CIVIL SOCIETIES AND UNCIVIL TIMES: THE RUBBER BAND BALL OF TRANSNATIONAL TENSIONS

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Abstract

This article introduces a special issue of Contention Journal addressing various contemporary mobilisations of civil society in response to the war in Syria and the migration of refugees into Europe. With contributions from Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, Canada, the Czech Republic and Germany, the cases represent a breadth of multidisciplinary approaches and a variety of stylistic standpoints, from statistical media analysis to troubled personal reflections of engaged activist academics. The subject matter ranges from political mobilisation against authoritarianism and austerity, transnational philanthropy, the emergence of local grassroots voluntary aid to right-wing populist nationalism. Though diverse, a coherent narrative is seen to converge around the refugee crisis as it unfolds in Europe; one of radical polarisation within civil societies and starkly conflicting imaginaries of social futures that claim to preclude the legitimacy of other possibilities. At the same time alliances are being generated beyond borders in an attempt to bolster ideological capacity, authority and force. This is not a clash of civilisations but the rubber band ball of transnational tension, a strained, chaotic and overlapping global contestation. At stake is the understanding of what a civil society should be.

Keywords

Civil society, refugees, austerity, populism, social movements

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The beginning of this decade witnessed a wave of civil mobilization across the globe, including impressive instances bursting forth along the Mediterranean rim. Resistance to capitalist excesses, technocratic austerity and embedded authoritarian regimes, seemed to unite and inspire civil societies across North Africa, the Middle East and southern Europe. There was hope and fear of radical social change and even talk of revolution, both on the streets and in academic debate. Five years passed. Now, improbable state alliances pummel Syria and Iraq from the safety of the skies. Brutal conflict forces families to flee by the millions, to nearby camps, across the seas and along cold, distant back-roads. Europe evokes right-wing sentiments, suspends open border agreements and invokes states of emergency. Lethal terror claims sovereignty in the east and falls upon the citizens of Turkey, Beirut, Paris, Brussels, Marseilles and tourists from St. Petersburg are blown out of the sky. The corpses of children wash up on the shore.

The call for papers for this special issue of Contention Journal was driven by a sense of disgust at the actions and inactions of state actors, the murderous brutality of violence and scale of suffering. We knew that, in opposition to official policies and media depictions of 'floods' of refugees, ordinary people were mobilising and organising to provide assistance and whatever succour was possible to offer under such circumstances. We hoped perhaps to portray common threads of human compassion crossing over borders and stretching across the seas. Having received submissions from Turkey to Bolivia, it is clear that the impulse to help others, to resist oppression and to build some form of ordinary, everyday sociality is indeed commonly found. However, formulations and practices of exclusion are also pervasive and nor are they the sole purvey of shadow institutions or dictatorial regimes. What James Aho (1994) calls 'this thing of darkness', also emerges from the collective actions of ordinary people and from within the self-same civil societies where so much compassion is witnessed. This is perhaps the meta-narrative of these uncivil times and the common thread that binds this collection together; a transnational struggle over the future of civil society in which local mobilisations are inspired and collaborate with like-minded movements near and far, be they universal liberalists calling for global justice or authoritarian isolationists seeking to reclaim and protect the purity of their unique culture.

This editor reviewed special issue includes contributions from Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, Canada, the Czech Republic and Germany. The cases represent a breadth of multidisciplinary approaches and a variety of stylistic standpoints, from statistical media analysis to troubled personal reflections of engaged activist academics. The subject matter ranges from political mobilisation against authoritarianism and austerity, transnational philanthropy, the emergence of local grassroots voluntary aid and right-wing populist nationalism. Though diverse, we present a narrative which converges around the refugee crisis as it unfolds in Europe, in which radical polarisation within civil societies is producing conflicting imaginaries of social futures. Grassroots liberal, authoritarian, isolationist, internationalist and nationalist strains are all seeking out and generating alliances beyond state borders, in an attempt to bolster their ideological legitimacy and driven by the sense that 'the People' demand action and change. The established global orders of governance, borders, business and treaties are not only seen to be inadequate to the task, for often it is the entire complex of political and economic orders of the global North is seen to be the cause of this calamity. This is not a clash of civilisations between East and West but a strained and overlapping global contestation over social morality for the twenty-first century. There is no national unity to pattern the landmasses in neither patchwork, nor even a cultural mosaic of distinct identities in coexistence. This is a chaotic rubber-band ball of transnational tension.

What is Civil Society?

Civil Society, in the social sciences, is often taken to be the aggregation of NGOs and institutions that manifest the will of citizens, which are however independent of both state bodies and business enterprises and are characterised by a high degree of voluntary labour and resource contribution. This meta-distinction of Civil Society from the Public and Private Sectors, (as in State controlled and Commercial economic activity), first emerged in its modern usage from Hegel's (1821) analysis of early industrialism, leading to the corollary   term the Third Sector to distinguish expressions of this social phenomena. In this sense, Frumkin (2005) argues that civil society engages in non-profit activities, delivering services, promoting civic engagement, expressing values, ethical models and faith based social morals. However such boundaries, like borders everywhere, are notoriously difficult to police and efforts to forcibly prevent transgression across idealised distinctions of social, commercial and bureaucratic phenomena are always going to be selective and exclusionary. Frumkin thus also recognises that non-profits have in practice a growing dependence on public funding, tendencies toward political polarization, idiosyncratic missions, and an increasing turn towards commercialism.

Consider UN bodies, such as UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF. They are funded by hundreds of state treasuries, backed by a massive bureaucracy and staffed by both volunteers and trained professionals following successful career paths. Yet their core function is to deliver services fundamental to human survival, in situations where local authorities are unable or unwilling to do so. Their mission is guided by a defined code of ethics, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – whose humanitarian 'principles' have arguably become a truly global morality (Perry, 2013). The direct involvement of state interests and the professionalization of the third sector 'industry' has led many to critique the purpose and practices of these transnational organisations; a neoliberal divestment of state services, 'a Trojan Horse for Capitalism' (Crn Blok, 2014) or a bloated industry which has failed to accord with its vaunted vocabulary and largely represents the political interests of its funders over the needs of its 'service users' (Allen, 2013; Englund, 2006).

Away from the massive transnational organisations, we must also cite the multitude of small-scale and highly localised exemplars of civil society in practice. In the United Kingdom the village green preservation societies, the Women's Institute, the Royal Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals, Barnardos children charity or the telethons of Comic Relief, have long-standing traditions and a high degree of support and participation from the population. Such venerable organisations not only rely heavily on the voluntary donation of time and money to provision services, they also exemplify an understanding of civil society as equated with philanthropic imperatives such as compassion, giving 'back' to society, the common good, the practice civic virtues of wisdom, moderation and justice. This Republican sentiment, equating public engagement with good citizenry and civility, harks back to the classical writings of Plato and Cicero, in which no distinction was made between state and society (Edwards, 2014). The association of an engaged civil society with the proper functioning of democratic institutions was adopted by liberal thinkers from de Tocqueville to Hannah Arendt, who considered concerted action in the public realm to be the most political faculty of the human condition (Arendt, 1958).

By the turn of the last millennium the concept had gone global and the new Global Civil Society would be a force that transcended territorial borders (Appadurai, 2008). For some, the emergence of New Social Movements and the connectedness of its various 'multitudes', would afford a radical opportunity to subvert the established order by creating direct and participatory social and political mechanisms (Callan, 2014; Djelic & Quack, 2010; Hardt & Negri, 2000,

2005; Juris & Khasnabish, 2013). Similarly, with demise of the Soviet Bloc neo-liberal economic reform 'packages' were offered (or imposed) to new newly independent nations across Asia and Central Europe by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The provision of these loans was dependant on the implementation of policy recommendations, originally developed to address economic malaise in Latin America, which included trade liberalisation and the privatisation of state enterprises (Skaggs, 2011; Williamson, 1990). With such downsizing of the public sector some proponents of neo-liberalism saw the Third Sector or 'Big Society' as a magic bullet that could 'take up the slack engendered by the retreating state' (Whitehead & Crawshaw, 2014, p. 202). In this way, voluntary organisation and private donations could replace the state's service provision of social care, a socio-political restructuring heavily criticised by some theorists who witnessed the negative effects of denuded state support in the Former Soviet Union and beyond (Collier, 2011; DeVerteuil, 2016; Górski, 2007; Michnik, 1999; Zaleski, 2006). Civil society, on the global scale, is thus imagined as the essential engine and the mechanism for implementing the agendas of both the radical New Left and ascendant neo-Conservative agendas.

Uncivil Times

There seems to be little need to define or catalogue how uncivil are the times we live in. Most, but not all, of the papers selected for this issue relate in some way to the out-pouring of refugees from the Syrian civil war. Some authors use the term 'crisis', with the inclusion to quotation marks to signify the problematic manipulation of the term for particular ends. It can be argued that the flow of refugees across the Mediterranean into Europe is crisis of will not of capacity. Historically, there have been cases where massive numbers have been resettled in a more or less managed fashion; two million in the 1923 Greek-Turkish population transfer; 14 million following the partition of India in 1947; over a million refugees from Indochina resettled in the West in the 1970s. Given that Europe has a population of over 700 million, the argument goes, an addition of two million refugees represents a tiny fraction in percentile term which could be easily managed through concerted effort.

However, the massive displacement of people is not the crisis in of itself and the lack of will amongst many European governments and citizens is shaped by other transnational calamities of our time. We continue to endure the global economic debacle of 2008. There is not much mention of the once vaunted BRICs or Celtic Tigers of late. Though the financial markets in New York and London claim to have recovered, the astounding transfer of sovereign wealth to private corporations (from the first to the second sector), forced national economies to impose austerity policies and stripped the public purses for service provision. The Euro-zone PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) were all but bankrupted and subjected to particularly onerous lending terms, 'inflicted in the service of a man-made artifice, the euro' (Stiglitz, 2014). This was the situation before migrants began, literally, washing up on Europe's shores. Neo-liberalism's freedom of movement for goods and capital, as the economic tide that will raise all boats, wasn't selling so well anymore, while grassroots opposition to austerity had become major political forces, such as Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos. At the same time migrants, both European and 'foreign' became easy targets as an unbearable load on collapsing welfare systems across the European treaty nations, even amongst the supposedly 'healthy' economies of Germany and the United Kingdom. Pondering the obvious disjuncture between the current populist focus on the strain to social services caused by 'benefit cheats' and 'foreigners' and the absence of any critique of the ongoing neo-liberal institutions which created austerity, Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle

cut through such chatter crying out, 'It was the f**king banks! It was on the f**king news!!' (Spencer, 2016).

We also live in a time when explosions rip through bodies in bazaars and airport terminals, cafe terraces and nightclubs are riddled with bullets in the name of an irredentist Islamic Caliphate claiming sovereignty over wreckage that was once Iraq and Syria. It is all very well and necessary to point out modern Jihadist's dubious links to Islamic faiths, copy-cat massacres by troubled souls, the proxy wars of Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Cold War posturing of Russian and the US, or the platitudes of Western leaders who 'they hate us because we are free'. Might they not also hate us for a decade of aerial assaults, massive civilian casualty and death rates and the destruction of any semblance of order over great swathes of land? We cannot dissect the metastasis of this phenomenon here, but it is interesting to note that both the financial crash and the rise of global Jihadism can be linked to the aggressive deregulation of the economy and the promotion of right-wing religious radicalism to combat the left-wing secular radicalism during the 1980s. Legacies of a resurgent America under the administrations of Ronald Regan. Nonetheless, modern Islamist terror attacks manifest a chilling brutality and we must not underestimate the fear, suspicion, anger and hatred they provoke, piled upon a bleak and skewed economic structure, and expansive contempt for those in power. We are in the midst of what Manuel Castells (2016) calls a 'global meta-crisis', in which the brutal treatment of stateless migrants is but one element.

The Cases

The articles in this issue follow one another in a loose temporal order and describe topical narrative. We begin back in 2011, when civil protest on astonishing scales mobilised across North Africa and the Middle East. Callie Maidhof's piece addresses one of the lesser known demonstrations in the region at this time, Israel's #J14 movement. By summer of 2011 Egypt's Tahrir Square was the defining event of that year, having brought to an end the presidency of Hosni Mubarak after sustained mass mobilisation established an encampment in the centre of Cairo, with high levels of organisation, cross-class and party participation and extensive use of social media. This 'Occupy' model inspired protests across the globe.

So it was that at the height of #J14, thousands of people were camped out in tents in the centre of Tel Aviv's along Rothschild Boulevard, a rather exclusive tree-lined promenade in the south of the city. Smaller encampments peppered the green spaces of several other Israeli towns and cities and the regular Saturday night protests of that summer in Tel Aviv drew upwards of 300,000 people. The rallying cry of the protestors was HaAm Doresh Tzadik Hevrati - The People Demand Social Justice - with specific demands focusing on unattainable housing prices, health care, childcare, and the overall high cost of living in Israel. An anthropologist in the field at the time, Maidhof watched the coverage of the events on a television set in the living room of her host family in Tsufim, a small secular Israeli settlement, a few kilometres into the West Bank of the occupied Palestinian territories.

#J14 was one of the largest mobilizations of civil society in the history of Israel, polling at a '90% approval' rating at some stages. Examining this apparently universal level support draws Maidhof to questions of inclusion and exclusion in imaginaries of civil society. She finds that the emergent spokespersons of the movement carefully and explicitly distinguished between the 'social' and the 'political', for in Israel the latter term is reserved almost exclusively for Palestinian issue. Tactically and consciously, 'the exclusion of the occupation and other divisive issues such as the rights of non-Jewish minorities and asylum seekers in Israel was considered key to the movement's success. The cited 90% support had not polled the opinions of Palestinians in the

Occupied Territories. Maidhof, following on from critiques of Habermas's (1991) 'public sphere' and Mamdani's (1996) post-colonial African civil societies, raises an important and recurring theme in this issue, the contentious struggle to define who is included or excluded from local conceptions of civil society.

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Colin Leech and his co-authors also reflect on this period of foment with their analysis of the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013, where the appearance of mass support and intersectional social alliances cloak deeper polarisation within society. Having travelled from the US to Turkey to conduct research on identity, it became clear to Leech's international team that the city was in upheaval below their hotel balcony, as explosions, waves of chanting marchers and clouds of tear gas filled the night skies. Finding themselves unexpectedly in the midst of massive upheaval, their minds turned to thoughts of 'possible revolution'.

Contrary to the narrative of spontaneous explosion of dissent, the Gezi Park protests had been gestating for some time, within the context of growing disquiet regarding the style and certain policies of the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP – Justice and Development Party). Coming to power for the first time in 2002, AKP's governance had initially raised Turkey's democratic standards, economy, and regional standing. However, for some its long rule became characterized as 'increasingly authoritarian and conservative', with concerns being voiced about its promotion of religious schooling, infringement on women's rights and increasing restrictions on the freedom of expression. According to Leech et al such policies amplified a divide between AKP supporters and detractors, which reflects longstanding tensions between conservative religious and liberal secular segments of the Turkish population.

Though ostensibly the Gezi protests began in opposition to redevelopment plans for this city park, they were an expression of these growing tensions which were only heightened when the protests were quickly and violently repressed by the police and denounced by the government as seditious. Studying the motivations of protestors, Leech's team found that the perception of police brutality actually mobilised more people to join the movement, which brought together LGBTI and feminists, Kurdish groups, socialists, communists, anarchists, anti-capitalist Muslim groups, unions and labour organizations and members of the main opposition party Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi. There was also wide-spread support across the city and in other protests across the country inspired by the 'Gezi Spirit'. However, as this paper points out, a national survey from July 2013 found that 54% of Turks agreed with the government's characterization of the protests, as part of a plot against Turkey in which protestors were influenced by external forces. Furthermore, the revolutionary spirit of that summer has not led to any amelioration of the authoritarian thrust in Turkish politics. The country has since seen the failure of a peace process with Kurdish separatists, the public murder of Kurdish rights lawyer Tahir Elçi, bombings in Istanbul's markets, the murderous attach at Atatürk Airport, an attempted military coup and the subsequent widespread arrest and detention of journalists, jurors, academics and voices of dissent.

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Departing from the analytic academic style and bringing us to date with the recent situation in Lebanon, Emily Regan Wills presents some personal reflections recorded in her field-notes from May 2015. This piece addresses the complexities of relationships between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese hosts as played out in Beirut and alone the now closed road to Damascus. Her account documents dynamics of anxiety and rejection, where refugees are demonized in the press, targeted through restrictive by-laws, denied access to basic services and even placed under curfew.

At the time Lebanon was hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees, the highest population of refugees per capita in the world, and the third largest population overall after Turkey and Pakistan. However, Lebanon isn't a signatory to either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the State of Refugees. It has no international obligation to provide for these refugees, either the 450,000 Palestinians who have been there since 1948 or the million Syrians who have fled the civil war. There is no obligation of non-refoulement, not returning people to a place where they are in danger. Furthermore, Lebanon has a long and often problematic relationship with Syria. For decades the 'Road to Damascus' was an open passage between the two countries and people would drive to Syria to go shopping, while familial metaphors were used to describe the closeness of these neighbouring nations. However, any sense of benevolent fraternity was strained by long term Syrian political and military involvement in Lebanese affairs.

Having travelled to Lebanon as part of an effort to provide education services for refugees, Wills explores these tensions at a time of severe and immediate humanitarian need, when anyone with Syrian backgrounds were fast becoming pariahs in Lebanese society. No more work permits were being issued to Syrians, there were checkpoints across the city, signs announcing a curfew for 'foreigners'. At the time of her visit, the capacity of Lebanese state services, as well as those of the many local and international NGOs, are already stretched to the limit and barely able to provide for Lebanese citizens. Wills' disturbing confrontation with the scale of need and the uneven local distribution of resources is reflected in a comment by one NGO worker who tells her, 'What's most important is that they leave'. The author is left to ponder on the future of the million Syrians in Lebanon, millions more sitting the other side of the closed borders and of the whole population of Syria, waiting for some the catastrophic violence to come too close to home. The question of where shall they find a place of welcome is one that extends far beyond the borders of Lebanon.

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Shawn Flanigan and Mounah Abdel-Samad have also explored civil society efforts to bring assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, this time the case of Syrian diasporans from Canada. While much research on diaspora assistance has focused on upon the dependence of concrete social and familial networks, Flanigan and Abdel-Samad's analysis finds a more abstract notion of collectivity emerging as a motivating factor for these members of the Syrian diaspora. In the context of the ongoing civil war, volunteers who had never been to their 'home' nation or who had previously seen themselves as 'Arab-Canadian', began to identify with Syria and as Syrians. Ironically, as the nation-state continues to disintegrate and appears to lose any viability of being a coherent territorial whole, deterritorialised Syrians in the diaspora are finding affective loyalties to a national community whose future is difficult to imagine. Furthermore, this emergent collectivity is largely imagined as 'apolitical'. In contrast to transnational civil society phenomena such as Occupy X or the World Social Forum, Flanigan and Abdel-Samad's respondents distance themselves from considerations of governance, security or economics. This distancing from politics is not adopted, as in Maidhof's #J14 case, to maintain fundamental state structures but rather by a sense of impotence. This grim view seems to be based on low sense of external efficacy regarding the responsiveness of government to the demands citizenry. These volunteers must therefore content themselves with the hope they are contributing to 'peace-building' through education and the hope that future generations will have and provide more 'liberal' perspectives on being Syrian.

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In a further example of the transnational dimensions of the Syrian civil war, Petra Molnar examines how the Canadian state performs its sovereignty in response to the refugees fleeing

that conflict. Canada has been presenting itself as a global leader in refugee and human rights issues, with its Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, very publically and personally welcoming refugee families at the airport and pledging to resettle tens of thousands. However, Molnar argues that the shifting political landscapes have to manage migration and resettlement over time, 're-circulate contentious discourses that oversimplify the narrative, muting important complexities in the rich diversity of human movement'. Molnar examines the poignant case of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian child found dead on a Turkish beach on September 2nd 2015. The images of his corpse facedown on the shoreline, taken by Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir, seemed for a time to define this crisis in 2015 and became a 'macabre catalyst for progressive change'. The Kurdi family had reportedly being trying to reach Canada, to join relatives in Vancouver, and the photographs had a major discursive impact on the Federal Election campaign which was underway at the time. Molnar notes how the incumbent Conservative administration had utilised negative tropes to describe the plight and scale of refugee migration, such as 'fear', 'floods' and 'crisis'. Though the electoral victory Trudeau's liberal administration resulted in a 'monumental policy change' on refugees, those negative notions do not simply disappear. In parliamentary democracies a party need not exceed forty percent of the popular vote in order to secure a comfortable majority and Molnar argues that exclusionary sentiments continue to circulate within society and continue to shape the state, media, and public discourse on the ongoing refugee issue. Given the short-term cyclical nature of democracy and the fact the resettlement is a long-term social undertaking, Molnar, fears the potential for a collective retreat to linking refugees with terrorism. The success of Canada's current exercise in humane migrant policies is thus subject to changing public moods and the 'continuing millennial border anxieties of the West'.

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Jan Křeček's contribution analyses the socio-political tensions in the Czech Republic, where the state adopts and implements a very different sovereign response to refugees than the current Canadian model. Despite the fact the country is neither a major transit corridor nor a destination for refugees, the Czech government immediately imposed harsh restrictions on migrants, routinely subjecting them to detention of up to three months in conditions described at times as 'degrading'. This 'preliminary refusal' strategy is promoted by both the political and media spheres and seems to garner broad public support within the population.

However, the Republic is also a country in which the tally of immigrants is actually less than the number of Czech citizens travelling beyond their national borders to help refugees congregating along the Balkan Route, which runs up northward from Greece and Bulgaria, towards Austria and Germany, sometimes veering Eastwards through Hungary and Slovakia and on into Poland. This 'Czech Team' of volunteers emerged initially from an independent 'social centre' called Klinika, where small collections of clothing and other necessities were organised for the refugees detained in the Western Czech village of Bělá at the end of August 2015. A rapid growth in the collections saw the organisation become a coordinating centre and over the following weeks, a 24-hour reception facility had been implemented to handle the distribution of contributions. At the same time Facebook groups called I'm going to help in... (followed by the location of a refugee camp) mobilised over 1,500 volunteers who then travelled in coordinated convoys to various nearby sites in Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia where they also kept a 24-hour operation, going over three shifts.

In analysing online correspondence and communication Křeček finds that Czech Team's efforts were often motivated by a sense of shame at official state policy and mainstream media's depiction of the migrants. In this case, he argues, volunteering is not merely an altruistic endeavour but a form of politic protest. The Czech Team, much like the transnational organisation of

assistance moving through Ireland and the United Kingdom to provide materials, skills and services for the people of the 'Jungle Camp' in Calais, shows that compassion will find expression in the form of action, even when the dominant discourse nurtures the tendency towards fear and the pollution of supposedly cultural purity. However, at the same time, President Miloš Zeman of the Czech Republic is by no means a lone voice in Europe promoting an explicitly anti-Islamic platform to renounce treaty obligations and deny the possibility of refuge.

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  With the rise of what is now being referred to as 'nativism' in mind (see Fetzer, 2000), this collection finishes with a paper by Adrian Paukstat and Cedric Ellwanger, which also address the emergence of a civil society organisation protesting against the official refugee policy of its government. The movement, which originated in Germany, is Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (PEGIDA, Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), who had been coordinating 'evening strolls' in Dresden every Monday since October 2014. Using Keller's (2007) 'Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse', the authors reveal the construction of PEGIDA's 'narrative identity'. In this, the movement's adherents position themselves as 'ordinary' German citizens, alienated from the 'System', which is a cosy and almost unspoken alliance between the political establishment, mainstream media and radical left-wing activists who are hostile and denigrating towards these ordinary Germans. The PEGIDA subject, the authors find, feels culturally and materially disadvantaged in the face of 'Islam, asylum seekers and foreigners', who appear in this narrative as an abstract and ambiguous threat. At the same time PEGIDA supporters believe in strengthening state institutions of coercion, such as the courts and the police forces, and express a dislike for the idea of subversion. But despite their patriotic intentions the more PEGIDA highlights the perils of immigration, the more it is attacked crude alliance of enemies that surrounds it. And yet, 'it only expresses what the "German people" think and it does so for the security, peace and prosperity of Germany, Europe and the Occident'.

  For Paukstat and Ellwanger, PEGIDA's use of vague and arbitrary notions of 'being German' are related to an equally vague and arbitrary notion of 'being Muslim'. This ambiguity they argue is a strategic, discursive practice which enables the movement to mobilize new supporters, defying predictions that it would quickly perish and the belief that Germany would forever be averse to right-wing populist movements.

The Proximity of Polarisation

> When events move very fast and possible worlds swing around them, something
> happens to the quality of thinking. Some men repeat formulae; some men become
> reporters. To time observation with thought so as to mate a decent level of abstraction is
> a difficult problem.
>
> (Mills, 1942)

  Reflecting on the revolutionary spirit which seemed to sweep the globe only a few years ago, we may well ask, well where did it go? Libya, Syria and Yemen are war zones, where local forces are aided and abetted by wider regional rivalries and Cold War revivalists. The military is back in control in Egypt, where if anything the situation is more severe than it was under the deposed Mubarak. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, now president of Turkey, seems to be achieving almost cultish status as a revered leader, and, having survived a military coup, authoritarian tendencies have been augmented with an old fashioned purge of dissent amongst jurists, journalists the police,

academics and civil society activists. The gulf states retain their monarchies. Saudi Arabia, having successfully quashed the revolutionary movement across the peninsula, now wages proxy wars with Iran. Tunisia of course stands out for its remarkable constitutional transition but as violent terror reaches its own shores, state authorities are now asking its citizens to choose between 'security and rights and freedoms' (Amnesty, 2015), the choice being presented to many civil societies in many jurisdictions. The hope, for many analysts, lies in the altered subjectivity of those who joined in or were inspired by the protests, that the revolutionary spirit lives on in the mind and true revolution is a long and ongoing 'process' (see Abou-El-Fadl, 2015). This is certainly true but if we look for hope in the longue durée, we must also acknowledge that the maintenance dictatorships or any status quo are also ongoing processes and that established systems tend to have the resources and the will to reproduce their position of dominance. Furthermore, the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood to forge broad political consensus in Egypt and the subsequent military coup dealt a blow to the wider efforts of Islamic political parties, justifying 'defection among certain Islamist constituencies towards jihadi or vigilante Salafism' (Yenigün, 2016, p. 276; see also Volpi & Stein, 2015).

Considering the anti-austerity protests, which drew inspiration from that Arab Spring time, the bipolar political establishments of both Greece and Spain have indeed been fundamentally restructured by the popular protest movements there. The far left Syriza party made its electoral break-though in Greece, whilst the M15 movement in Spain has led to the Podemos party which became the third largest party in parliament. However, in Greece the right-wing Independant Greeks party also serves in the current cabinet and ultra-nationalist Golden Dawn have eighteen seats in parliament. Unidos Podemos, has indeed succeeded in restructuring the old de facto two-party system in Spanish politics, but it does not command any kind of majority following in the country as a whole. The relative success of Bernie Sanders in the United States or Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom certainly reflects residuals of the disenfranchisement expressed at the height of the Occupy X phenomena. But then again, in both those respective nations, the unexpected success of Donald Trump and the 'Brexit' referendum to leave the European Union are also indebted to similar sentiments.

The tendency towards authoritarianism, a simple, powerful and punitive political style with the willingness to use state power to 'eliminate' the threats, is apparent across the West. As we have seen in this issue, the populism of simple solutions finds appeal across Europe in nationalist political forms. Alternative für Deutschland received double-digit percentages of the vote in the three state elections in contested in Germany in 2016. The in the UK was often an exemplar of the crass, vapid, self-interested ineptitude of political systems. The promotion of alarmist and demonising discourses by 'pro-Brexiteers' in the UK campaign was equalling shocking, and displayed 'dishonesty on an industrial scale' (Dougan, 2016). Though, economic inequality, age and regional divides have been cited as factors motivating the move towards nationalist populism in these case, several analysts and pollsters have noted a less palitable (yet stronger) correlation between authoritarian inclinations in the population, which 'slice through groups, communities and even families' (Kaufmann, 2016; see also Hetherington & Weiler, 2009; MacWilliams, 2016; Taub, 2016). The polarisation within these societies is about philosophy. It is a contention of moralities.

There is then, a palpable sense of 'general dissatisfaction, widespread malaise, and contempt for those in power' (Arendt, 1990, p. 260) that is evident. These are the conditions which Arendt argued are the source of revolution's cause. Malaise, as such, does not universally lead to justice and liberty – whatever they might mean. Subjectivity is not necessarily altered in the direction one might desire and civil society is not some unitary object, struggling to express its singular ideal.

The articles in this special issue of Contention represent but a few instances of the uncivil times and complex civil society responses flowing through current global sociality. Notably absent from this collection are reflections from colleagues working across Arab nations. This is not through a lack of want and clearly greater effort must be made to foster greater communication and collaboration with our counterparts in North Africa and the Middle East. There is also much to learn from the situation south of the Sahara Desert, the troubling violence in Nigeria, South Sudan and also Zimbabwe, where state violence has attempted to suppress protests and the Movement for Democratic Change for over a decade. What of the altered subjectivities of the Iranian protesters of 2011-2 or the growing labour unrest and strike actions in China? Brazil, another of the once golden BRICS nations (an acronym coined by Goldman Sachs, no less (O'Neill, 2011)), seems to have had its democratically elected socialist president impeached by a consortium of politicians facing serious criminal corruption charges. We hope that this collection is the beginning of a broader conversation of the subject.

It is indeed, as Mills noted in the above quote, a difficult problem to produce a decent, and useful, level of abstraction to such complex phenomena at a time of turbluence and we are not approaching a conclusion here. As the refugees who manage to struggle across borders, risking death and an uncertain future rather than the insufferablity of home, civil society groups also mobilise, coordinate and cross borders to provide some form of solace, while their national representatives flout international obligations and bicker about quotas. At the same time, and within the same social spaces, a strong isolationist, nationalist tradition is resurgent with calls to close borders and expel migrants so as to make these nations 'great again'. These civil society movments also transcend the borders they seek to enforce, with movements like Germany's PEGIDA sprouting chapters across the continent and forming alliances with other foreign like-minded concered citizen associations. The UK Independance Party Leader advises Donald Trump in his election campaign and appears on the podium beside him, recalling or reclaiming the message 'Yes We Can'. Arjun Appadurai (2008) considered disjunture and ruptures in the transnational flow of technical, financial, ethnic and ideograpahic 'scapes' as the source and form of future conflict. While this remains true, there is also an intense proximity of polarised social imaginations. The world appears as a rubber-band ball, with no particular pattern in any one region. It is tensioned and strained in an overlapping, knot of self-supporting, chaotic structures which stretch around the globe and painfully impinge on random localities, layer upon layer down to the core of human sociality. The tensions and alliances run through borders, across nations, into communities, between generations and within families. There may well be a sense or even a need for revolution but who's revolution will it be? What should we imagine a civil society to be?

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