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## **Between Inequality and Injustice: Dignity as a Motive for Mobilization During the Crisis**

Susana Narotzky, Universitat de Barcelona

*Structural adjustment policies in Europe underscore the lack of sovereignty and responsibility of nation-states towards the wellbeing of their citizens. As a result, in popular mobilizations arguments of inequality and injustice, expressed in a demand for dignity, are intertwined. The article explores this shift away from older arguments of exploitation and domination. Using ethnographic material from an industrial town in Galicia (Spain), I analyze two apparently different types of mobilization that have emerged after the 2008 crisis, trying to understand what grievances and objectives pull people together. One is the local expression of new social movements; the other is the remaining expression of working class organization. Each of these models reinterprets a particular historical tradition of struggle while developing a new interpretation of the social objectives and subjectivities of the future. My hypothesis is that a 'moral economy' framework has superseded a 'political economy' framework in the motivation for struggle.*

*Keywords: Inequality; Injustice; Crisis; Political Economy; Moral Economy*

In Europe incomes are dwindling and basic public provisioning of education and health services is diminishing, producing material precariousness and emotional anxiety in large sectors of the population. Structural adjustment policies are underscoring the lack of sovereignty and responsibility of nation-states towards the wellbeing of their citizens. In this context, people are starting to organize, to protest and act in an attempt to change the world they live in. Very salient in all present-day mobilizations are the intertwined arguments of inequality and injustice, and the widespread demand for respect and dignity. I will explore what this shift away from older arguments of exploitation and domination means for the pedagogies of social change.

Present-day protests in Spain generally address the state's failure to secure a decent livelihood for its citizens, that is, the failure to protect and provide security across generations. The generational aspect points to the larger framework of social reproduction, where the "lack of a future"<sup>1</sup> expresses a systemic breakdown perceived in everyday life and becomes the pressing force behind the protests. The argument behind mobilizations is that the state fails citizens because it has become completely subservient to capitalist interests and especially to financial, speculative forms of accumulation, a rationalization that implicitly condemns forms of wealth accumulation through monopoly rent privilege. Collusion between political and economic elites is denounced and rejected as corruption, and impunity for these elites' illegal behaviour adds insult to injury while it negates the basic tenet of liberal democracy, i.e. equality of citizens before the Law. Increasingly salient are appeals to recover "national sovereignty" in the face of austerity policies that are perceived as imposed from without by powerful trans-territorial institutions such as the infamous Troika<sup>2</sup>. The perception that the institutions supporting and organizing capitalist accumulation and directly

responsible for the structure of livelihood opportunities are beyond national democratic control is acute. It is intensified by the certainty that democratically elected parliaments are not held responsible vis-à-vis the citizenry but vis-à-vis non-elected transnational institutions that support capitalist accumulation or surplus extraction.

Using ethnographic material from an industrial town in Galicia, I will analyze mobilizations that have emerged after the 2008 crisis, trying to understand what grievances and objectives pull people together. The relationship of these movements with the memories of past practices of struggle will be related to present-day forms of wealth accumulation and to how ordinary people interpret them. I will focus on the convergence of traditional union activism with other collective forms of mobilization in order to show how they are increasingly converging around a call for dignity, basically a claim to recognition and social worth (Fraser 1995, 2001). The various modes of resistance, protest and mobilization hark back to a local tradition of struggle in terms of continuity or rupture as they develop new subjectivities and define the social objectives of the future.

The growth of unemployment and precarisation have transformed subjectivities in the most intimate ways, as people are forced to rely on personalized or institutional forms of dependency that the ideology of autonomy and self-reliance of the neoliberal model had discredited. This systematic humiliation has produced a struggle to change the moral frameworks in which making a life acquires value and meaning (Narotzky and Besnier 2014) while also creating conditions of possibility for obtaining basic resources while regaining dignity. My hypothesis is that a “moral economy” framework is superseding the framework primarily based on “political economy” that dominated in the recent past as the central motivation for workers' struggles. As the ethnography shows, however, there is no clear-cut distinction between moral and politico-economic

arguments. Rather there is a tangle that gets increasingly expressed in moral terms and explicitly embedded in a discourse that underlines the failure of the state to protect and care for its citizens. This affective discourse replaces the classical structural pedagogy of socialism with an intuitive and spontaneous feeling of suffering inflicted by “the system” which includes the failure of the institutions (parties, unions) that were directly in charge of protecting and promoting working people’s wellbeing. The structures of feeling that mobilize people in Ferrol express the politico-economic production of an increasingly large surplus population (Smith 2011; Sider 1996; Li 2009), pushed to what Biehl (2012) aptly describes as “zones of social abandonment”. While these affective logics enable spontaneous expressions of overarching solidarities they have yet to develop into durable transformative political projects and organizational instruments (Williams 1989; Hobsbawm 1984; Kasmir & Carbonella 2014; Harvey 2001; Narotzky 2014). Although the sudden rise in the recent elections (2014 European Parliament, 2015 Municipal) of Podemos, a political party that voices its attachment to these new mobilizations, is directly related to this shift away from political economy and class politics and towards moral outrage at undue use of privilege on the part of “elites” (i.e. corruption, rent extraction), I will not directly address this new political landscape.

### **The context of mobilizations**

The mobilizations I will discuss emerged in the period immediately following the 2008 crisis and are ongoing. The first one is the expression of social networks of support including the reactivation of kinship networks and other forms of solidarity circulating food and clothing and giving support against house eviction (see Sabaté in this issue).

The second is the union-led mobilizations of workers and the entire community demanding employment in the context of continued job loss in the area.

Ferrol is a city of some 75,000 inhabitants located in the north-western coast of the Spanish region of Galicia, in the province of A Coruña. It has been home to military shipyards since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has developed a strong union culture at least since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1970s some 15,000 people worked in the main shipyards or in the auxiliary contract companies. Shipyard workers were heavily unionized, and work conditions and work pay defined them as privileged because they held secure jobs. Starting in the 1980s and following the general trend in Europe (Hudson and Sadler 1989; Beynon, Hudson and Sadler 1994) the shipyards were re-structured and thousands of jobs were lost. This trend has continued until the present through various moments of re-structuring and job loss in the 1990s and 2000s. Although the industry still provides 2,300 direct jobs, it has lost some 3,500 jobs since 2011, mostly in the contract firms.

The shipyard industry in Ferrol has become “flexible,” relying on a network of subcontracted auxiliary firms that do not honour collective agreements.<sup>3</sup> This has gone hand in hand with the increase in unskilled and poorly paid service jobs and the feminization of the workforce, with 81% of women working in the service sector.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the region has experienced an increase of small and medium enterprises, many linked to construction, subcontracts or spin-offs from the shipyards, logistics and service sectors, in industrial parks surrounding the town of Ferrol. Today, the Ferrol area has over 30% unemployment, well above the national rate (Narotzky 2014, 2015) that adds to precarity and population loss through migration.

### **The double bind of dependency**

The case of María, a young divorced mother of two teenage children, is an example of what moves people to collective mobilization. When María, age 42, lost her home through forced eviction because she was unable to pay the mortgage after a long stint of

unemployment, she went back to her parents' apartment with her two children and her husband (who would eventually divorce her). She says: "I have worked wherever I could find a job. I did my best. When I haven't been able to manage, my siblings have reached out to me, my parents have reached out. Because... who takes in a married couple with two children if not their parents?" María and her husband were in the process of becoming the owners of a small apartment that they had purchased with a mortgage during the housing bubble years preceding the crisis. Although she never had a permanent job, she was able to get precarious employment until the crisis hit, while her husband was self-employed as a sales representative. The loss of their jobs began a process that she defines as a return to dependency ties with her parents, a process that negated the desired autonomy of adult citizenship. She secured housing for her small family because of her parents' sense of responsibility towards their daughter and grandchildren, but the tensions of dependency strained her marriage, which eventually broke up. She speaks of the pressure it put on her parents' lives and retirement pensions and she wonders how this family solidarity will be possible if the government approves the pension reform, and adds, "I will never have a pension... I will never be able to do for my children what my parents are doing for me."

María has become an activist in alternative provisioning networks and participates in a local cooperative that recycles used clothes (*Tenda de troco*, Barter shop) and provides them free through a system of accounting that registers points for the clothes one brings, the condition of the items, and the help one provides in mending and cleaning those in bad condition. She also participates in a free food distribution process that takes place twice a week: food is collected from local donors (mostly small shops in the market or ordinary people who still have a job) and redistributed to those who need it and request

it. In return they are asked to participate and join the cooperative and their alternative project: to give as well as take help.

María's situation is not exceptional. For her, the loss of a job and of the autonomy that a monetary income provides, results in foregrounding different kinds of dependency, each with its positive and negative aspects. While participants in these quasi-institutionalized support networks unanimously underline their aim of "not depending on the state", the terms of what this non-dependency means are ambiguous. Indeed, welfare transfer programs are viewed as shameful for the recipient, but other public services such as health and education are strongly vindicated as a right acquired through past struggle. They are perceived as an inalienable attribute of citizenship and their non-provision or degradation points to the state's default on its moral obligation towards the wellbeing of its citizens. María angrily talks about the abysmal quality of the public school that her children attend. She says "I didn't finish high school, but even *I* know that the teacher is giving them crap. I go there and tell them [the teachers] 'are you kidding me? They [my children] don't even know the basics!'" She attributes this neglect to a conspiratorial strategy to render working class children useless, unskilled and pushed out to the margins of the labour force. For her, this is also a process of political destitution, a voiding of the substance of liberal citizenship (Smith 2011; Collins and Mayer 2010; Gledhill 2005). Work and housing are also understood as constitutional rights cementing political citizenship and human dignity and the state's failure to provide or protect from their loss is assessed as a systemic breakdown, as María asserts: "the system was not giving me anything".

These ambiguous aspects of dependency are superseded for the participants in support networks by the overwhelming benefits of regaining "dignity" and "respect" through collaboration with others. In María's own words: "people have to know that you still

have dignity, that you still merit the respect of everyone around you, even in the worst situation. When your situation is bad and you are suffering from it, you can truly understand others coming out of similar experiences. You feel useful because you collaborate, you participate with people who understand the situation, who give you alternatives, give you information. And you feel capable... all this helps you as a person (...) there are people there who will support you, *who will make you feel good*" (my emphasis). Here, the power of the relationship enmeshed with the circulation of material resources is highlighted: the centrality of making people valuable again in social terms, turning their mutual dependency into an expression of individual worth and even into a form of regained autonomy. At the same time, the value of remaking society through mutual dependencies defines the "common good" as a labour of care (Lawson 2007; Massey 2004; Milligan and Wiles 2010; Mol 2008).<sup>5</sup>

The main political argument for mobilization, here, is a form of mutual obligation based on shared humanity and on an often vague and allegedly self-evident definition of the "common good", rather than on an explicit "social contract". Activism is justified as resulting from a moral critique of the collusion of state and capital in depriving people from their dignity and, thus, from their humanity. Although material expressions of deprivation and dispossession are acknowledged (e.g. lack of jobs, income, housing, savings, public services) the state is viewed as the main culprit for failing in its mandate to protect citizens while protecting "banks" and corrupt elites instead. The "system", as María puts it, does not provide what it promised, *that* is the main complaint, and the system's bi-cephalic structure (State and Capital) is viewed as unique because the state is perceived as entirely subservient to the dictates of capital, whatever the party in government. Hence, stating claims in moral terms rather than in politico-economic terms, makes sense in a context where both political and economic institutions are



recognized as liars and deceivers for not providing the wellbeing they promised. Claims are framed in obligations constructed as eminently moral. They address the pledge to care, highlighting the breakdown of social reproduction both at the immediate and at the wider scale.

### **Trade union demonstrations and “Marches for Dignity”**

In Ferrol, unions have always been very strong and have a history of struggle that is commemorated every 10<sup>th</sup> of March. Present re-structuring of the shipyards and bureaucratization have de-legitimized the leadership, but unions are *still* the major mobilizing force in Ferrol and its surrounding area. Strong unions in industrial towns such as Ferrol stem from the 1960s reconstitution of a class-based union movement opposed to Francoist policies. Although rank-and-file workers are often critical of union leaders, in Ferrol unions set large numbers of people in motion.

On 19 February 2012, a nationwide demonstration against the Labour reform Law submitted by the Partido Popular (neoliberal party) was supported by some 20,000 people in Ferrol.<sup>6</sup> On 29 March 2012, the national general strike was supported by over 40,000 people in Ferrol.<sup>7</sup> On 14 November 2012, another general mobilization responded to the call of the unions with over 45,000 people taking to the streets in Ferrol. On 30 May 2013, the workers of the shipyards in Ferrol went on strike again. Two days later, on 2 June 2013, there was an art performance organized by a group of activist artists where citizens of Ferrol hung all kinds of personal garments on the gates of the shipyards and displayed a banner on the main entrance with the sentence “Carga de Dignidad” (Dignity load) referring to the workers’ slogan “Carga de trabajo” (Work load) in demand for new contracts to the shipyards.<sup>8</sup> Ten days later, on 12 June 2013, all the unions together made a call for a massive demonstration and a general strike in support of the shipyards and the development of other economic opportunities, as Ferrol

had the highest rate of unemployment in Galicia (32%) and one of the highest in Spain, up from 16.7% only three years before.<sup>9</sup> Other union mobilizations drew many people to the streets during 2013 and 2014, often in defence of the National Health System and public education. They all responded to calls from the unions, although not all the unions participated in every call.

During 2014, all over Spain, trade unions were suffering increased harassment from the Partido Popular neoliberal government and many union members were prosecuted and sentenced to prison for participating in the 29 March 2012 general strike, often as members of pickets.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, however, well-founded allegations of corruption concerning some of the union's higher-ranking officials have divested trade unions of credibility. The younger workers in the shipyards' contract firms are driven away from unions. Some are afraid of being stigmatized by the company if they become union members and of losing even their precarious employment opportunities. Most are also extremely sceptical about the large national unions Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), who are endlessly reaching tripartite agreements with the employers' national association and the government. In Ferrol, younger workers are often attracted to the Galician nationalist trade union Confederación Intersindical Galega (CIG), which has a discourse of re-territorializing the economy, pushing local employers to assume responsibility for local workers as a nation-building coalition.

Memory of the historical gains that the working class accomplished through union struggles is still present, albeit perceived as an ambiguous heritage. For many, the gains in rights and wellbeing that resulted from struggles in the 1960s and 1970s were betrayed in the neo-corporatist agreements of the 1980s, a conciliatory position that continues to this day (Narotzky 2014). This ambiguity can be observed both in the

massive support to the unions' mobilization call during the general strike of 12 June 2013 and in the *moral* framing of the struggle that sets the confrontation on a different ground. The regional newspaper *Voz de Galicia* describes it as a “*Manifestación histórica. Multitudinaria*” (Historical demonstration. Massive). The regional representative of the CIG union claimed that 120,000 had rallied and added “*É unha manifestación da dignidade, porque digno é o dereito a traballar e vivir na nosa terra*” (It is a demonstration of dignity, because dignity is our right to work and live in our land).<sup>11</sup>

Dignity is also the cry that has been driving people all over Spain in what has been termed “mareas” (tides)<sup>12</sup> in support of public services in the face of austerity cuts and privatization: Marea Blanca-Sanidad (White Tide-Health),<sup>13</sup> and Marea Verde-Educación (Green Tide-Education). Tides were extremely important mobilizing forces during the years 2011-2013, and the White Tide mobilizations in Madrid in 2013 stopped the autonomous community of Madrid's plan to privatize public health services, in what was viewed as the victory of a broad-based citizen movement, not only a trade union defence, although trade unions were part of the mobilizing instruments.<sup>14</sup> In Ferrol, where public health services account for an important sector of employment, but also where the public health system is the main provider for the majority of the population, these mobilizations have also been important.<sup>15</sup> This is a new form of workers' and ordinary citizen's coalitions around the defence of public goods. Tides have given way to the “*Marchas de la dignidad*”.

The “*Marchas de la dignidad*” (marches for dignity) converged on 22 March 2014 (22M) in Madrid, and gathered a total of between 50,000 and 2,500,000 people from different regions of Spain.<sup>16</sup> Under the slogan “*Pan, trabajo y techo*” (Bread, Work and a Roof) the marches protested against austerity measures, labour reform, mortgage

foreclosures and corruption.<sup>17</sup> In Ferrol, these marches for dignity have been organized by various civic associations. In one of the preparatory mobilizations before the 22M march to Madrid in 2014, Juan, an old union member who experienced the shipyards' re-structuring in the 1980s, spoke of the "militant-citizen" that needs to emerge and made an appeal to occupy the city streets and squares. He spoke of the younger generations without work and living on their parents' retirement pensions, and pointed to the fact that these pensions will be disappearing in the near future as this older generation dies out. He also echoed María's conspiratorial reading of the present crisis when he asserted: "The neoliberal Right is not getting it wrong. Their politics are deliberately pursued as part of a very clear strategy. Therefore, thinking that they are getting it wrong is a mistake. (...) and they will continue until they have emptied the conquests of the working class of all content. The goal of the Right, but not only in Spain, at a worldwide level is... there is a strategy (...) there is a perfectly organized design. They want to do away with all the conquests that we had achieved until now. They want us to move back to the 1920s." Juan went on to explain the conquests that are being attacked through austerity and covert privatization. These conquests are not those related to wages or labour conditions, but social conquests: public provisioning of quality health care, education and public services. For Juan and many of his peers, austerity measures are the organized dispossession of something that was not there to begin with but was produced (and achieved) as a form of common good through workers' collective struggles in the past. This was a struggle to *produce* the commons that are now being enclosed.

Struggles, therefore, define the boundaries and content of the common good and must be waged incessantly. His appeal to struggle is poignant: "The only way to change this situation is to occupy squares, occupy streets. We need to get to work, each one of us

needs to become a militant-citizen. We cannot remain passive... if we don't do it for ourselves, let's do it for our children, for future generations (...) Citizens are starting to rebel and this rebellion has to spread like an oil spill (...) because if we do not occupy the squares, the far right will occupy them, *compañeros*, it [the far right] is already shaping a discourse that resembles that of a real Left but what they are doing is confusing people, and they are winning battles. *Compañeros*, liberties are at stake, democracy is at stake, everything is at stake! But not for everyone, everything is at stake for a part of the citizenry, for the social majority... Therefore we need to fight with our own weapons. That is all, *compañeros*".

These marches for dignity are organized explicitly as a separate movement from the major national unions (CCOO, UGT), but they are defined as "of workers" and consider citizens-as-workers (beyond the employed/unemployed divide) (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014). They are led by smaller unions (CUT, SAT, CGT, CNT), smaller parties (in Galicia, Esquerda Unida-EU and Anova supported the first march), neighbourhood associations, as well as participants in the "mareas" (Marea Blanca, Marea Verde).<sup>18</sup> They present themselves as a grassroots workers' movement and do not want to be instrumentalized by the big unions, as they explicitly pointed out in their second big mobilization in November 2014.<sup>19</sup>

In the Municipal elections of May 2015, the new national party Podemos concurred in Galicia as a coalition with other left parties (EU, Anova) under the platform name of Marea and was successful in some major cities including Ferrol. They demand a re-moralization of politics that explicitly poses justice as the central objective, where justice is defined as the redress of an inequality gap expressed in terms of an opposition between the "elite" and "the people". People who adhere to this basic project of moral redress and social justice are described as "gente decente" (decent people) by

intellectuals in Podemos (Monedero 2013), as opposed, implicitly, to “indecent people” (presumably those who, although not part of the elite, choose other projects for enhancing their wellbeing, namely the far-right projects that Juan fears) (Holmes 2000, Ost 2015, Kalb 2009, Kalb and Halmi 2011). Decent/indecent is also a moral divide, one that describes positions in terms of chosen values instead of structural positioning in the exploitation/ dispossession processes. In most cases what we observe is a shift towards social-movement forms of mobilization and activism. And these rest on concepts of inequality and injustice.

### **Inequality, injustice, dignity**

What do these mobilizations tell us? The first mobilization is a grassroots movement that stems from the need to organize support in the wake of unemployment, foreclosure, and cuts to social services and subsidies. It focuses on the state’s failure to guarantee the basic material and social elements of a livelihood within the present “system”: food, shelter, work and respect. The second form of mobilization follows a more classic pattern of working class mobilization, focused on retaining jobs and social benefits in the face of industrial restructuring, the crisis and austerity. But it converges with the “tides” and “marches for dignity” that focus on the attack against public goods (through privatization and welfare adjustment cuts) and on the dispossession of basic rights: *Pan, trabajo y techo* (Bread, Work and a Roof) which are in fact included as rights in the 1978 Spanish Constitution. Both movements underline “dignity” as the central claim that encapsulates the limits beyond which the “system” becomes intolerable. The concept of dignity appears as a summary of grievances, both material and social, which addresses the breach of the democratic social contract as it was understood by citizen-workers: as the result of struggles that had tamed capital’s greed and ruthlessness, in a context of nominal human equality (Polanyi’s double movement,<sup>20</sup> 1971). Both analyze

the situation as the consequence of an increasing collusion of the state with capitalist interests.

The appeal to moral arguments such as dignity or injustice points to the feeling that the grounds on which certain principles of inequality were tolerated are no longer there (Scott 1976, 1985; Moore 1978; Thompson 1971, 1993). Indeed, the Keynesian pact of growth, redistribution and inclusion was based on the expansion of productive capital, employment, consumption and social benefits.<sup>21</sup> Inequality in economic terms could be accepted as long as nominal equality in political terms (liberal democracy) appeared as a limiting factor to the excesses of political and economic elites.<sup>22</sup> Therefore “injustice” points at the breakdown of the expectations that the “system” had pledged to provide. The breakdown of the Keynesian pact has pushed the abandoned European masses to the realization that they are not being treated as equals in the basic, human, enlightened sense of the concept (a realization that was always present for colonial subjects).

Therefore the contradiction between the principle of freedom and equality as basic human rights and the reality of inequalities of distribution has become blatant. Indeed, an expanding form of capitalism based on monopoly rents, that is, on privilege and political force rather than on competitive markets, is becoming as obvious now in the core industrial nations as it was in the colonies and the global South for a long time. The forced aspect of the alleged “freedom” of contract at the base of the labour / capital relationship is compounded with the deceitful aspect of “equality” before the Law of alleged liberal democracies as impunity looms large for the rich and powerful while taxes, sanctions and punishment increase for the ordinary citizens and the poor.

Inequality and injustice are substantially different concepts although they often appear as pairs. As Dumont (1977) among others has exposed, the concept of equality comes with individualism and the notion of universal humanity, and appears historically as a

weapon of the bourgeoisie against unearned privilege. It becomes entrenched as equality of opportunity and supports private property as the extension of this ontological equality (of being individual humans) into social being: as a produced inequality attached to personal effort (not privilege) (Locke 1984; Rousseau 1965; Weber 1979). Therefore, in the liberal moral economy, inequality appears as individually earned, the result of effort, and is deemed legitimate insofar as general progress is supposed to benefit all, however unequally.

In its historical adoption by the working class, “equality” has (often although not always) been radicalized through the attack on the legitimacy of private property as an extension of human equality. Fighting inequality then addresses equal distribution of the means of producing a livelihood; as Engels pointed out in his *Anti-Düring*, “the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the *abolition of classes*” (1877). By this he meant the abolition of the capital-labour relation predicated on the unequal ownership of the means of production. Over centuries of struggle to achieve this kind of equality, many options have been pursued with mixed success. In present debates about inequality, redistribution of wealth through taxation and provisioning of public goods together with limits to “excess” returns on effort expended (e.g. management bonuses) stop very far from any consideration of structurally transforming the actual distribution of the means to produce a livelihood (Stiglitz 2012; Picketty 2014; Wade 2014).

Injustice is a different matter altogether. If we think of equality as a modern invention, injustice is, to say the least, a pre-modern concept that harks back to Aristotle and Aquinas (some think it is a universal, ahistorical concept, e.g. Moore 1978). Injustice is so interesting because it is inescapably a *political* concept. Justice refers to social reproduction in its broader sense of enabling the continuity of social life, that is, the continuity of human relations and complex dynamics in a political community



(Aristóteles 1985). Justice, here, is not about measuring individuals against each other, about rendering them equal because they are commensurable in their identical humanity. Justice is about understanding the geometries of difference that make life in common possible. This is the “common good” which is the objective of the political, a political based on the articulation of differences that are permanently re-negotiated, stabilized and challenged (Bourdieu 1982, 1986a, 1986b). Accepted principles of inequality form the basis upon which expected obligations tie people to each other into producing a “common good”, the reproduction of political society. Simultaneously, however, the embedding of these principles of inequality in cultural obligations produces a hegemony that conceals domination and exploitation while favouring consent (Gramsci 1987; Bourdieu 1980). In the everyday, justice is mostly a procedure that redresses tort for the common good, enabling life in society to go on. But when cries of injustice become collective they point to systematic abuse. They point to the breakdown of the reciprocal obligations between unequal groups in society, and challenge the hitherto accepted principles of inequality that supported a particular idea of the “common good”. E.P. Thompson (1971) describes this precise moment of breakdown in his famous piece on the “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”. It is only in their demise that actual existing moral economies can be recognized.

In 1338, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, influenced by Aristotle’s political works in Thomas Aquinas’ reading (Aquino 2001) depicted the Allegory of Good and Bad Government in a famous fresco at the municipal palace in Siena. At the centre of this depiction, Justice appears as the highest moral virtue, holding together the Commune of Siena: Justice is the guide towards the common good represented as the “Ruler”. As Rubinstein (1958:184) asserts: “In the early fourteenth century, it becomes a commonplace in

political and didactic prose and poetry that only by placing common welfare above private interest can internal peace, economic prosperity and political power be secured and preserved; so does the view that neglect of the common good leads to civic strife and the decline and fall of cities.” Therefore “the common good must be raised to the position of the ruler” while it also gets to represent the Commune (1958:185). In the Allegory of Bad Government, neglect of Justice and the common good brings Tyranny and social disaster. Therefore, justice as a moral political virtue is pre-modern and is not directly tied to a modernist understanding of equality but to pursuing the common good and avoiding havoc. It refers even less to a class-based understanding of equality; but moral indignation is a symptom. Here we need to unpack the tension between injustice and inequality in present-day mobilizations, and “dignity” provides the lynchpin.

Dignity expresses social worth; it asserts the value of the person in a particular structure of social reproduction. Whatever the position of the person in the geometries of power and wealth, dignity confirms that they have social value, that they are “equal” in their value for the common good. While this is a pre-modern claim, people’s analyses of the causes that bring about their loss of dignity in present-day Ferrol point to the structure of a new form of capitalist accumulation that destroys the old (Fordist-Keynesian) principles of inequality within which worker-citizens had carved out a dignified position.

The financialization of accumulation in the present cycle has shifted the weight from surplus value to monopoly rent extraction on the one hand, and from value expansion through production to asset-price inflation, e.g. bubbles, on the other (Foster 2010; Lapavistas 2009; Harvey 2004; Hudson 2014). As a consequence this has highlighted the role of political elites in their production of *privilege* for capitalist corporations in the form of national and trans-national forms of regulation that favour the reaping of

rents (often referred to as “corporate welfare”). The *deep* form of neoliberalism that Peck and Tickell (2002) define as a rolling out of the state appears also as the subservience of national power to non-elected political institutions that organize capital accumulation on a world scale (e.g. Troika). In Hudson’s words, “the world is seeing a retrogression of economic democracy back into rentier oligarchy” (2014, 130). In addition, as debt service has become one of the main forms of rent extraction it has reconfigured the power structures that support its reproduction. At the inter-state level, it is only too apparent in Europe how debtor-creditor relations are re-configuring the relational structures of inter-governmental power (Arrighi et al. 1989, 72-73; Harvey 2004). It is also apparent how flows of idle over-accumulated capital are siphoned into financial valorisation through bubble leveraging. In the case of Spain, ordinary people were affected by the housing bubble produced, inter alia, by the inflow of German surplus capital, which expressed the financial aspect of everyday forms of capital accumulation (see Sabaté in this issue). Debt became both the structural instrument for systematic expropriation in the sphere of circulation and a humiliating lived experience (Lapavitsas 2009).

In their claim for dignity, people name three aspects that are put forward as the material pillars of this moral endowment (i.e. dignity): Bread, Work and a Roof. These are all tied to basic livelihood and express social reproduction at the immediate level of bodies, households, and families. The claim is against being pushed off to the zones of abandonment of the state, of being deprived of the rights that produce them as citizens (work,<sup>23</sup> housing,<sup>24</sup> education,<sup>25</sup> health<sup>26</sup> and dignity<sup>27</sup> are enshrined in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 as Rights); it is also a claim against accumulation by dispossession as it affects them. This is understood as the dispossession of public goods that were attained through struggle in the past and became the symbols of democracy after the end

of the dictatorship. The commons that are being enclosed in this period are the historical gains of working class struggles (Harvey 2012) and they appear as the dispossession of *rights*. The wave of “internal devaluation” that has been forced upon Southern European countries through structural adjustment also implies the evacuation of citizenship rights that were attached to liberal democracy. The destruction of the value of labour, together with the destruction of the value of assets that are being given away to vulture funds (e.g. foreclosed and unfinished housing) sets the ground for a future phase of expanded reproduction.

### **Conclusion: The search for a new covenant**

I have described two ways in which people are fighting this deprivation of dignity. The first is through an attempt to create networks of solidarity that may open new spaces of production and sharing through a practice of caring, a new morality embedded in everyday forms of support and collective responsibility for the wellbeing of others. These mobilizations are linked to what Caillé (1996) defines as primary socialities and dependencies (kinship, proximity). They extend horizontally without much organizational structure or relation to past struggles and produce small pockets of hope in the midst of an oppressive grid. They search for the future by breaking with the past and try to create a new moral economy. The second, on the contrary, strongly articulates with a past of struggles and conquests and with traditional forms of working class organization, although in a new way that clearly sets the fight for social wellbeing (as opposed to trade union privileges) at the forefront. “Work” is a claim to access a means of livelihood but also to retain autonomy through earned income; it expresses the aim of retaining dignity within a liberal ideological framework that underscores individual responsibility. Similarly, the claims for “bread” and “a roof” focus on social reproduction while pointing at the basic foundations of social inclusion (as opposed to

poverty and homelessness). What is being fought for is a form of social worth that generally refers to a past moral covenant (Fordist-Keynesian) between capital and labour typical of Western core nations. As the transnational forms of regulation of capital accumulation become clear and the dispossession of public goods is felt as a divestment of citizenship rights, what is at stake is reclaiming the political structure of responsibility. Who will take care of the people who live in a place?

Many attempts at re-centring the economy in the national space appeal to a corporatist sense of responsibility within a clearly bounded territory. Some projects aimed at regaining dignity are framed in a competing process of creating privilege that would fend off deprivation at the expense of other under-privileged social groups. This is apparent in some forms of neo-nationalist projects that are exclusionary and xenophobic (Kalb and Halimi 2011; Ost 2015). Other nationalist projects appear just as a demand for the state to care, a claim to proximate political responsibility that can be simultaneously viewed as a search for equality. What both kinds of projects have in common is an understanding that present-day political structures are not responsible towards them. These forms of revolt result from the structures of financial accumulation and the new enclosures, that is, from the process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004). Those who participate in them express moral indignation at the unjust consequences of these processes, and they perceive increased inequality and social polarization as the breakdown of the tacit agreement of liberal democracy. They understand inequality in moral terms, that is, in terms of injustice. They seek redress, at best, in the form of a return to the “*statu quo ante*”, expressed in the short-lived European Social Market project that Spain joined late (and incompletely) or, at worst, in the creation of exclusionary spaces of privilege. Does this point to the kind of mobilizations described in *Primitive Rebels* (Hobsbawm 1965)? Or is it the making of a new class attuned to the

present structure of capital accumulation (Thompson 1966)? The realization that in a context of increasing rentier capitalism the political creation of privilege is systemic, underscores the structural inadequacy of liberal democracy with its universal definition of equality and also its market corollary based on absolute freedom of contract. Real existing political structure in Western democracies has been shifting towards an “estate” kind of structure where institutions reproduce strong boundaries between groups (Humphrey 2012). The dignity concept supporting these mobilizations acknowledges this shift in an ambivalent manner: in the first case, by exiting the pretence of liberal equality and creating a separate realm based on different modes of relatedness and responsibility; in the second case, by claiming a return to the moral economy of Keynesian capitalism. In Ferrol I have not encountered the exclusionary kind of mobilization which nevertheless lurks in the background: the violent process seeking to enclose and protect parcels of privilege by some against other deprived people. In the sphere of corporate and financial capital, however, formal democracy seems to have become a vacuous discourse that authoritarian practices and illiberal forms of power increasingly negate. This might be because, as Polanyi (1935, 391-392) argued in his analysis of the rise of fascism in Europe, democracy is inherently oriented toward socialism.

These rebellions present themselves as fragmented attempts to redress an unjust situation. All are expressions of a positioning in the structural logics of present-day capitalism. People who participate in these mobilizations are aware of this in the intimate realm of their “structures of feeling” (Williams 1977). They often seem to be trapped in a moral economy of the past that corresponded to a previous phase of capitalism, however. This inhibits the realization that monopoly rent capitalism thrives on illiberal political structures and transnational institutions and the old Keynesian

covenant is no more. Present-day moral indignation is a symptom of total breakdown of the Keynesian moral economy, the moment where what is no more emerges clearly in its absence. The conflation of inequality with injustice as the motive for mobilization, however, obscures the complexities of the articulation of political economy and moral economy in contemporary forms of accumulation and their historical development.

Although moral outrage is a powerful motive for mobilization, it needs to be directed at what causes inequality of access to the means that enable a worthy livelihood. This is different from addressing inequality of opportunity, which is itself a consequence.

Structural adjustment has unleashed contradictions between the political and economic aspects of capital accumulation that were latent for a long time. This is a creative moment when reconfiguration of class takes the form of debtor-creditor lines of struggle (Narotzky 2015), and where alternative spaces of hope are flourishing in the gaps of debasement as a means of subsistence and a way to rebuild personal worth. It is also a moment when attempts to fight elite privilege with exclusionary privilege on the grounds of injustice show the dark face of other possible outcomes of resistance to the illiberal politico-economic reconfiguration.

I have witnessed the strength that the union organizations still hold in Ferrol. Their convergence with wide-ranging social movements is important because it pushes the struggle away from the shipyard and towards systemic social reproduction, attaching it to personal social reproduction. The convergence movement brings classical forms of organization, which are aware of the need to work up from the grassroots, together with the solidarity networks that want to break with the past in a more radical way, albeit in a non-systemic manner. The confluence of these two movements has the potential to bring forth a project that would articulate the aim at a structural transformation of the means to produce a livelihood with a strong ethics of care.

However, the understanding of inequality in terms of injustice traps most people within a *moral* rather than a politico-economic framework for mobilization, one which is not predicated on *class*, that is, on the awareness of the structural positions within the unequal ownership of the means to reproduce a livelihood. Therefore, the question is the following: can moral economy struggles become structural challenges to systemic social reproduction through praxis, as Thompson (1966) proposed for the making of the “old” working class consciousness? From “moral economies” and “primitive rebels” to “political economies” and “class struggles”, the tension between preserving the moral leverage of concrete injury and the political leverage of structural inequality has to be bridged. Meanwhile, this tension cannot be superseded: it must be retained in order to produce the real forces of change.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXp-a0HOYX8>

<sup>2</sup> The Troika is the colloquial term used for the three institutions regulating structural adjustment policies in Southern Europe after the financial crisis and national bailouts: [European Commission](#) (EC), [European Central Bank](#) (ECB) and the [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF).

<sup>3</sup> [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2015/02/09/galicia/1423506608\\_781222.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2015/02/09/galicia/1423506608_781222.html)

<sup>4</sup> The overwhelmingly industrial profile of Ferrol is giving way to a more heterogeneous occupational fabric, with 67.7% occupation in the service sector in 2011 up from 48.14% in 1991 and 16.2% in industry in 2011 down from 19.25% in 1991, although still representing 21% of male employment. Instituto Galego de Estadística *Mercado de Traballo 2005 Información Comarcal*

[http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/publicaciones/Mercado\\_Traballo\\_2005.pdf](http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/publicaciones/Mercado_Traballo_2005.pdf)

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[http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/publicaciones/datos\\_estadisticos\\_basicos\\_Galicia\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/publicaciones/datos_estadisticos_basicos_Galicia_2012.pdf)

accessed September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012

<sup>5</sup> It is amazing how close to a feminist understanding this renewed emphasis on the dependencies of care as constituting the core of society is.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.galiciaartabradigital.com/archivos/3235> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TypNn9sig-c&list=PL904B840A07FD6247> ;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhXzoTDoa4Y&list=PL904B840A07FD6247&index=2> and sequence; accessed 20 January 2015

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.laregion.es/articulo/galicia/70-000-personas-secundan-manifestaciones-ferrol-sindicatos-y-22-000-policia/20120330175940197129.html>, accessed 21 January 2015

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/05/30/galicia/1369923763\\_923614.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/05/30/galicia/1369923763_923614.html);

<http://www.elcorreogallego.es/galicia/ecg/cuelgan-prendas-ropa-verja-navantia-ferrol-defensa-naval/idEdicion-2013-06-02/idNoticia-809758/>; <http://www.diariodeferrol.com/articulo/ferrol/llaman-a-todo-ferrol-para-crear-un-monumento-a-la-dignidad-en-la-reja-de-navantia/20130529232259047583.html>;

[http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/06/02/galicia/1370184758\\_672745.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/06/02/galicia/1370184758_672745.html) , accessed 21 January 2015

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.eldiario.es/galicia/comarca-Ferrol-general-exigiendo-soluciones\\_0\\_142086328.html](http://www.eldiario.es/galicia/comarca-Ferrol-general-exigiendo-soluciones_0_142086328.html); accessed 20 January 2015

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.eldiario.es/economia/Penas-protestar-sanciones-administrativas-empresas\\_0\\_267374097.html](http://www.eldiario.es/economia/Penas-protestar-sanciones-administrativas-empresas_0_267374097.html); [http://www.eldiario.es/economia/encausados-participar-piquetes-rozan\\_0\\_305870121.html](http://www.eldiario.es/economia/encausados-participar-piquetes-rozan_0_305870121.html) , accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/noticia/ferrol/2013/06/12/manifestacion-multitudinaria-corona-jornada-huelga-ferrol/00031371040198822914688.htm>, accessed 21 January 2015

<sup>12</sup> In Spanish an oil spill is a “marea negra” a black tide. It is significant that the “marea” has become the Galician political alternative left platform in the recent elections.

<sup>13</sup> <https://mesaendefensasanidadpublica.wordpress.com/> , accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>14</sup> <https://mesaendefensasanidadpublica.wordpress.com/about/> , accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/noticia/galicia/2013/12/10/miles-personas-manifiestan-galicia-defensa-sanidad-publica/00031386707732646754985.htm> , accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Participation counts vary from the very low count of the Police, to the very high count of the organizers.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20140322/54403954606/miles-personas-22m-marcha-dignidad.html>; <http://endirecto.lavanguardia.com/politica/20140322/54403952580/22m-marchas-de-la-dignidad.html> ; [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/03/22/actualidad/1395521928\\_044887.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/03/22/actualidad/1395521928_044887.html) ;



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<http://marchasdeladignidad.org/22m-dos-millones-de-personas-en-una-demostracion-de-dignidad/> ,

accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKoshzBztCc#t=399> , accessed 21 January 2015.

<sup>19</sup> See for example the manifesto in which they clearly separate their mobilization on 29 November 2014 with the one called by CCOO and UGT for the same day. <http://marchasdeladignidad.org/jornadas-de-lucha-del-24-al-29-de-noviembre-pan-trabajo-techo-dignidad/> ; accessed 20 January 2015

<sup>20</sup> Polanyi (1971) explained capitalist economic history as a double movement. A first push toward market deregulation and free-trade disembedding the economy from society would be followed by a reaction against the destructive consequences of the first movement through regulatory frameworks that re-embedded the economy in society.

<sup>21</sup> Inequality was accepted as linked to merit and to contributions to the common good, but was limited by an ideological enlightenment framework of a shared humanity that had to be respected and enhanced (obviously this was not the case for those that were explicitly produced as not human or barely human, such as women, primitive, black, etc. cf. Engels in *Anti-Düring*, chap. X)

<sup>22</sup> But see Balibar and Wallerstein (1988) on the production of difference within the enlightenment Universalist model of human equality.

<sup>23</sup> “Art. 35. Todos los españoles tienen el deber de trabajar y el derecho al trabajo, a la libre elección de profesión u oficio, a la promoción a través del trabajo y a una remuneración suficiente para satisfacer sus necesidades y las de su familia”

<sup>24</sup> “Art.47. Todos los españoles tienen derecho a disfrutar de una vivienda digna y adecuada.”

<sup>25</sup> “Art. 27. Todos tienen el derecho a la educación.”

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<sup>26</sup> “Art. 43. 1. Se reconoce el derecho a la protección de la salud. 2. Compete a los poderes públicos organizar y tutelar la salud pública a través de medidas preventivas y de las prestaciones y servicios necesarios.”

<sup>27</sup> “Art 10. 1. La dignidad de la persona, los derechos inviolables que le son inherentes, el libre desarrollo de la personalidad, el respeto a la ley y a los derechos de los demás son fundamento del orden político y de la paz social.”