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Introduction: Social theory and social movements – 21st-century innovations and contentions

Capital & Class

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Since its establishment in 1977, *Capital and Class* has provided a critical space for scholars and activists to explore existing and new forms of socio-political struggles and movements in and against capital. A range of theoretical perspectives have also been employed by *Capital and Class* authors to make sense of these movements, which, among others, include Open Marxism, social movement theory, critical urban approaches, Gramscian, autonomist and post-structural perspectives. This special issue builds on, develops and extends this rich tradition in *Capital and Class* by interrogating the ways in which social theory can be used to understand and analyse 21st-century extra-parliamentary political, cultural and social movements across the world. In particular, the special issue contributes to the field of social and political movements by offering papers that ask (1) how can

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contemporary collective action critically advance social theoretical ideas, and (2) what new tools of inquiry can build on existing theoretical approaches to enhance our critical understanding of social movements.

Since 2011, the world has seen new outbursts of political contention, including the Arab spring, the Occupy Movement, Black Lives Matter and the Gillet Jaune protests. These movements include political claims making around anti-austerity, anti-racism, pro-democracy and are veritable grass roots movements and could be considered a kind of populism from below. During the same period, we have also seen the rise of movement parties such as Momentum in the United Kingdom, 5 Star in Italy, and Podemos in Spain. While these are all qualitatively different and have national specificities, they could be considered to represent an attempt to claim power through a populism from above. These and other protest movements have generated new discussions and debates requiring new empirical and theoretical analyses. This special issue speaks directly to some of these movements and the political contentions that have emerged.

This special issue comprises six papers from scholars who are exploring new empirical and theoretical approaches to understanding these social movement dynamics. What sets this special issue off from other analyses is that all the papers contain a strong degree of social theory, which is somewhat underutilised within social movement studies. More directly for *Capital and Class*, these papers draw on a number of critical theoretical approaches, including Open Marxism, Gramsci, Foucault, Bauman, Pizzorno and others, which bring new insights beyond social movement theory. The papers include new theoretical discussions and debates on Open Marxism in relation to the movement party, Momentum, the resurgence of Marxists perspectives on class struggles in light of austerity, populism and social movements, new cultural approaches drawing on emotions and how these are used to recruit supporters for social movements, disabled people's movements and imagined futures, and Gramscian perspectives on organic intellectuals and leadership.

The first paper by John Roberts and Joseph Ibrahim is an extended piece that deals with two interrelated issues. First, it speaks directly to wider debates that have taken place within *Capital and Class* and elsewhere on Open Marxism and class analysis. They argue that social class cannot be analysed through static sociological concepts and discrete analytical units because class is fluid in its constitution since it is formed by alienated and dispossessed labour, constantly struggling to various degrees against capital. Second, they then use this alternative class analysis to provide a critique of Open Marxist accounts of political and social movements. Following these critical observations, they put forward the second issue, drawing on the alternative class perspective and by incorporating elements of Gramscian theory, they argue that Open Marxism can develop a more robust account of the class nature of social and political movements today.

The next piece continues with the importance of class analysis. Donatella Della Porta's article discusses Alessandro Pizzorno's relational analysis of the emergence and re-emergence of struggles for recognition in relation to the labour movement of the 1960s and how it has developed now, nearly 60 years later. Arguing that recognition is a core aim of the struggles of emerging groups, Della Porta suggests that this is important for the construction of a collective identity that is needed to prise new advantages for a movement. She moves on to suggest that during times of intense contention, social movements produce innovation in the forms of protest and that in the earlier time period

she explores, action was radical, innovative and adapting to, while challenging, new forms of production. Pizzorno, she argues, offers important insights in that he calls for the distinction between the emergence of new identities within struggles for recognition versus the struggles around already formed interests and identities. She argues that this relational approach can be helpful to address contemporary debates about the revival of trade unionism and other protest waves that seek social justice and how these movements, innovative and seeking identity, can then condition the mobilisation of new social groups.

Having set out new theoretical contentions above, the next four papers are based on empirical research which draw on cultural-political explanations for the emergence of new movements and processes. Cultural theory has a long tradition for understanding social movement dynamics and Jasper and Zhelnina push the boundaries of knowledge here by employing emotion theory to understand the controversy around Moscow's Renovation, a giant urban renewal project launched in 2017. They use the notion of moral batteries which are pairs of emotions, one positive and the other negative, which draw people towards one pole as they repel them from the other. They discuss binaries based on time, before-and-after contrasts, which have not previously been adequately recognised. In addition to moral batteries, they look at public characters, especially villains who get blamed and minions who are ridiculed; these are often contrasted with good characters such as victims or heroes. Like moral batteries, characters fuse cognitive elements, such as words and images, with the emotions that are supposed to accompany them. The use of emotions in this case provides new explanations for social movements when polarisations between groups of people occur.

Eugene Nulman's and Ashley Cole's article explores the notion of 'leaderfulness' in contemporary social movements, utilising a Gramscian framework in the context of the Black Lives Matter Global Network. Leaderfulness, they argue, is a critical component of struggles for hegemony and of enormous importance to the life of all social movements. The piece, premised upon data gathered from extensive interviews across 18 chapters of the movement, argues that the structures that Gramsci said were required for the development of leaderfulness were lacking which resulted in limited developments in that regard. This failure to develop leaderfulness through structured processes explains the lack of momentum generated by movements over long periods of time, as leadership skills are confined to few participants. As such, Nulman and Cole provide an important fresh environment to revisit Gramsci's century-old ideas about intellectualism in collective action and provide important theoretical insights to the study of social movements.

Miro Griffiths' paper, 'Livin' in the Future: Conceptualising the Future of UK Disability Activism through Utopian, Retrotopian, and Heterotopian Configurations', uses his own 5-year empirical research project with young disabled activists involved in the UK Disabled People Movement to chart their different visions of the future. Griffiths uses a critical framework combining theories of utopia, retrotopia and heterotopia using the work of Freire, Bauman and Foucault, respectively, to better understand how ideas of the future are constructed by elites but then spread among networks such as social movements. He argues that there is a tension between what the UK Disabled People's Movement articulates in its own visions and those embraced by the young disabled activists at the heart of his research. Griffiths suggests that for the UK Disabled Movement there is a utopian belief in the successful change of British society, combined with a

nostalgia for the 'purer' forms of activism that characterised the earlier history of the disability activism in the United Kingdom. For the young disabled activists who do not fit easily into these different narratives of the future, Griffiths shows they have a vision of heterotopias, based around the flourishing of alternative, counter activisms, new ideas and new forms of action and practice.

Paolo Gerbaudo's paper provides a comprehensive overview of the latest social movement formations based on populist perspectives, from the square occupation movements to the Gillet jaunes, in which he discusses the different components and implications of this 'populist turn' and its differences vis-à-vis other forms of populism, and in particular right-wing populism. He claims that social movements' populism involves the adoption of a 'popular identity' as a unifying notion as a means to compensate for identity fragmentation; an identification with social majorities evident in Occupy Wall Street's famous 'we are the 99%' slogan, which departs from the minoritarian identification of previous movements and an appeal to common sense and the nation vis-à-vis the militant antagonism and cosmopolitanism prevalent in many previous social movement waves. This represents a new cultural transformation within social movements which demonstrates new political opportunities and areas of support for protest movements. However, this populist turn has also raised concerns among some activists, especially concerning the association of the 'popular' with the 'national' and a perception that popular identity involves undermining internal diversity and pluralism.

This special issue will make an excellent contribution to existing debates in the pages of *Capital and Class* that have explored social movements and class-based politics, since it examines new contemporary movements as well contributes to past and present theoretical debates about Marxism and social movement ideas.

Author biographies

Joseph Ibrahim is the Course Director for Sociology at Leeds Beckett University, UK. His research interests are in social movements, political mobilisations and protests. He has published a monograph, *Bourdieu and Social Movements* with Palgrave (2015) and has coedited (with John Roberts) two books: *Contemporary Left-wing activism: Democracy, Participation and Dissent in a Global Context Vol1&2*, with Routledge (2019).

Pete Millward is Professor of Contemporary Sociology at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. He has published three monographs (the most recent is *Collective Action and Football Fandom*, Palgrave, 2018), three edited collections (the most recent is *Sport Policy and Politics in an Era of Austerity*, Routledge, 2019) and edited five special issues of journals (the most recent is 'Social Movements, Collective Action and Activism' *Sociology*, e-special issue, 2019).

John Roberts is Professor of Sociology and Communications at Brunel University. He has published four monographs, one co-authored book, and four co-edited books. His areas of interest include social movement activism on the public sphere, public space and free speech, work and global political economy, voluntary activity, and Marxist theory.

Karl Spracklen is a Professor of Sociology of Leisure and Culture at Leeds Beckett University (UK). He has researched and written extensively on leisure, music, identity and belonging, and has over a hundred books, papers and book chapters. His latest book is *Metal Music and the Re-imagining of Masculinity, Place, Race and Nation*, published by Emerald in 2020.