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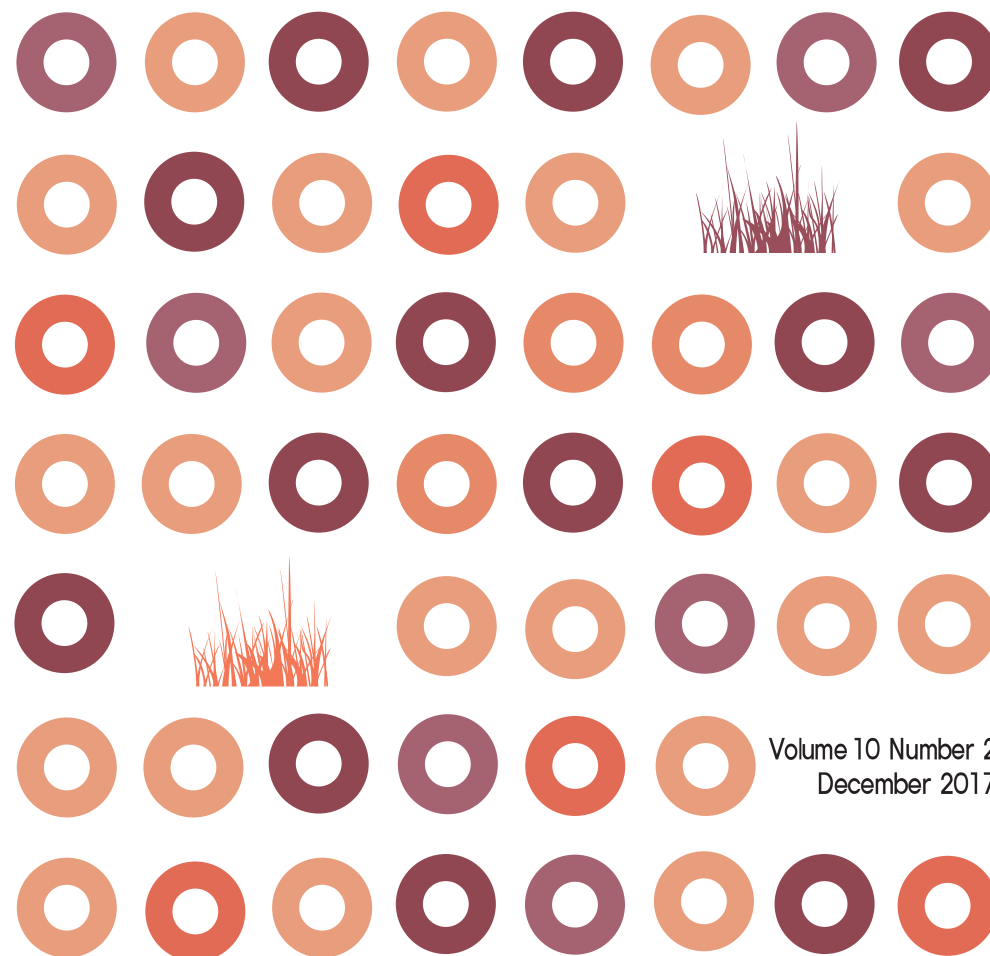

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Alter-globalization in Southern Europe: The Case of a Social Movement that Does Not Move

Eduardo Zachary Albrecht

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Alter-globalization in Southern Europe: The Case of a Social Movement that Does Not Move

Eduardo Zachary Albrecht*

Abstract

This paper introduces the politics of the Alter-globalization movement in Greece, Spain, and Italy through a series of interviews and vignettes from the field, and locates the movement within the broader socio-political spectrum. The movement is found to have an uneasy relationship to power due to a paradox between its rhetoric and the actual material interests of its adherents. The paper also explores the relationship between activists and society and finds that the movement occupies a ritualistic and liminal space. It is concluded that this dynamic risks undermining civic participation in democratic processes.

Key words: Alter-globalization, Ethnography, Class Conflict, Social Protest, Political Identity

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1. Introduction

Recent times have seen mounting challenges to multilateral institutions of global governance. Where these organizations are perceived to be failing the world's citizenry, individuals join social movements to vent their grievances. The study of social movements has concomitantly gained in relevance and momentum. A pressing question in social movement studies has been to understand the nature of the relationship between protest and political power in this era of globalization. Some have set out to examine how movements impact power (Tarrow 2011; West 2013; Johnston 2010, 2014), others how power utilizes movements (McAdam, Zald, and McCarthy 1996; Goldstone 2003; Gillion 2013), others yet the interaction between the two (Della Porta 2013). But what if a movement has *no* relationship to political power?

This paper discusses one such movement. We will find that the alter-globalization movement in Southern Europe has no relationship to political power, or at least none in the form history has accustomed us to thus far. The movement's broad aims include, but are not limited to, the abolition of neoliberal economic policies, the emancipation of workers, the protection of the environment, the defense of civil liberties, and the general promotion of justice around the world. The conclusions will find that conventional politics never needs to accommodate the movement's demands, and that the movement is ever seriously engaged by politicians.

This paper will examine the movement within both its contemporary cultural and political frameworks, and look at activists' everyday recreational practices as important sites of political identity. In particular, it engages with the movement's counter cultural scene. Movements' cultural "scenes" have been little noticed in academia and are considered by some to be under-researched and under-theorized (Leach and Haunss 2009). The fieldwork is conducted in social settings frequented by activists in three different Southern European countries: Spain, Italy, and Greece. It is important to note that these venues were frequented both by activist and non-activist crowds, the interaction between these being an important focus of this research.

Activists yearn for political change, but at the same time they also desire to disengage from political life. Such double desire leads to a paradox. The activist

becomes politically active but his or her activity never materializes in any substantial changes in society. In other words the social subject becomes active but that action does not reintegrate into the social body. This results in a state of continuous transition that never actually takes the subject anywhere new. The activist space is a perennially liminal one (Turner 1964, 1974; Yang 2000). As such, it takes on ritual characteristics, and plays a ritual role within Southern European society. Power concedes it nothing as its impact remains on the imagination and its possible worlds are experimented with only on one's own body.

What on the surface seems like a legitimate social movement, once the embodied practices of its members are analyzed and the movement's "anatomy" laid bare, becomes something very different. The movement appears to be a kind of ritualized holding pattern for middle class youths in Southern Europe. The fieldwork reveals that the alter-globalization movement in Southern Europe is in fact largely – but not solely – composed of youths that come from middle and class backgrounds (see also Pleyers 2010). While the revolutionary rhetoric activists use is borrowed from workers' struggles of previous eras the movement actually draws most of its adherents not from the working class, but from an increasingly disoriented middle and lower middle class. These youths find themselves uncomfortably placed between a receding state structure on the one side (Kurlantzick 2013) and the ubiquitous, popular substrata of the informal economy on the other. Joining the alter-globalization movement presents itself as an appealing solution. Its ritual liminality allows adherents to be nominally revolutionary yet practically ineffectual. The first characteristic provides activists with a frame to articulate their frustrations, while the second guarantees that no real threat is posed to the system, thereby safeguarding their middle class status.

These conclusions echo the findings in social movement literature that call for greater alliances across classes (Leondar-Wright 2014), value systems (Al-Saleh 2015), and issues (Ruiz 2014), and contribute to debates concerning the role of protest within global politics (Buechler 1999; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Della Porta, Kriesi, and Rucht 2009; Caiani and Della Porta 2011; Tilly and Wood 2012, Almeida 2014). The findings also, however, add a novel perspective to the study of social movements. In recent scholarship social movements are found to be major players in the contemporary political arena

(Roberts and Ash 2011). Sidney Tarrow's (2011) work established the "fleeting but real" influence that movements have on politics, while David West (2013) speaks of their "enormous but unpredictable" political potential. Perhaps the most prolific writer in the field, Donatella Della Porta (2013, 2014), sees movements as one of the few hopes left for democracy itself. For Dario Azzellini and Maria Sitrin (2014) they are reinventing the very meaning of democracy. Hank Johnston (2014), too, affirms that movements are a major force for social change today. Much of the literature on the Occupy movement (Blumenkranz 2011; Gitlin 2012; Byrne 2012), grassroots activism (Thompson 2007), and non-violent protest (Popovic and Miller 2015) tends to automatically cast all types of contentious politics as harbingers of real political change. There is, in fact, a tendency to romanticize movements, approaching them primarily as a celebration of independent self-expression in the face of authority (see Piven 2008; Quart 2014). This line of thought has created a somewhat homogenous front at the cutting edge of the field. This research problematizes that.

2. Methodology

Methodologically, ethnographic studies of the alter-globalization movement tend to be as multi-sited as the movement itself (see Juris 2008). Social movement studies' methodologies in general are often comparative/ multi-sited (McAdam et al. 1996; Goldstone 2003; Staggenborg 2007; Gerbaudo 2012; Jasper 2014; Della Porta 2006, 2014). This study's methodology is also multi-sited. Fieldwork unfolds in three Southern European cities: Naples, Barcelona, and Athens. Key takeaways concerning the discursive use of political categories from each city are related to those in the other cities. These cities all reveal very similar social contexts in which the movement operates – yet with important differences.

Multi-sited approaches are necessary because contemporary movements are conspicuously lacking in geographic boundaries. They are, however, also very much lacking in ideological boundaries. This is harder to address methodologically. The alter-globalization movement studied here is so

ideologically varied that adherent have a hard time agreeing on a single name. It is sometimes referred to as the anti-globalization movement, global justice movement, or no-global movement. Furthermore, this movement is, in reality, a movement of movements. It contains many different movements within it, each of which, in turn, considers itself part of this umbrella movement in differing degrees. This study will stick to the term alter-globalization and will use a wide-angled approach to its constituent movements.

It is also very difficult to locate the alter-globalization movement within the broad spectrum of history. The movement, which gained momentum at the beginning of this century, combines elements of novelty and continuity. The use of digital communication and reliance on expressive culture, for example, fosters a sense of novelty, yet it is in many ways also the contemporary embodiment of older movements, like the anti-authoritarian or squatter movements. Likewise, recent years have seen elements of the alter-globalization movement synergize with newer phenomena, like the anti-war or anti-austerity movements.

The result is a movement that contains multiple, porous sub-groups within it that are often in ideological contraposition. In sum, the alter-globalization movement in Southern Europe is not a monolithic entity, but is rather a complex and sophisticated sandwiching of different political identities. It is not easily pigeonholed ideologically and its group borders are not clear cut. This complexity is compounded by the fact that activists themselves do not enjoy being labeled. Very few wholeheartedly commit to a single label, viewing their identity instead as nuanced, multiple, indeterminate, and above all personalized. There are as many ideologies out there as there are activists. Alter-globalization, like anti-capitalism or anti-fascism, is just one possible strand, and does not monopolize anyone's identity. Everyone seems to have their own "brand," their own cocktail of alternative and contentious political philosophies.

All these different component movements and all these different activists do, however, share one very fundamental thing in common: their counterculture. Methodologically, I have therefore chosen to focus on this aspect of the alter-globalization movement. The same general counterculture feeds and informs the many different movements tied to the alter-globalization cause, and even the many different iterations of these movements through time. Baby boomers, generation Xers, and millennials may disagree on points of political doctrine,

but at the end of the rally they all dance to the same music. The basic feature of the fieldwork is that I frequented this activist counter cultural social scene over the time span of fifteen years, from 2001 to 2016.

Since the alter-globalization movement is associated with individuals belonging to the middle class, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by middle class in Southern Europe. Informants in the filed discursively refer to middle class status in a very wide ranging way, which includes the lower and higher middle classes too. For example, small shopkeepers and public servants may very well be seen as belonging to the same middle class as those with high paying professional jobs. The reason for this is because the formula applied to determine class takes into consideration one's social and cultural capital in addition to one's title or economic means. This study too will employ such wide ranging definition.

3. Class Conflict in Greece

The uniqueness of the Greek political predicament – the extreme levels of sovereign debt and the depth of reform the nation has been subjected to – has resulted in ever wider sections of the population joining in public demonstrations of discontent. Different responses to austerity have led to a wide variety of positions yet they all offer something similar: a sense of empowerment against the perceived peripheralization of Greece within the European Union (Theodossopoulos 2013). In 2015, a rising tide of popular discontent propelled the first anti-austerity party, Syriza, to power. Syriza's success centered upon the articulation of an alternative strategy out of the nation's debt crisis. By politicizing popular discontent, the party emerged as an important political force in Greece (Bozkurt-Güngen 2014).

The Greek alter-globalization movement's relationship to Syriza has been dynamic. At first they were seduced by Syriza's capacity to address national issues within the frame of a challenge to the international hegemony of neoliberalism, that is – to act locally but think globally (Sergi and Vogiatzoglou 2013). However, as Syriza got closer to power, activist narratives turned increasingly skeptical. Finally, Syriza's failure to produce any tangible results

plus its volte-face toward creditor nations in Brussels has turned it into an actual target of protests. A Greek activist explained it to me thusly:

> The relationship between the government and the movements is horrible. There is no relationship. Syriza does not want to do anything, or change anything, they just want to stay in power. They say they are a leftist party but no one believes them. 17 November is an important date in Greece, it is the anniversary of when students protested at the Athens Polytechnic against the dictatorship in 1973. We celebrate democracy that day. Every year we commemorate those students at the Polytechnic campus. This year when Syriza came to celebrate they were booed off the campus. The slogan the students used in 1973 was "bread, education, and liberty." When Tsipras went to lay down flowers the students around him started shouting, "get out of here, you stole our bread, education, and liberty."

There is a further contradiction at the heart of the Greek anti-austerity drive that plagues Syriza. As it gains adherents by decrying the global imperialist hegemonic forces that have brought Greece to its knees it simultaneously cajoles Greece's own ultra-nationalist hegemonic narratives (Theodossopoulos 2014). This contradiction has not gone unnoticed by alter-globalization activists who criticize Syriza's devil's bargain with the darker side of Greek nationalism. Activists now see Syriza as capitulating to power both in Brussels and on the home front.

This troubled relationship to the party is symptomatic of an uneasy relationship between Greek activists and political power in general. Marxist and Anarchist sub-currents still influence large sections of the activist scene. John Holloway (2002, 2010) points out that today's Marxist/Anarchist movements are peculiar in that they fight for radical political change in ways that have nothing to do with actually taking power. He explains that these movements essentially fight against power, not for power. This is redefining the nature of the relationship between activists and power, and their definition of resistance. Holloway finds that resistance is seen as embedded in everyday life, as *a way of life* that is in opposition to power. Resistance is no longer a means to an end – as it was throughout the socialist struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries – but an end in itself. This means that once a revolutionary group achieves power they are, by definition, no longer revolutionary.

I am reminded of the personal slogan one Greek activist I interviewed used to repeatedly claim: “Wherever power lies I will always be one step behind it for that is the nature of a revolutionary.” Yet there might be an additional explanation for the remarkably nonlinear relationship between political power and activism in Greece; an explanation that has to do with the demographic make-up the movement. The following exchange with an activist named Eleni will help shed light on this demographic aspect. Eleni and I were introduced electronically via a mutual friend. I was told she is involved in the Greek activist scene so reached out for us to meet.

One morning Eleni sent me a text message, “There is a demonstration at the Ministry of Labor; do you want to meet there? I can meet you at Panepisthmio Metro Station at 12:00.”

I check, the metro station is one of those with multiple exits on various streets, so I reply, “There is a Starbucks near the station. Perhaps we can meet at the entrance to that?”

“Ok,” she says, “but I will not take our coffee there.”

I like her already–it’s the way she said “our” coffee. I get to our meeting place early and take a walk around in the gathering crowd. It is a pleasure to protest in this sun, I think, as it warms the January air. The old dusty streets and pockmarked building facades remind me of similar neighborhoods in Naples and Barcelona, where the city feels like an open wound–one where sometimes great beauty is bared before you. As I turn a corner, above a busy intersection the Academy of Athens’ column’s glisten with sunlight and the building’s Vitruvian proportions come unexpectedly to life. Nearby, I notice a group of older men dressed in elegant but tattered suits standing in front of a newsstand reading headlines off papers they do not buy.

Eleni arrives not unpardonably late. We walk quickly to the main body of the protest and join a group of her friends. They eagerly explain that they are protesting the government’s decision to reform pensions again. This reform will affect architects, engineers, and other professionals. In particular, these workers will be expected to pay government pension contributions even if they earn no money. One engineer tells me: “Even if I gain zero Euro a year I must still pay 2500 Euro in pension contributions. Does that sound logical? Based on the

income I expect this year, I worked it out, I will have to pay 92 euro out of every 100 euro I earn in taxes. This is not legal. Bigger companies can take advantage. They can blackmail me and say, 'look, we will pay the contributions but you have to work for 600 Euro a month and with no hour limits in a day.'"

Eleni jumps in, "And we are the lucky ones, we studied engineering, we can at least make 600 a month. Also, we have the chance to leave Greece and work elsewhere in Europe where engineers are needed. Many studied disciplines that are not needed, like mathematics or the humanities. Where do they go?"

I look around, there is a remarkably relaxed attitude amongst the crowd. Many know each other and socialize. A conspicuous majority are smoking cigarettes. People see me taking notes and enthusiastically approach answering questions they assume I have about the government, Greece, and the EU. I politely fend off these volunteers and turn back to Eleni to ask about the alter-globalization movement in Greece.

She replies, "In Greece it is not hard to protest, it is hard to take the final steps and actually change things. I think we are always afraid. Social movements cannot achieve anything if the government doesn't listen, the poor don't care, and the rich have all the power, legal and illegal."

"But isn't that always the case," I say. "Isn't that why people protest?"

You see, social movements in Greece are made up of middle class people like small business owners, doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, et cetera– the people you see here. Change cannot come from these, it must come from below, but the lower and working classes are not part of the movements because they have no class conscience. Research shows that in Greece the lower classes don't know they are the lower classes, and the working class does not know it's a working class. Therefore they cannot fight for their rights. Greece is not really a capitalist country in this sense. Most families have a plot of land somewhere with olive trees on it so they will always have olive oil, which means that they will always be OK. In Greece family is important. You need it to find a job, for support, for everything. So long as you have olive oil and a family behind you then you are fine, there is no need to upset things too much. This is different from the working class in other countries, like the UK for example, where they are forced to organize because they have nothing else to fall back on.

"So these are all middle class people?" I ask.

These are all people that are experiencing downward mobility. They are being pushed toward lower and working class status but are not. Even members of the upper middle class are caught up in this and have become part of the movements. You can find young anarchists that are from quite wealthy bourgeois families. But we cannot expect a revolution from them. Many of the comrades I mobilized with at protests–anarchists, communists like me–I now understand were fighting for the working class but were actually part of the middle class. Now that things are bad in Greece I have no family that supports me. They do. My mother is a single mother, and she can't support me on her salary. I come from a small town, I studied hard and became a member of the movement. I have a bachelors and a masters in engineering but now work as a waitress; most waitresses in Greece have a master's degree. I see we are different now. I am an actual working class person and believe in the things I fight for. For them, many of them, it was a hobby. The things we were fighting for did not coincide with their actual interests as a class. This became clear to me during the referendum this summer [the "Greek Bailout Referendum" for or against continued austerity in Greece in support of European Union/ International Monetary Fund debt repayments held in July 2015]. Those who voted no were from the working class. The yes vote was from the middle and upper classes. My comrades would not openly admit it but I came to find out that they secretly voted yes. They said they voted no but in reality voted yes. What does that tell you? They are wolves in sheep's clothing. You see, the difference between those that voted yes and those that voted no is whether or not they had any money in the bank. Those with money risked losing it if Greece stood up to the Eurozone. It turns out that many of my comrades, some with a golden tongue that could talk for hours about socialism, had money in the bank and preferred to protect that than continue the fight for real change.

Stereotypes of competing class identities, leftist resistance struggles, and Greek cultural traits interlace into a tight and corrosive narrative that helps Eleni make sense of her personal life experience. Stereotypes of authenticity and inauthenticity are interwoven with stereotypes of class identity to provide meaning and direction. Eleni's view, however, is not shared by all activists. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

I spent the rest of that day at Nosotros, an autonomous space run by members of the Greek anti-authoritarian movement in the Exarcheia neighborhood. Nosotros is well known in the activist community for organizing political debates, socially minded concerts, and housing events for migrants. I spent some hours there discussing the day's events with activists and patrons. We were discussing further mobilizations and actions needed. The view expounded by Eleni was still on my mind so I shared it with the others. Despite multiple attempts, I found it difficult to weave Eleni's idea into the conversation. Every time I brought it up my interlocutors' knee-jerk reaction was to skirt around the issue. Her perspective on class and authenticity was anathema to the one being constructed in our current conversation. What is it about the experience of a thwarted, upwardly mobile member of the working class that does not chime with the experiences of a mobilizing, downwardly mobile middle class? Is it that for Eleni something is being taken away which she, arguably, worked for and deserves while for the others something is also being taken away but it is something that was given at birth?

Eleni's narrative helps explain the movement's uneasy relationship to political power. Attaining actual political power would force the movement into an uncomfortable paradox. In power, it would have to either A: enact policies that are ultimately not in the interest of its members (a socialist, planned economy would essentially kill out the privileges of the middle class individuals that ultimately make up the rank and file of the movement) or B: abandon its policies. The movement thus cloaks itself in an antipolitical counterculture, avoiding power, as a solution to this paradox. As Eleni said, "it is as if we are always afraid to take the last step." Indeed, taking the last step would amount to either class suicide or ideological betrayal. So by staying away from political power the movement is essentially protecting and perpetuating its existence. What depicts itself – and is depicted – as a resistance movement mobilizing in the interest of the disenfranchised is in reality something more complex. Surface relationships between political power, social class, and the activist landscape conceal a contradictory dynamic unfolding underneath that requires further investigation.

Incidentally, James Petras notes that the anti-austerity movement in Southern Europe is plagued by a similar paradox. He notes that while it has been placed on the radical left side of the political spectrum in reality it cares very

little about realizing the socialist economic agenda of the traditional European left. What fueled this movement's incredible growth is what Petras calls middle class radicalism. Years of economic crisis in Southern Europe have led to lower standards of living for large sections of the middle class. The end of middle class upward mobility and the threat of its possible proletariazation have resulted in a loss of faith in the establishment and traditional political parties. Petras points out that despite its revolutionary rhetoric this movement does not seek to restructure society but only to restore middle class privilege. It really only seeks to "moralize capitalism" rather than seriously pursue "the traditional left's goal of public ownership under worker control" (Petras 2015, 1). The alter-globalization movement is not the same as the anti-austerity movement, but the two share this somewhat bipolar character. They are both in fact rooted in the same increasingly marginalized middle class in Southern Europe. Their anti-establishment bombast hides an underlying desire for a place back on the establishment's gravy train. In other words, "scratch the heresy and you will find the leper" (Eco 1994, 203).

4. Social Protest in Spain

Jeffrey Juris' (2008) extensive ethnography of the alter-globalization movement in Barcelona finds that the Catalan city is a critical node for protest action aimed at transnational corporations and multi-lateral organizations. Like elsewhere, he finds that the alter-globalization movement in Barcelona is a collection of many movements whose networking has been facilitated by new information technologies, and that its politics are highly embodied and performative (Juris 2008; Vilaseca 2013). The alter-globalization movement in Barcelona has seen both change and continuity. On the one hand, gaining momentum in the struggle for Catalan independence, the economic crisis, and the rise of new political parties have altered the movement's political ecosystem significantly–providing both challenges and opportunities. For example, dramatic levels of youth unemployment have seen ever higher numbers of citizens respond by joining social movements (Marti i Puig 2012). On the other hand, recent mobilizations such as 15M (anti-austerity protest that began on

May 15 2011) have drawn extensively upon the experiences of preexistent movements like the alter-globalization movement. Indeed, cross-pollination between movements is common (Fuster Morell 2012; Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Priska and Zamponi 2014). One activist in Barcelona explained it to me thusly: "15M brought the new generation of activists together with the older ones. You have cycles. The protests against the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund were a peak, then the anti-war movement was another peak, then 15M. Cycles are moments in history where the torch passes from one generation to another."

An increasing challenge for movements in Spain is the question of how to interface with mainstream political organizations. There used to be many linkages between movements and political parties (Hughes 2011; Karamichas 2015). Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2007, 2014) questions whether this is still the case. Her research notes that tensions often rise when movements that gain legitimacy from being "autonomous" rely on resources from "institutional" organizations. To retain authenticity, she finds, movements will now often forgo those party resources and connections altogether despite overlapping objectives. A telling example is the relationship between alter-globalization activists and the political party Podemos. While the party engages profusely in anti-establishment rhetoric it has not been able to convince many activists of its sincerity. An activist in Barcelona pointed out: "They tell Pablo Iglesias [Podemos' leader] to not cut his ponytail because it makes him look more authentic, come on, then Podemos says that they are not against selling arms to third world countries in civil wars, to not piss off the big arms manufacturers in Spain. What am I going to do with a ponytail when my beliefs are not represented?" Like in Greece with Syriza, power stains. Indeed, the moment a party comes in contact with power it is seen to betray its popular mandate.

Ana, an activist in Barcelona explains that it is a problem of form.

> I believe hope will not be in political party form. I do not believe in political parties. I believe activism should be autonomous, cooperative, spontaneous, and local. It is not about the big revolution; it is about many small revolutions over the next 100 years or so. Ideology will slowly change; peoples' minds will slowly change. I am a teacher and am an activist in my classes. It is more

> about the long term. Change cannot happen at once, I wish it could, but I guess that is not how it works.

Polarizing stereotypes of authenticity and power are playing an important role in determining the relationship activists have with institutions in Southern Europe. Divesting power of any possible authenticity poses a challenge to the meaning of representational democracy. Similarly, authenticity without power forces one to fall back on somewhat disabling narratives that focus interchangeably on the long run, "the next 100 years or so," or the "spontaneous and local." The following conversation with Camila, a schoolteacher, and Mia, an anthropology graduate, details how these stereotypes of authenticity and power link with others relating to lifestyle choices in Spain to create emergent political subjectivities.

We met by chance late one evening in the wide, flat expanse adjacent the MACBA, Barcelona's museum of contemporary art. This open space in the neighborhood of El Raval is reclaimed at night by a crowd of skateboarders, students, and activists. As we spoke skaters darted about, some juggled beer bottles, most sat chatting leisurely and playfully in stark contrast to the somber modernist architecture of the museum. As we spoke a young man approached to invite us to an event being held that night in an occupied building. He promised music, clowns, and a "magic potion."

"Magic potion?" asked Mia.

"Oh, no" replied the man smiling, "the magic potion is a mix of art, music, mural painting, theatrical performance, social awareness, political discussion, confronting the other …"

Mia smiled back disappointedly. As the man left Camila mentioned that she used to go to these events but is getting tired of them. Mia agreed, adding:

> Politics cannot change society. The system is rotten and politics will not be able to change it. I am the least activist person you could find. I don't trust politics. It is not about political change, getting new people in power, elections and all that; politics cannot change a thing. You see, politics does not change society, rather, if we all do our little bit, at the personal level, that will produce change at the social level which will eventually create change at the political level.

I ask, on impulse, “What about those that cannot afford to wait, those social classes that are being exploited right now?”

Camila answers:

> We are all being exploited. Most of us think we are part of the middle class but in reality we are in the lower class. We have been told that we are the middle class but are not. A lower class person earns 800 euro. I earn 800 euro. So I am in the lower class. People tell you that you should be happy that you even have a job and can pay rent. But the fact is that the money I earn goes completely to pay the rent. That is the definition of being in the lower class: work to pay rent, no saving, and no discretionary spending.

“How would you describe someone in the middle class?” I ask.

“I don’t know; I don’t know any. I guess they are the ones that get private education and health, and that can spend money to enjoy life.”

Mia interjects,

> It is not a matter of class. It is about lifestyle. I experimented with non-consumerism for a few months, I paid for nothing, bought nothing, ate recycled food. I like to go and live in nature for long stretches of time. I basically do not like the system, that’s all, so I avoid it. These are my choices, they have nothing to do with my social class. I went to a posh private school. At the time they used to tell me that anyone under the Avinguda Diagonal is lower class and anyone above it is upper class. [The diagonal is a long avenue that divides the northern, hilly part of Barcelona from the southern part near the port]. Barcelona is so multicultural and multifaceted it is hard to find clear cut social class divisions.

Upon learning that Mia went to a private school Camila silently raised an eyebrow. Mia, noticing, continued apologetically,

> I went to a private school because I grew up in a family in which my father believed in the value of education. I am not rich. Also, I disagree with Camila, we are not the lower class even if we make 800 euro a month. Classes are more fluid than that, lives are mixed, sometimes it’s a lifestyle choice to be

> part of the lower class. [Looking sideways at Camila she adds slowly] I choose poverty. I choose to be working class. I go to the woods for days at a time with a bunch of people who are from all classes and we live without consumerism, in nature, simply, like the poor …

Camila interrupts her forcefully, "You have the possibility to choose. You can choose to live either with nothing or with wealth."

Mia: "I chose to have less choices. I can no longer be wealthy now. I cannot go back and study economics and get a high paying job, that path is closed to me now. [Emphatically] We are so lucky; we can choose a simpler lifestyle if we so wish."

"No *we* are not. My parents *are* working class. I had to pay for my education. I started working when I was 14."

"I worked at 14 too!"

"Sure, while attending a posh private school."

The police arrived at this point in the conversation and started asking people to leave the space. Officers stopped and interrogated some of the skateboarders that resisted. The rest of the crowd screamed insults in protest as they reluctantly moved out en masse.

The exchange with Mia shows how the stereotype of authentic political progress connects with the stereotype of an individual making independent lifestyle choices. Institutional politics, conversely, connects with choicelessness; "politics cannot change a thing." Connecting political progress to lifestyle choice comes with a price: social class is also reduced to a matter of choice. If class identity is reduced to a choice, then class struggle is meaningless. One may argue: if you do not like your class choose another. This view is counterpointed by Camila's for which class identity is fixed. For her class is an objective condition at the root of exploitation. The difference between Camila's proletariat and Mia's proletariod perspectives mirrors the difference between activist political subjectivity in the twentieth and twenty-first century in Southern Europe. It also helps explain the scant relevance of Marxist revolutionary eschatology and the vacuity of leftist opposition political parties and institutions. In the preceding section we saw that the movement's middle class pedigree forces it to operate away from power. In this section we see that

the focus on lifestyle choice allows it to also divorce from an ontological view of class.

Class is no longer the main locus of political struggle. One reason is because class affiliation itself is becoming more nuanced and contradictory. Juan, a veteran alter-globalization activist in Barcelona points out – like Camila did – that class designations are changing.

> Most activists are from the middle class. The working class does not have time for it, they need to work! However, an interesting development is that the working class is now becoming the new middle class, and the middle class is becoming the new exploited class. A factory worker has a stable job and makes a handsome salary, say two, three thousand euros. While the jobs that young middle class people are getting are temporary and pay one thousand euros or less. We even have a name for these, we call them *Milleuristas*, [thousand euro people], though now they probably make even less than that.

Another reason for the deemphasizing of class is the shift from an understanding of political participation as involvement in a general system, to an understanding of political participation as involvement in a parallel system – as Ana and Mia made clear. Class identity requires there be a variety of different classes competing within the same general system. Activists have abandoned participation in this general system in favor of creating a parallel system. Since the parallel system is new, the rules governing class relations can be rewritten from scratch – or altogether removed in the spirit of solidarity. This shift is best encapsulated in the notion of *contrapoder popular* (popular counter-power), the centrality of which emerges in the following explanation of the difference between Podemos and the alter-globalization movement in Barcelona. Raul, active for years in the Okupa and alter-globalization scene, points out that:

> Podemos is an electoral artifact. We are not interested in voting. If we do vote it is for the Communists but even this is rare. The basic difference is that Podemos believes in institutions while we do not. So we may like each other but we operate in different areas of political action. Podemos' strategy is to take power through elections. Our idea is not to take over existing power (for example, through the state), our idea is to generate our own new power, from

> the bottom. We call it contrapoder popular. We want to erect our own new institutions. Podemos wants to use existing ones. We believe we can solve all the problems we need to solve to live well without having to pass through the state's institutions. We are creating our own schools, our own health centers, our own community care centers, and even our own market structures. We have co-ops for everything, we even have our own banks and energy companies. We are identifying every aspect of our life and taking it back. Yes, it is hard, but what happens is that in the end capitalism will eventually be substituted by millions of small solidarity based cooperative projects all over the world.

5. Political Multiplicity in Italy

According to Lorenzo Zamponi (2012) the interaction between social movements and political parties in Italy is at its lowest point in history. In the past, movements used to be a resource for the parties. Their ability to mobilize the masses at rallies had great strategic value. Zamponi argues that they have since become an obstacle. He notes Italian parties' rigid ideological stances have become a difficult fit with the post-political mind frame of contemporary social movements. To remain ideologically unfettered and inclusive (i.e. authentic) movements in Italy have distanced themselves from the parties, often mobilizing against them.

One movement even became its own political organization. The Five Star Movement, or M5S, rode the wave of anti-party sentiment in Italy to gain a quarter of all votes in the 2013 general election. M5S gained broad support by focusing on the shortcomings of elected representatives to politicize crisis-related popular discontent. For some this explains why anti-austerity protests have not been as widespread in Italy as in Greece and Spain. The focus on people rather than on policy or political processes has kept discontent focused on Italian politicians rather than on the European Union or broader issues of economic restructuring (Bozkurt-Güngen 2014). Despite its electoral success M5S does not call itself a party nor does it allow itself to be placed anywhere along the traditional right-left spectrum of political party affiliation.

The distrust of political parties includes a distrust for individuals that adhere to those parties. Parties are for people that are somehow inauthentic – people that cannot think on their own. A conversation with Pio and Marco, with whom I attended several alter-globalization protests in Italy, demonstrates how stereotypical party adherents are viewed by activists. Pio was wearing a long colorful scarf and rolling tobacco into tiny cigarettes that he would share with Marco and me. I asked them to introduce me to the different political party identities in Italy. A stereotypical rightwing party adherent, they explained, is "paranoid, racist, and uncouth." Similarly, a stereotypical radical leftwing voter is "prey to the ideological fascination that Marxism can wield" and has a "biased and hypocritical" understanding of world issues. Center left and center right adherents are "unthinking" and "conformist." What all these have in common is that they are defined by their lifestyle more than by the ideals or interests their parties supposedly stand for. Parties are containers for individuals of one or another specific lifestyle.

Where do Pio and Marco place themselves? When asked, they responded that they are beyond the pale of political partisanship. No one party/identity could ever represent them. Informants were constantly placing others within political boxes but never placing themselves into any such container. Each political party had its stereotypical adherent that would follow a precise set of behaviors, operate under a preset code of moral instructions, and display a finite array of opinions. Others invariably fell in one or another of these categories, but never the person I was talking to. In fact, everyone was quick to place themselves *against* the entire system of categories. To do so appeared to grant a special kind of status. The next exchange explains why:

"Pio," I asked, "what makes you an objective judge of other people's ideologies?"

"I am a better judge because I contain multiple views. I can empathize with others' political perspectives and see things from their point of view. I can stand in my shoes and in their shoes. Most can hardly stand in their own shoes."

"So you are multiple while most others are singular?"

After a pause, "Yeah, seems so, the multiple me."

Movements have distanced themselves from political parties because they have distanced themselves from the kinds of people that join parties. Activists see themselves as manifold while party followers are seen as uniform. In the

previous section we saw that the notion of a fixed class identity is being challenged, here we find that also the notion of a fixed party identity holds little sway amongst activists in Southern Europe.

By forgoing both class and party identity is an activist beyond all political identity? What is left to identify with? The movement itself, perhaps, yet very few of those I interviewed would ever identify as stereotypical activists. Neither can it be said that activists have replaced the singular mode of political identity with a common multiple one – since no two activists seem to share the same combination of identities. Rather, it seems, they have replaced political identity tout court with a kind of psychological mobility which allows them to be in different places at will. Now, if one is beyond fixed political identities of any kind, it follows that he or she is left with the act of choice as the only constant in his or her political life. Choice is all that is left, and is guarded jealously. For this reason, an otherwise objective condition like class is reduced to a lifestyle choice. Similarly, party affiliation is a lifestyle choice. Trading one's fixed political identity for the shapeshifting convenience of choice is also useful if the ultimate aim is to stay as far away from power as possible, as noted above. A fixed identity is necessary to engage power. One without it does not really know, nor can he or she really fight to defend, his or her position within a system.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the rise of alter-globalization political discourse in Southern Europe from an anthropological perspective. It has use an ethnographic approach to better understand how class conflict, economic hardship, and alternative political ideologies in Greece, Spain, and Italy have coalesced to produce a social movement intent on challenging the status-quo thinking on globalization. At the same time, however, this study finds that the movement has certain limitations in its relationship to political power.

The previous three sections introduced the reader to some discursive political categories present in Athens, Barcelona, and Naples through a series of interviews and vignettes from the field. These sections have attempted to

locate the movement within the broader socio-political spectrum in those countries. Activists are found to be strongly averse to assuming any fixed class or political party identity. Lifestyle identities, on the other hand, figure rather prominently in activist discourse. Lifestyles discursively connect the different political, social, and stylistic themes present in the field.

Those belonging to the activist lifestyle distrust and dislike individuals seen to partake of the other lifestyles, and speak of a hostile but ill-defined political entity that presses continuously against the individual, limiting his or her capacity to make independent decisions. Those out of this scene are seen as lacking in political autonomy and forming a kind of obedient majority. Dominant political structures, therefore, can only be challenged through the liberation of one's autonomous agency. For this line of reasoning, political resistance happens on subjective terms, for example through the return to a more just, ethical, and humane individual lifestyle.

The personal has been equated with the political for many activists at least since the late 1960s, when Carol Hanisch and others popularized the phrase "the personal is political" in the context of the feminist movement (Hanisch 2006). Movements have concomitantly begun turning against the idea of directly tackling power, as witnessed also in the growth of "horizontalism" (Becker, Stahler-Sholk, and Vanden 2014). Activists, in fact, are increasingly responding to injustice by creating closed social/economic circuits (Pratt and Luetchford 2013) in which the social movement itself becomes a parallel "way of life" (Chuang 2013). For some observers this personal politics, or "biopolitics," is the potential foundation for a new democratic order (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005, 2011), yet this study argues that, at least for the alter-globalization movement in Southern Europe, the more politics is left to the personal sphere the easier it is for an individual to disassociate him or herself from broader collective responsibilities, and that this stance ultimately becomes antipolitical.

The conclusions arrived at in this study build on, and resonate most closely with, those arrived at by Geoffrey Pleyers (2010). Pleyers describes a part of the alter-globalization movement as not only rooted in a desire to distance itself from traditional politics and institutions but also from the classical idea of revolution. Social change for these activists, Pleyers finds, is not a matter of replacing one political system with another but of radically changing the relationship between the self and society. This change starts by reclaiming one's

autonomous agency against a hostile global capitalist system. The focus on experiential autonomy means that all social change must be lived, not planned. As such, activists create spaces where politics and pleasure coincide, allowing people to experience new types of self-society relationships. Pleyers notes that this ultimately "holds alter-globalization at a critical distance from political actors" and "enables alter-globalization activists to combine a will to engage in the political sphere with a rejection of traditional forms of political engagement" (Pleyers 2010, 222, quoted in Klæmintsdóttir Olsen 2010, 6). Here, we have attempted to grasp the anthropological factors that lie behind this paradox, and that allow unconventional political subjectivities like these to take hold.

These conclusions both supplement and complement current accounts of social movements in Southern Europe. They supplement John Karamichas' (2015) emphasis on the connections between the many groups/institutions that form networks of protest with an analysis that grounds activism in the lived experiences of protesters. That is, this study brings a microscope to the movement's anatomy, where others have brought a telescope to see the movements' networks, organizational structures, and institutional relations. Della Porta's (2015) recent work deals with the increase in the number of protests across Europe that challenge what is perceived as a decline in democratic and civic values. The author speaks of a crisis of neoliberalism and focuses on the movements that, like the one in this study, include young and educated members of the middle class. She calls for an understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural context in which these movements develop. This ethnographic study complements Della Porta's efforts by responding to her call to look at the cultural context of the movement.

Finally, studies conducted by Joseph Luders (2010) and Paul Almeida (2014), like this one, place an emphasis on the context within which movements operate. Luders points out that it is not so much the capabilities of a social movement that determine its success or failure in achieving its objectives, but the capabilities of its targets. The weaker a political structure already is the more likely a social movement can put another dent in it, if not take it down completely. Almeida expands on this perspective when he finds that the success or failure of a social movement is also determined by the way local conditions fit within larger global economic and geopolitical processes. This study, like the

ones by Luders and Almeida, also focuses on the characteristics and abilities of the "targets" and the larger political structure that a movement aims to change.

A key difference/addition is the fact that this study asks the novel question: what happens to a movement that fails to reach its objectives, but does not disappear from the scene? It is generally accepted that if a movement fails to impact politics, or is not co-opted by politicians, then it will eventually disband. Yet, here we find that the alter-globalization movement in Southern Europe has not met with this fate, changing only slightly in its outward form through the decades. Readers interested in expanding the fail-success dichotomy in their understanding of social movements, or in going beyond models of contentious politics in which groups maximize power under conditions of power scarcity (similar to economic models based on material scarcity), may be interested in this research's theoretical and ethnographic findings.

In practical political terms, these findings point to a potentially problematic development for the state of democracy in liberal, western societies in general. This ritualistic form of activism risks leaking out of the space occupied by radical social movements and shaping the perspectives of increasing numbers of individuals in "mainstream" society. The possibility of being nominally revolutionary yet politically ineffectual – allowing for the feel good moralism of "activist culture" without engendering any of the dangers that an actual redesigning of economic relations entails – may be seen as an increasingly desirable option form more and more members of the middle and upper classes. One could argue that there is evidence that this is affecting the attitudes of the liberal elites in the large urban centers of other parts of the West, too.

Trading in one's actual class identity for this form of lifestyle identity politics risks threatening the moral foundations of western democracy. A small class conscious elite could easily disable the civic participation of large sections of the population – more preoccupied with expressing the *act* of choice, than weighing their actual options. In sum, constant choice without actual options. Further research is needed to explore this hypothesis more systematically.

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