of protest, particularly (although not entirely) in the anti-austerity movements, in which, once again, young people were key. The political participation of youth, in fact, reflects a broader change in forms of participation, characterised by greater fluidity and sustained by the increased use of a variety of digital tools for civic engagement. In this assessment of the impact of the crisis on how dissent is organised and expressed – which, as we have noticed, expanded and branched into different arenas (public and private, formal and informal) – it remains relevant to observe the responses of the institutional political system to this outcome by looking at the system’s reconfigurations. Chapter 9 (Jonas Van Vossole) analyses the evolution of the various elections during the crisis period, showing how the system itself responded to the crisis by somehow assimilating its impact.

We must add here a word concerning method. This book brings together different research projects that adopt different methodologies, with different implications concerning the way in which the main issues, as outlined above, are addressed. All chapters rely on qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis, each with its own specificities, that can be summarised by three major variants: 1) in-depth interviews as main method, conducted as a result of ongoing participant observation (chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8), as part of a purposive sample method (chapter 1), and as part of a life course analysis (with a special biographical emphasis) in two different time periods with the same interviewees (chapter 2); 2) participant observation as complementary method, integrated in an ethnographic approach to the subject, either relying on a single case study (chapter 3), on multiple groups and/or events (chapters 4 and 7), or on online observation of different platforms (chapter 8); 3) documental collection and analysis as main method, either of legislation and statistical data (chapter 5), official data from elections (chapter 9) or historical documents and statements pertinent to a specific time period (chapter 6).

Considering the diversity of research objectives, it is to be expected that, from an empirical point of view, different samples would be drawn with distinct implications in terms of their representativeness. The question of representativeness of cases depends largely on the nature of the objects,

being most unlikely to anticipate the limits of populations that are generally unknown by the lack of prior reference information. Therefore, the empirical contours of research objectives have been delineated, in most cases, in the course of the research projects themselves, outlining the ethnographic approach adapted to each respective group, as seen as relevant to the situations under observation. In those cases where collection materials are in the form of document data (official statistical data, legal documents, historical testimonies, etc.), representativeness is ensured by the very availability of the materials that allowed for an exhaustive examination of entire sets (legislation and official results of the elections).

The diversity of epistemological guidelines depended on the research objectives of the different empirical cases gathered, which, in turn, resulted in different understandings on how to collect information and the circumstances surrounding the gathering procedures. Thus, while some cases had a more participative character, demanding closer proximity to the subjects studied (mainly that of participant observation and ethnographic work), others called for no such active participation due to the nature of the analysis (i.e. documental analysis). In situations where the gathering of information involved direct contact with the research subjects, participation was voluntary and consented, and the necessary elucidations regarding the research objectives were provided. Where there were interviewees, anonymity of the participants and confidentiality were guaranteed, according to a previously established agreement.

In our view, the methodological multiplicity offered throughout this volume is one of its most enriching aspects. As each chapter presents a specific research objective and is founded on a particular method of data collection, it should be considered independently of the others. However, given the cross-cutting and transversal nature of the issues discussed, the chapters can also be understood in a complementary way, contributing to an understanding of the arguments presented throughout the book. The unity of the book develops, in this sense, from its own diversity, which enables both autonomous and complementary readings. In any case, each chapter provides an individual explanation of the particular methodology adopted in order to make it understandable on its own to the reader.

This introduction has thus served as an invitation to the chapters that follow, outlining the major debates and results ahead. In doing so, it did not intend to deliver definitive answers, but rather to posit the problems to be discussed and encourage the reader to read further. Our approach, as previously underlined, is diverse in nature, setting out to captivate different audiences, deriving from different areas of interest and backgrounds. The focus on a unique case such as Portugal, usually absent from collective volumes

on the topic, offers an opportunity to go deeper into an analysis of recent events that have youth, precariousness and austerity as central subjects.

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Note

1. Even in cases of new political parties being formed during the crisis period, as was the case of *Livre – Tempo de avançar* (Free party – Time to move forward).

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