‘Mild Mannered’? Protest and Mobilisation in Portugal in Times of Crisis

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Introduction: Portugal and the protests in the Mediterranean basin

The aim of this paper is to analyze the consequences of the economical crisis and of the adoption of austerity measures on Portuguese citizens’ political mobilisation, focusing on the involvement in protest events, in particular in demonstrations and strikes, since 2010.

As is well-known, great waves of protests have in recent year swept through the Mediterranean Basin.¹ The wave of protest in the Arab world has been at centre of the media and public opinion’s attention since the dramatic actions of twenty-six-year-old Tunisian pitchman Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010 in Tunis. This act became the symbol trigger-event of the so-called Arab Spring, which spread in several Arab countries during the following two years, up to overthrowing governments in four countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

In Greece, the trigger-event of the recent protest cycle came with the May 2010 general strike against the spending cuts and tax increases announced by Prime Minister, George Papandreou, following the country’s bailout by the IMF-EU-ECB troika in April. The strike

¹ We use this simplifying definition even if some countries involved in the Arab Spring and Portugal itself do not border the Mediterranean.
culminated in a large demonstration in Athens and an attempt to storm the Greek Parliament. In May 2011, the Greek Indignant Citizens Movement emerged, in the context of the platform Direct Democracy Now!, inspired by the Spanish ¡Democracia Real YA!, which had in turn been inspired by emerging movements in neighbouring Portugal, also facing the consequences of an externally imposed rapid deflationary policy.

Our aim is not to establish direct connections, nor a ‘genealogy’ of influence across these movements, although these are likely to exist and are the subject of a growing and interesting literature (e.g. Cox et al 2012; Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013).² Rather we would like to focus on a deeper analysis of a single case in its fuller political, social and historical context in order to test some of the claims that have been made about the characteristics of this transnational cycle of protest.

As other European countries, Portugal also witnessed, important mobilisations against the politics of austerity in the past three years. In common with Greek, Spanish, and to an extent, Italian citizens, the Portuguese have suffered in this period the imposition of drastic measures of fiscal contraction which, aside from worsening the economic situation, increasing unemployment have deeply undermined what in the country are considered the ‘conquests’ of the 25 April 1974 revolution that ushered in Portugal’s democracy – a set of social rights in terms of labour law, healthcare and access to education. Starting from an already unfavourable situation – the country has long been amongst the poorest in western Europe – the living conditions in austerity Portugal have deteriorated significantly. The litany of problems is depressingly familiar, so we will offer only a quick reminder: with GDP contracting in three of the five years between 2008 and 2012, unemployment rose from 8.6 per cent in 2008 to hit 15.9 in 2012 (but reaching 37.7 for those under 25).³ The impact of these measures has been particularly unequal in a country that is already amongst the most unequal in Europe: the largest fall in disposable household income has been felt in the poorest tenth of the population (Carmo, Cantante e Carvalho 2012).

As in other countries, the measures that have prompted these conditions have not gone unchallenged by civil society, and there has been an intensification of protest, from fairly

ephemeral “media friendly” actions such as the large demonstrations called by new anti-austerity organisation, to more low profile but enduring conflicts, such as the months-long dock workers’ strikes. On 12 March 2011, 200,000 people marched on behalf of Portugal’s Geração à Rasca (“Desperate Generation”) – the name of the Facebook group and blog that was unexpectedly responsible for what has been considered the largest protest in Portugal since the revolutionary period of 1974-1975 (Baumgarten, 2013; Ramos Pinto, 2012). In the ensuing months and years, demonstrations of different sizes have followed one another. By most accounts, the largest of all demonstrations within this cycle occurred on 2 March 2013, organized by the platform Que se Lixe a Troika (“Fuck the Troika”, QLT). This demonstration seemed also to be the last episode of a discontinuous flux of protests, which involved – around a heterogeneous and in part vague amalgam of claims – very different social sectors and classes. In fact, the demonstration organised by the QLT movement on 1 June 2013 gathered only a few hundred of people.

This paper will analyse the period between January 2010 and July 2013 as a cycle of protest, seeing to uncover the dynamics and modes of contention that characterise it. The Portuguese ‘austerity cycle of protest’ is only now beginning to be analysed in earnest, but the emerging theme and tone is the novelty of type of mobilisation witnessed in recent years. Baumgarten’s field study has begun offering us invaluable insights into the internal dynamics of the new social movement organisations that have appeared in this period, as well as the working of their internal identitary and democratic processes. For her, the Geração à Rasca demonstration of 12 March 2011 ‘marked a turning point; after this point the level of mobilization by civil society actors increased, including the birth of various new activist groups and cooperation networks’ (Baumgarten, 2013: 461). Estanque, Costa and Soeiro, building on Sousa Santos’ insight, emphasize the connection with global protest movements in terms of emotional activation, as well defending that the mobilisation of a young precariat in new forms of anti-austerity protests constitutes a ‘new pole of collective mobilization’ in Portugal that is broader than that of the traditional politics (Estanque, Costa and Soeiro 2013: 106, Sousa Santos, 2011). These readings echo international overviews see the networks of young people behind these mobilisations as part of ‘new new’ social movements characterised by their transnational connections, use of ICT as a mobilisation tool, the combination of material, political and identitary demands and particularly the establishment
of new forms organisation, especially horizontal, direct or diffuse modes of decision-making and representation (See Feixa, Pereira and Juris, 2009, and Fonseca 2012).

Our work differs from theirs to the extent that we look to shift the focus slightly away from these social movements and networks in and of themselves, and instead try to analyse them as part of a broader cycle of contention, and in relation to other social and political actors. Our aim is to test in particular the claims about the reach, scope and impact of these mobilisations on the field of contention as a whole, and in relation to traditions and existing modes of social mobilisation in contemporary Portugal. In doing so we hope to place this particular manifestation of this global cycle in its local context, and perhaps open up new questions that can lead us to a better understanding both these movements, and of their relation and impact on other actors. One aspect we are keen to investigate is whether these ‘new new’ forms of mobilisation are embedded in a broader cycle of contention, if we can witness a build up of momentum, or whether we are witnessing a discontinuous series of manifestations and other forms of protest, and to what extent these movements are central to the articulation of opposition to the politics of austerity in Portugal.

In order to do this we have constructed a database of protest events in Portugal between January 2010 and July 2013. Using a Protest Event Analysis (PEA) methodological framework, we sampled three weekly issues of the online platform of the daily national newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, which includes the newspaper’s news, as well as agency material from the Portuguese news agency *Lusa*, sampling the Monday, Wednesday and Friday issues of the newspaper between 1 January 2010 and 31 July 2013. We established a number of criteria for selection of the news items to include reports on any form of ‘contentious’ claim-making: that is, interaction between collective actors taking place outside established channels of representation and exchange (such as elections, parliamentary debates, ‘concertation’ meetings or other forms of ‘ordinary’ political interaction). The resulting episodes of contention were coded according to primary actor (who was responsible for the contents episode), the claim or issue at stake, the primary target of the action, the type of action (e.g. demonstration, occupation, petition or strike), as well as number of other
characteristics of the action, if available: place, numbers involved, duration and whether or not violence had taken place.\(^4\)

The database covers protest events in multiple dates as long as they are reported in the dates sampled. While not able to provide a day-by-day account of protest events, this allows us to elicit changes in the frequency and repertoires of protest and the role played by different categories of actors.

The central part of our study is thus the evolution political contention in Portugal between January 2010 and June 2013, the period that precedes and follows the Portuguese bailout by the IMF-EU-ECB troika in May 2011. However, in order to offer a better contextualisation of this process we start by reviewing the literature on civil society and political participation in Portugal – the backstory to the recent re-emergence of protest.

*Portuguese civil society activism in historical context: the ‘mild-mannered’ disaffected*

Influential studies on the political attitudes and participation of Portuguese citizens since the establishment of democracy in the mid 1970s have argued that the country is characterised by comparatively low levels of involvement, (Freire 2000; Freire and Magalhães, 2002; Freire 2003; Magalhães, 2005; Pequito Teixeira and Almeida Pereira, 2012) a feature partly motivated by decreasing trust in political institutions (Magalhães 2005; Magalhães 2009; Pinto et al., 2012).

These two dimensions of Portuguese political attitudes are said to be closely linked. In a 2005 study Magalhães stressed the distance of Portuguese citizens from political institutions and underlines that, even if support for democracy is solid, ‘the most prevalent and consequential attitudinal-behavioural syndrome in Portuguese politics remains one where strong political disaffection is associated with low levels of all kinds of political participation, including voting in elections, resorting to conventional forms of political action or engaging in unconventional civic activism’ (Magalhães, 2005: 988). He also adds that ‘this finding is made particularly stinking by the fact that the Portuguese transition to democracy involved

\(^4\) Our methodology draws on both the PEA and ‘Contentious Politics’ approach, combining the systematic coding of newspaper events with content analysis of the same, as well as broader contextual sweep of available materials, seeking to map the field of contention, rather than focusing on single actor. See: Earl et al 2004; Koopmans and Statham 1999; Tilly and Tarrow 2007.
massive levels of political mobilisation and activism, which seem to have all but disappeared’ (Magalhães 2005: 988). Magalhães explains this situation through the concept of ‘democratic disaffection’, which he considers more pertinent than that of ‘democratic dissatisfaction’: support for democracy and its main institutions – parliament and parties – has remained strong and stable from the 1980s until today, despite slow but steady decline of satisfaction with regime performance. A more recent study (Pequito Teixeira and Almeida Pereira, 2012), covering the period 2000-2010 showed that even if the hypothesis of a crisis of legitimacy in Portugal during this period must be rejected, an erosion of specific support could be detected, mainly in respect to regime performance, regime institutions and political actors.

This increasing distance from institutions reveals itself in different ways. One is decreasing participation in elections. Already in 2002, a study of Freire and Magalhães highlighted ‘while in the 1970s Portugal was one of the Western nations without compulsory voting were turnout was higher, turnout today is already below the average for the West European democracies without compulsory voting, in what represents the sharpest decline among OECD countries’ (Freire and Magalhães 2002: 47–50). In the intervening decade since their study, the situation has not improved: while a slight rise can be seen in the proportion of those resident in Portugal voting, the return of a pattern of emigration continues to depress voting turnout (see Table 1).

Until recently, this disaffection was not, however, translated into participation in unconventional political, in social movements, protest and demonstrations. Membership of voluntary associations, participation in strikes and other actions was also low (Magalhães, 2005: 975, Inglehart and Catterberg 2002: 308). Fernandes’s comparative analysis of Portuguese engagement in civic associations also reveals that Portugal, alongside Spain, has the weakest concentration of and participation in civil society organisations in all democracies in Western Europe (Fernandes, 2012: 1). While there are no systematic comparisons of participation and incidence of contentious political mobilisation, a preliminary analysis suggests that, in the period 1989-1995, Portugal showed a drastically lower level of people’s engagement in protest activities than even Greece (Accornero, 2012).

Rejecting ‘fatalistic’ and ‘culturalist’ explanations for these patterns of participation, recent scholarship has emphasised the importance of education and access to the cognitive resources
that capacitate political participation. In fact, among the 15 countries that composed the European union in 2002, Portugal had, by far, the lowest percentage of the population in the 25-64 age group who had completed secondary education (21%). Manuel Villaverde Cabral too stresses the “political alienation” and “distance to power”, caused by both socio-economic inequality and low levels of civic and cognitive skills» (Cabral, 1997 and 2000). In Freire’s opinion, Portugal’s high levels of abstention in legislative elections, can be explained by a deficit of socio-political resources and/or to a socio-geographical isolation (Freire, 2000: 122).

These patterns are surprising since Portuguese democracy was forged in an atmosphere of heightened mobilisation. The Portuguese revolutionary period (the nineteen months that followed the removal of the dictatorship by a military coup in 25 April 1974) was characterised almost daily demonstrations, public meetings, strikes and other forms of unconventional political activity that included the occupation of houses, firms and agricultural land (Cerezales 2004; Ramos Pinto 2013). This was, in many senses the culmination of longer cycle of contestation that had brought the dictatorship under pressure, but which shaped the nature of the country’s transition to democracy and of its democratic institutions (Accornero 2012, Bermeo 1997, Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira 2010). Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s protest characterised the years of austerity that preceded Portugal’s entry to the European Economic Community in 1986. During this period the country was forced to resort to IMF bailouts in 1978 and 1983, and witnessed its first general strike since 1934 in 1982.

Data collated for the years 1980-1995 shows that high levels of labour mobilisation characterised the political landscape of the period. In this period there were 1,415 protest events in Portugal, including strikes, demonstrations, occupations, hunger strikes, and riots. Among these, strikes accounted for 57 per cent of all protest events (807 strikes), and all other forms of protest represented 43 per cent of contentious political events (there were 608 such events). 1982 was the year with the highest number of protest events in Portugal (170)

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5 Such positions were often defended by some anglo saxon scholars, who stated that the ‘Portuguese had inherited from the authoritarian past a fundamentally “corporatist” and “illiberal” political culture’ (Wiarda and Mott, 2000, quoted by Magalhães, 2005: 973) and that Portuguese political culture would be traditionally non-participatory, except during the transition when the ‘other Portugal’ exploded in revolution. (Wiarda et al, 2006).

6 These figures come from the European Protest and Coercion Database (EPCD). The EPCD is based on daily and sub-daily coded data gathered using Lexis-Nexis and Reuters Textline library as primary sources. These
in the period 1980-1995 and the second highest number of strikes (101). Not coincidentally, 1982 was a difficult year for the Portuguese economy, preceding the second IMF intervention in only five years.

It is also interesting to observe that after the IMF intervention and throughout most of that decade, strike action and rates of participation decreased progressively, reaching a low point in 1987. This trend was not directly accompanied by an equivalent decrease in others kinds of protest, which only declined after 1985. All types of protest events, including strikes, began to increase again in the two-year period between 1988 and 1989, coinciding with the liberalising reforms of the second PSD (centre-right) government under Cavaco Silva. Cavaco Silva’s government implemented strong structural reforms to liberalise the Portuguese economy, including fiscal reform, the liberalisation of public enterprises and state media, and the reform of labour and agricultural legislation.

After the mid-1990s, the availability of data on various types of protest is more fragmentary, but the evidence suggests that 1995 closed a cycle of contention and opened a period of relative quiet. In the field of labour protest, with the Portuguese economy buoyed by membership of the European Economic Community, labour conflicts entered a decade of progressive decline (Figure 7). There were no general strikes during the 1990s, and only two were called in the decade following the millennium (Table 2). Charting the evolution of non-labour contention using protest events analysis for the years 1992-2002, Mendes and Seixas noted a tendency towards a decrease for the average number of participants in protests: while the number of contentious events increased, these tended to attract fewer participants, and be marked by more ‘spectacular and radical’ actions (Mendes and Seixas 2005: 119-120).

In summary we can see that Portuguese civil society has been far from static over the past four decades. There have been periods of intense mobilisation, but this has also been accompanied by an erosion of the weight and role of traditional forms of political participation, particular in the case of labour unions, political parties and electoral participation. How do the anti-austerity mobilisations of the 2010-2013 fit into this pattern?

include global, regional and local wire-services as well as on-line newspapers and magazines. The database was created by Ron Francisco at the University of Kansas.

7 Unlike the EPCD data, which draws on news sources, Figure 7 draws on governmental statistics drawing on legal notices of strike action, which results in the reporting of a much wider range of actions. As a result of different methods of collection the two series cannot be combined, but they show roughly comparable fluctuations.
In the rest of this paper we analyse the ebb and flow of protests during this period and explore the evolution and position of these new movements. Finally, we will try to consider continuities and discontinuities in a historical perspective, and to understand the relevance of new and traditional movements and forms of actions.

Protest and austerity in Portugal since 2010

In order to address these questions, and build a picture of the protest cycle initiated by the severe economic crisis affecting Portugal since the start of the decade, we compiled a database of protest events reported by one of the country’s major news outlets.

The data, summarised in Figure 1, reveal an evolving protest cycle with a number of peaks and troughs. The first half of 2010 sees a concentration of protest events that coincides with the shockwaves of the global economic crisis hitting Portugal. By the beginning of the year, the Socialist minority government was forced to admit that significant budget cuts would be necessary in order to meet the Eurozone’s deficit target. Pay freezes and other deflationary measures were strongly contested by multiple actors, with the most high profile actions being a public sector strike in early March and the organisation of simultaneous nationwide demonstrations by the CGTP trade union federation in early July. A second peak can be found around the time of the resignation of the Socialist government under worsening economic conditions. Following the general strike of November 2010, the incidence of protest events grows markedly, culminating in the large Geração à Rasca demonstration of 12 March.

On 22 March 2011, the socialist government led by José Socrates its proposed 4th Stability and Growth Programme (Programa de Estabilidade e Crescimento – PEC IV), which aimed to restrain public spending and limit the growth of the budget deficit, defeated in Parliament. The rejection of the PEC IV made external intervention inevitable, and the government’s position untenable. It duly resigned 10 days later and began negotiations for a rescue package with the EC-ECB-IMF troika. The 78 billion Euro bailout was agreed by May, immediately before the June 2011 elections which saw the appointment of a coalition government formed by the centre-right PSD (Partido Social Democrático - Social Democratic Party) and the right-wing PP (Partido Popular – Popular Party). While public spending cuts had begun under the Socialist government, the most hard-hitting measures have been applied since its resignation, as the bailout conditions required painful cuts to salaries, pensions, benefits and
the public services (health, transport and education). Together with tax increases (including the rising of the sales tax to 23 per cent), these measures have had a significant effect on the financial security of many in the country, with knock-on effects on consumption, and through that on employment, creating what feels to many as a vicious circle.

After the 2011 legislative elections, two more peaks of protest have emerged: in the second half of 2012, and more recently, between March and June 2013. Both of these were marked by some of the largest public demonstrations recorded in Portuguese history, on 15 September 2012 and in 2 March 2013. Both were organised by the social movement *Que se Lixe a Troika* – exactly the kind of the ‘new politics’ that commentators have argued we are beginning to see emerging across different polities, not only in Europe, but also elsewhere.

But event counts alone cannot give us a complete picture of a complex cycle of contention. Measuring the weight of different protests in terms of participation is notoriously difficult, and is not reflected in pure event counts - for instance, four of the five general strikes seen in Portugal in this period, which mobilised many thousands of citizens, appear in months where the sample shows relatively small numbers of protest events.

But more can be gleaned from an analysis of forms of action used, and the categories of actors who were reported as leading or initiating the protest events in the database. Such an analysis highlights two clear patterns: that a shift in the kind of protest used is observable between early 2010 and 2013, and labour has remained throughout the most significant protest actor.

Firstly, the sample reveals overwhelming predominance of labour-initiated protest. Despite the focus by the Portuguese and international media on new actors, particularly the supposed centrality of labour market outsiders to anti-austerity protests, our sample shows that ‘traditional’ labour organisations are still at the forefront of protest in Portugal. Across the period, 78 (47.9 per cent of protests were initiated by public sector trade unions), to which we can add the further eleven organised by national trade union federations such as the CGTP or UGT, and the 19 led by workers in the private sector. Overall, two-thirds of protests (66.3 per cent) in the sample arose from the world of work and workers representative organisations (Figure 4). In contrast, political groups such as QLT, M12M or *Geração à Rasca* appear as the lead actors in only 19 events (11.7 per cent), barely more than in protests organised by users and consumers of public and private services (15 events).
A second notable feature is that the sample shows strikes and demonstrations appearing in different cycles. These forms of action overshadow all others in the sample: 66 of the 163 events listed are demonstrations (40.5 per cent) and 76 strikes of various durations and scope (46.6 per cent). Other types of action, including petitions, public assemblies and occupations characterise primarily only 12.9 per cent of protest events. But the way in which they are distributed through our period differs – strikes are concentrated in two peaks of protest that preceded the 2011 election (Figure 3). After that their frequency diminishes to emerge once again, although with slightly lower intensity, in the last 6 months. Demonstrations on the other hand, become more common in the periods of contestation in mid to late 2012 and since March 2013 (Figure 2).

*Mobilising against the austerity: Labour and ‘New New’ Social Movements*

The connection between these two emerging patterns can be made clearer by charting the political evolution over the two and half years in question. From this we argue that throughout the period, the public sector and its unions have become increasingly central in contesting the government’s austerity programme. In addition, protest became increasingly coordinated as the two main trade union federations, began to agglomerate what had begun as more isolated protests by sector or company-level unions. Accompanying this evolution, a number of ‘new new’ social movements have emerged, but it is not clear that they have been able to sustain high levels of mobilisation when not supported by union action. However, while their capacity to bring out large numbers remains limited, in recent times these movements seem to have adapted to use high-visibility protest actions (demonstrations) by small groups of activists as a means to gather media attention and drive their campaigns forward.

At the beginning of the period sampled, during the first wave of protest (the first half of 2010), over a third of labour-based protest originated in the private sector, notably over pay and layoffs (Figure 5). Over the remainder of the period, the incidence of private-sector labour conflict diminishes, and public sector workers and trade union federations take a leading role in protest. Available data on the pattern of strike action in Portugal seems to confirm this trend. Because of the time lag in the publication of official statistics, numbers
beyond 2011 are not available. But in that year strikes across multiple companies (a sign of coordination) accounted for 39.7 per cent of strike events, up from 18.6 in 2010.\(^8\)

Such an increase in coordination of protest by labour is evident in the growing use of the general strike as a tactic: during the first 35 years of democracy (1974-2009), Portuguese trade union federations called general strikes on five occasions (See Table 2). Since 2010, however, a similar number have taken place in only three years. Moreover, only once in the previous three decades had both trade union federations joined forces in supporting a general strike. The Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (General Confederation of Portuguese Workers – CGTP) and the União Geral dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ General Union – UGT) have long represented different political leanings of Portuguese labour, with the CGTP working closely with the Portuguese Communist Party, and the UGT more closely linked to the Socialist Party. This closeness to one of two ruling parties means that in the past the UGT has been more willing to negotiate with government, and the federations have acted more as rivals than as allies (Royo 2002: 94-5). Yet, since 2010, the federations have put their differences aside on three occasions, most recently in June 2013. In this the UGT seems at times to have been pushed by its membership: when it decided not to support the November 2012 general strike, 23 of its 49 affiliated unions (including 6 large public sector unions) decided to join the strike nonetheless.\(^9\)

Whether or not this growing coordination of the labour movement has been accompanied by a strengthening of its capacity for mobilisation is, however, a question for which we do not yet have an answer. It is difficult to estimate the impact and scope of each of these general strikes, and available data on union affiliation, while it shows a steady decline in trade union density rates, is only available until 2010.\(^10\)

What is clear is that new organisations have appeared on the field of protest, and have been particularly active since the summer of 2012. Movements such as Geração à Rasca (GR) and Que se Lixe a Troika (QLT) have been the focus of media attention, which identifies them as

\(^8\) Data from Estatísticas em Síntese - Greves. Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos, Ministério da Economia e Emprego, 2010 and 2011. The 2010 figure seems to be the continuation of a pattern, with the proportion of multiple company strikes similar to those observed in 2005, 2006 and 2007 – the closest years for which data is available.

\(^9\) http://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/23-sindicatos-da-ugt-emitem-preavisos-de-greve--1572243

\(^10\) According to the ICTWSS Database, reported union density rates have steadily fallen from 60.8 in 1978 to 19.3 in 2010: Jelle Visser, ICTWSS database (Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts, 1960-2010), version 4.0: http://www.uva-aias.net/208
the principal novelty in civic and political engagement and as the principal civil society response to austerity measures.

The first of these movements to appear – *Geração à Rasca* – predates even the Spanish *Indignados*. The manner and speed through which this movement emerged is indeed testament to the role of ICTs in supporting mobilisation: the demonstration was called by three friends who started a Facebook group and blog after being inspired by a popular song by the Portuguese band Deolinda, *Parva que sou* (‘How dumb I am’), whose lyrics express the anxieties of job precariousness and lack of prospects of Portuguese twenty-somethings.11 As Baumgarten has suggested, despite references to international movements and themes that included the Arab Spring of 2010, the focus and key references of this emerging movement were principally national (Baumgarten 2013: 465-466). This is clear in its name, *Geração à Rasca*, a reference to an earlier cycle of protest in the early 1990s, and especially to university and high-school student protests against the then PSD government’s educational reforms. At the time there was a considerable backlash from political and media elites against student mobilisation, which was accused by both many of being self-serving and hedonistic, giving it the name of *Geração Rasca* - ‘Trashy Generation’ (Seixas 2005). The 2011 protests recovered this title and created a pun by adding ‘à’, changing the meaning to ‘Desperate Generation’.

Ostensibly non-partisan, even anti-political in the sense of a rejection of established political parties, the *Geração à Rasca* demonstration was certainly a success – it gathered between 200,000 and 500,000 on the streets of several Portuguese cities, making it (probably) the largest street demonstration in Portugal since the revolutionary period of 1974-1975. But it is important to note that the *GR* demonstration did not come out of thin air: although it lacked a traditional organizational structure, placing the event in our longer-time frame sees it as part of a on-going cycle of protest, and the growing dissatisfaction with Portuguese political elites in the lead up to the May 2011 bailout. The *Geração à Rasca* Facebook invitation worked because it tapped an already engaged current of protest.

In addition, we must be careful about seeing this as a fundamental turning point in the pattern of civil society mobilisation in Portugal. After these auspicious beginnings, the ability of ‘new new’ social movements to sustain mobilisation has had two sides: if in some instances

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they have been able to mobilise in very large numbers, being responsible for some of the largest demonstrations since the Revolution; in between these events they have been less successful at maintaining significant levels of participation in other demonstrations, public assemblies and other initiatives.

A number of organizations and movements appeared after March 2011, as smaller protest organisations coalesced and created alliances. The following month, the organizers of the *Geração à Rasca* demonstration created the platform M12M: *Movimento 12 de Março* (‘12 March Movement’). Again emphasizing its non-partisan, neither right not left position, and eschewing any programmatic positions, the movement invoked Portugal’s Nobel prize in literature, José Saramago, in their aim “to make every citizen a politician”. By the summer of 2011 they joined other groups - many recent offshoots of global networks such as *Indignados Lisboa, Acampada Lisboa – Democracia Veradeira Já, Portugal Uncut, or ATTAC Portugal* - to create the 15-O Platform, coordinating with similar organisations across the world to stage a further demonstration on 15 October 2011. This was also a significant protest, if considerably smaller than the March 2011 events.12

Throughout this period, we can see a shift in the attitude of established political actors on the left to the new movement organisations, from an initial suspicion towards increasing contact and collaboration. Particularly through the end of 2011 and beginning of 2012 there were signs of the anti-austerity movements splitting along the traditional divisions on the left, caught between the rivalry between the PCP and the *Bloco de Esquerda*. After the March 2012 the secretary-general of the CGTP, Arménio Carlos accused the 15-O of having provoked clashes with the police during the strike, a tactic he believed distracted attention from the real issues and allowed the police to stoke up a climate of fear, and suggested instead that the CGTP only recognised a different anti-austerity organisation, the *Precários Inflexíveis* (‘Inflexible short-term contract workers’ – PI). However, among other players, collaborations had already begun developing, with several ‘new new’ movements engaging with established political actors in initiatives such as the creation of a ‘Citizen Audit on Sovereign Debt’ (*Auditoria Cidadã à Dívida Pública*) aimed at promoting debate around debt restructuration or even its cancellation, whose organizing committee included a former

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secretary general of the CGTP union federation and a former socialist junior minister, amongst others.\(^\text{13}\)

This tendency towards greater collaboration was evident in October 2012, when the leaders of the M12M joined others close to the CGTP and the left-wing party Bloco de Esquerda in organising a ‘Democratic Congress for Alternatives’ (Congresso Democratico das Alternativas – CDA). Despite drawing criticism from both the Communist Party and the UGT union federation, the Congress brought together around 1,500 people aiming to create a common platform unifying the various movements and groups fighting against austerity.\(^\text{14}\)

The CDA, together with other groups and organisations, supported a further demonstration-organising platform: *Que se Lixe a Troika. Queremos as Nossas Vidas de Volta* (‘Fuck the Troika: we Want our Lives Back!’ – QLT). As with M12M and 15O, the QLT has defined itself as non-partisan in its slogans, communiqués and publicity. The terms right or left are barely mentioned, and there are many expressions of independence. Nevertheless, its left-wing positioning is evident, if only because pattern of alliances it has established left-wing parties (PCP and Bloco de Esquerda) and with the union federation CGTP.\(^\text{15}\) Despite its earlier suspicions over the CDA, and having often publicly criticised the ‘new new’ movements (most recently in a highly sceptical editorial of its members’ newspapers), it seems that the PCP changed strategy in 2012, and opted for a closer collaboration with the non-aligned anti-austerity protests.\(^\text{16}\) One newspaper reported that the QLT organising committee included several leading PCP members, alongside other BE leaders.\(^\text{17}\) Although this does not meant that the QLT is a ‘front organisation’, it does show that since 2012 there is a greater degree of coordination between ‘old old’ and ‘new new’ politics in Portugal: a few days after the demonstration of 15 September, the QLT organizers called on its supporters to attend a demonstration convened by the CGTP on 29 September 2012, while the CGTP supported the QLT’s 2 March 2013, demonstration, which once again was said to have broken participation records. And once more, alongside the decidedly ‘internationalist’ feel and claims of the organisers, the historic symbols of protest and democracy the country

\(^{13}\) [http://www.auditoriacidada.info/](http://www.auditoriacidada.info/)

\(^{14}\) [http://www.congressoalternativas.org/](http://www.congressoalternativas.org/)

\(^{15}\) One newspaper claimed that there was a strong PCP and BE presence in the QLT organising committee, and leader of both these parties have attended QLT protests on several occasions:


are recurrently used by the QLT, as is the case with the song *Grândola, Vila Morena*, symbolic of the 1974-5 Revolution.¹⁸

**Preliminary conclusions**

Looking across the two and a half years since the start of 2010, we can therefore see an evolving and shifting pattern of contention, but one where multiple forms of mobilisation of civil society interact, build alliances and adapt strategies. We are still digesting our findings – but we would tentatively highlight several features:

a) The limits of ‘new new’ movements:
   a. The new social movements we charted in relation to the broader field of anti-austerity politics in Portugal certainly do evidence many interesting, and novel, characteristics: their mode of mobilisation does rely extensively on ICT; their discourse makes original identity claims based on traditionally silent vectors (informal or insecure employment, the idea of a ‘generation’); and they do advocate, in many cases, non-hierarchical forms of mobilisation and participation.
   b. On the other hand, our data (with all its limitations) does seem to suggest that these movements’ ability to mobilise extensively has been sporadic and discontinuous. In part this may be connected to the relative absence a long-established autonomous infra-structure of civil society – in contrast to similar movements in Spain, Portuguese ‘new new’ social movements have a much less dense network of autonomous social justice and campaigning smos to draw support, expertise and members from (on this see the discussion in Ramos Pinto 2012)
   c. This suggests that they may be less rooted in their constituency than is often suggested. In particular, our evidence points to the possibility (which needs to be tested by more targeted analysis) that, especially in 2012 and 2013, they have increasingly relied on alliances with established political actors, such as
political parties and particular trade unions – they seem to be a lot less likely to mobilise extensively when not backed by such established actors.

d. This in turn seems to have prompted an adaptation in tactics and repertoires, with these social movements increasingly engaged in high-profile, highly-visible by small numbers of activists, such as disrupting public events.

b) Austerity and the ‘old old’ politics:

a. Overall, in terms of sustained mobilisation – the ‘old old’ politics of labour have not diminished in importance. Even, if the forms of protest which more attracted the media attention since 2011 have been the big demonstrations organised by new anti-austerity movements, following our preliminary analysis, it seems that the most important component of the mobilisations between 2010-1013 have been the “traditional” forms of protest and, first of all, a classical instrument: the general strike.

b. The early signs are that there has been a relative strengthening of the mobilising capacity and political influence of the unions. This is evidenced in the growing use of the general strike as a protest tactic, and the coming together of Portugal’s two main trade union federations.

c. However, the continued centrality of the labour movement in anti-austerity protests is also limited by several important factors:

   i. Membership and overall strike levels are still low in historical terms: unions seems to be making the best from a position of weakness rather than significantly extending their base and gaining more influence.

   ii. Labour activism seems over-reliant on its core public sector constituency – the ‘insiders’ of Southern European dual labour markets, and private sector workers seem to have almost disappeared from public space.

d. But it would be wrong to suggest that the mobilisation of the ‘new new’ social movements has not had an influence on the unions (as well as on the political establishment in general) – they have been led to negotiate, coordinate with and in many cases participate in emerging constellation of new organisation seeking to represent new constituencies – e.g. the ‘precariat’. The question is which ‘precariat’ are both the unions and anti-austerity movements
representing: the vast cohort of the under-skilled, under or un-employed - or primarily a principally urban, middle-class segment of this group?

a) A New Politics?

a. Given these, to what extent are we witnessing the birth of a ‘new politics’ in Portugal as it goes through the crucible of austerity? While many themes of mobilisation are new, we must note and reinforce Baumgarten’s assertion about the importance of public memories and inherited frames of reference and repertoires, where the ‘values’ and actions of the 1974-5 Revolution still loom large in shaping political contention in Portugal.

b. As we noted above, much of the scholarship on Portugal’s ‘mild-mannered disaffection’ from politics points to inequalities in resources as an explanation for low participation. With the caveat outlined above (who exactly is participating in this cycle of protest) we can also add a less pessimistic outlook – the mobilisation of Portuguese civil society is not fixed and entirely limited by what could be called ‘supply-side’ factors (the characteristics of the population), but also responds to contexts and opportunities: the cycle we have analysed here has show that there is a potential and appetite for participation.

b) What can be the impact of this cycle of protest?

a. A final, and critical issue relates to the actual consequences this cycle of mobilisation. We know that this is a highly complex issue, since the effects of protest rarely are immediate or direct, and more often than not can be detected only through unexpected consequences. In any case, even if we are well aware that this is a simplistic conclusion, it is evident that neither the massive demonstrations, nor the multiplication of the general strikes, nor the months-long strong strike of the docks-workers seem to have had much effect in reversing the application of austerity measures.

b. This observation needs to be considered from at least two angles: the first is the effectiveness of democracy in Southern Europe, which the imposition of strict economic programmes by an external centre of power – as the BCE, the FMI or the UE – bring seriously into question. It is reasonable that the increasing electoral abstention and political disaffection of Southern
Europeans may be in part at least a consequence of this. The second point, linked to the previous one, is the fact that, apart from in a few cases, most of these struggles are oriented to the national state institutions, while the centres of political decision-making are increasingly located elsewhere. Yet, contentious actors continue to identify their main target in local institutions (Baumgarten, 2013). In this sense, it clearly seems that the transnational dimension persistently followed by the anti-globalisation movement has worked primarily at the level of repertoires, and even if academics tend to see each of these movements as part of a global movement, the action and orientations of activists seems to suggest otherwise.
References.


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Sousa Santos, Boaventura, Ensaio contra a auto-flagelação, Coimbra, Almedina.


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### Tab. 1 Abstention index in Portugal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Residents in Portugal</th>
<th>Not Residents in Portugal</th>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>8,5</td>
<td>8,3</td>
<td>36,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>35</td>
<td>75,3</td>
</tr>
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<td>39,5</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>41,1</td>
<td>83,1</td>
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</table>

Source: PORDATA
### Tab. 2 General Strikes in Portugal since 1975:

<table>
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<th>Organiser</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1982 (12 February)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 (11 May)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 (28 March)</td>
<td>CGTP and UGT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 (10 December)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 (30 May)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010 (24 November)</td>
<td>CGTP and UGT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 (24 November)</td>
<td>CGTP and UGT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (22 March)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 (14 November)</td>
<td>CGTP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 (27 June)</td>
<td>CGTP and UGT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

**Event Count, Portugal Jan-2010 to Jul-2013**
(3 day/week sample)

- **Events (Total per Month)**
- **2 per. Mov. Avg.**
  (Events (Total per Month))
Figure 2

Demonstrations, Portugal 01/2010 to 07/2013
(3 day/week sample)
Figure 3

Strikes, Portugal 01/2010 to 07/2013
(3 day/week sample)
Figure 4

Protest Event by Actor Category, 6-month periods 2010-2013
(3 day/week sample)

- All Others
- Political Groups
- Consumers
- Labour
Figure 5

Labour Protest by Category of Actor, 6-month periods, 2010-2013
(3 day/week sample)
Figure 6

Strikes in Portugal, 1986-2011

- Total Number of Strikes
- Total Number of Workers (000)