A geometry of crises, criticism and collective action

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CHAPTER 2:

A GEOMETRY OF CRISES, CRITICISM AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

René Gabriëls, Maastricht University

Introduction

One of the most intriguing aspects of neoliberalism is that it has succeeded in convincing the majority of people that there is no alternative to the global logics of free-market capitalism. Today, only a small minority questions Margaret Thatcher's slogan 'There Is No Alternative'. This minority makes itself heard from time to time. For example, under the slogan 'Another World is Possible', the World Social Forum, a worldwide network of social movement organisations and activists, advocates for a different vision of globalization. Their basic message is that globalization should not be shaped by neoliberal principles, but by principles of global justice and democracy (Fisher and Ponniah 2015).

The need for an alternative rests on the everyday experiences of people suffering the consequences of neoliberal policies. This concerns, for example, the experiences of people in Greece, who became poor as a result of the severe austerity policies imposed by the European Union (EU) and the IMF (Kousis 2016; Pelagidis and Mitsopoulos 2017). It also concerns people who suffer from stress, burnout and depression as a result of the hyper-competitive neoliberal work regime (Ehrenberg 2016; Becker, Hartwich and Haslam 2021). In Spain, the imposition of neoliberal policy led to enormous resistance during a massive series of anti-austerity protests and demonstrations in 2011 that came to be known as the Indignados Movement (Nez 2016). Next door, in France, the Yellow Vests Movement (Mouvement des Gilets Jaunes) shows that the popular opposition against the neoliberal policies of President Macron that began in November 2018 spread to other European countries, such as Belgium and the Netherlands (Turley 2019).

When the everyday experiences of people suffering from crisis conditions of neoliberalism are not heard by politicians, it is an indicator of a democratic deficit. Research shows that people who feel that politicians do not listen to them, have lost confidence in them, often no longer vote (Schäfer 2013; Offe 2013) or support populist parties (Manow 2018). Intellectuals and social movements try to give public

expression to the everyday experiences of people who are not or hardly heard. Take the Occupy Movement in 2011 that resonated all over the world (Graeber 2012; Smaligo 2014). This movement not only pointed to all kinds of social evils as a result of neoliberal capitalism, but with the slogan 'We, The 99%' also to the crisis of democracy. Can democracy really exist if less than 1% of the world's population has power over the rest? This crisis of democracy stands in the way of an adequate response to other crises, such as the growing socio-economic inequality and the ecological catastrophe.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the relations between the socio-economic crisis, the ecological crisis and the crisis of democracy as well as the possibilities of political resistance to this geometry of crises. From the perspective of a critical theory of the world society (Habermas 2004; Brunkhorst 2014b; Wittmann 2014), the possibilities and limitations of resistance through collective action are examined. To this end, in the first section, the focus is on what a geometry of crises and criticism entails on the basis of a conceptualization of experience. At the intersection of philosophy and social sciences, some key concepts are presented to foster understanding of crises and the response to them by social movements. Then, in the second section, the manifestations of crises in the EU and the way in which citizens through collective actions respond to them are analysed. As a political experiment in transnational cooperation, the EU offers an interesting case to explore how crises can be challenged by social movements. Finally, in the third section, a critique of a nationalist perspective on crises is presented and juxtaposed to a cosmopolitan perspective. Ultimately, it is argued that in order to effectively combat the transnational geometry of crises in Europe, social movements must contribute to a decolonization of the European Union.

1.   The sense of injustice and collective action

In European democracies, the notion of political engagement is often perceived in the public imagination as a top-down affair. This concerns politicians and intellectuals who know what is best for "the people", and who try to realize the people's political ideals without properly consulting them. Politicians often lack a strong or direct connectivity with the everyday experiences of the people who they claim to represent. However, in the case of bottom-up or grassroots political engagement that is typically embodied by social movements, people's everyday experiences are the starting point. Experiences are the bedrock of resistance and solidarity.

However, the experiences of people suffering from poverty or the toxic effects of environmental pollution do not necessarily lead to political resistance. Indeed, an interesting question for scholars of social movements and protest is why some people do something about their situation and others don't. In other words, why do some

people seek to actively combat and grapple with crises, while others do not? Those who regard their situation as unavoidable, that is, without alternative, are not likely to engage in collective forms of resistance. If they think their situation is the result of external causes beyond their control, for instance, then they are more likely to resign themselves to their misfortune and suffering than if they are able to do something about it themselves. A necessary but not sufficient condition for resistance is that they regard their situation as unfair, which is often accompanied by grievances, indignation and outrage (Simmons 2014). This sense of injustice is an important driver of collective action and political resistance (Barrington Moore 1978). Judith Shklar (1990: 83) describes the sense of injustice as follows: "The special kind of anger we feel when we are denied promised benefits and when we do not get what we believe to be our due. It is the betrayal that we experience when others disappoint expectations that they have created in us. (...) We are not only aroused on our behalf but emphatically also when the indignities of injustice are experienced by other people. The sense of injustice is eminently political."

If a sense of injustice is eminently political, then a key question is how people's experiences of crises become politicized. Politicization can be defined as "the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political" (Zürn 2019: 977). People's experiences with regard to poverty and pollution are often depoliticized. Politicization and politics, therefore, entail a struggle to make from people's experiences of suffering a public affair.

The collective actions of NGOs, social movements and trade unions express their sense of injustice in the public sphere (Della Porta 2021). For example, when the NGO Oxfam presents its annual report on global poverty at about the same time as the World Economic Forum has its annual meeting in Davos, it does so not only to put facts on the table of the economic and political elite who have gathered, but to make a moral appeal: do something about the unjust divide between rich and poor. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Oxfam reports in 2021, among other things: "It took just nine months for the top 1,000 billionaires' fortunes to return to their pre-pandemic highs but for the world's poorest people recovery could take 14 times longer; more than a decade. The increase in the 10 richest billionaires' wealth since the crisis began is more than enough to prevent anyone on Earth from falling into poverty because of the virus, and to pay for a COVID-19 vaccine for everyone." (Oxfam 2021:9). The crisis to which Oxfam point to here is a socio-economic crisis as well as a crisis of democracy. Certainly, for the people concerned, poverty is often experienced as a permanent crisis because they do not have the prospect that their material situation will improve significantly in the foreseeable future. The crisis of democracy relates to the fact that many in the world do not regard poverty as an indicator of a socio-economic crisis and do not seriously engage politically to improve the position of the poor, whose interests are therefore not adequately represented in politics. This is

partly due to the fact that they do not personally suffer from it and often hold the poor themselves responsible for their situation. Hence, in the face of such disregard and apathy, there is a tangible need to politicize the suffering of the poor in order for the socio-economic crisis to be addressed.

When the Dutch NGO 'Milieudefensie' (Defence of the Environment), together with other civil society organizations and 17,000 citizens, on 26 May 2021, successfully compels the multinational company Royal Dutch Shell by means of a lawsuit to reduce CO_2 emissions by 45 percent this decade compared to the level of 2019, then this also happens on the basis of a sense of injustice, which stems from people's experiences of suffering and anxiety in the face of the ecological crisis (De Volkskrant 2021). For these actors, a political failure to do something about CO_2 reduction is a matter of environmental justice regarding our present as well as future generations, thus also speaking to the expected experiences of those not yet born.

A crisis (from the Greek κρίσις) is a turning point at which the situation worsens by continuing on the chosen path or the situation is reversed and a new direction is sought (Müller 2021: 34). Even if a new direction is sought, the future is uncertain in times of a crisis. Characteristic of a crisis is precisely the uncertainty that people experience. Reinhart Koselleck points out that the concept of crisis is associated with making judgments and decisions. Regarding the decision to be made, the alternatives in a crisis situation are usually focused on: "success or failure, right or wrong, life or death, ultimate salvation or damnation" (Koselleck 2006: 204). Koselleck emphasizes that the concept of crisis has a clear temporal dimension. In a sense, there is a time constraint because a decision has to be made urgently in order to turn the tide. The urgency to move in a new direction is currently perceived more with regard to the ecological crisis than with regard to the socio-economic crisis. However, without the bottom-up actions of, among others, the Fridays for Future movement that was initiated on 20 August 2018 by Greta Thunberg, economic and political elites would have been not or less active to do something about the environmental issue.

The crises related to severe poverty and climate change are large-scale global crises, but experienced locally. Consequentially, the corresponding responses to this socio-economic crisis and ecological crisis need to be addressed by political actors both locally and globally. The possibilities for such 'glocal' responses are limited, however, adds another dimension to the 'geometry of crises: democracy (Ketterer and Becker 2019).

In a democracy, the most basic aspect is that 'the people' have the opportunity to influence decisions that profoundly affect their quality of life. A crisis of democracy thus occurs when self-government is systematically undermined over a long period of time. A key symptom of the crisis of democracy concerns the epistemic dimension of democracy, i.e. truth-finding as a necessary condition for good decision-making.

Without valid knowledge, citizens lack reliable information to form an opinion and make the right decision. For example, Fake news, alternative facts and microtargeting for the purpose of political propaganda are, according to some, undermining this truth-finding and have led to post-truth politics (Ball 2017; Nieman 2017; McIntyre 2018). While the internet and social media were initially expected to spark a new wave of democratization, they are now increasingly seen as a serious threat to democracy because of their capacity to so easily spread disinformation (Sunstein 2017; Bartlett 2018; Baldwinn 2018).

Distrust of experts is also a symptom of the crisis of democracy (Oreskes and Conway 2010; Hirschi 2018). This implies that citizens do not believe what experts say about, for example, climate change or covid-19. In practice, this leads to climate change denial or the belief in conspiracy theories. It increases the perceived gap between citizens and experts. In an increasingly complex society, democratic decision-making is impossible without either the knowledge of experts, or without the political legitimacy of decision-making by citizens. The tension between expertocracy (i.e. the rule of experts) and democracy (i.e. the rule of the people) plays an important role in decision-making around political issues such as Covid-19 or climate change (Gabriëls 2021).

In addition to post-truth politics and the gap between citizens and experts, both right-wing and left-wing populism is another symptom of the crisis of democracy (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Howell and Moe 2020; Navin and Nunan 2020). Populists claim that it is not the people that rule, but an elite. They articulate the unease of citizens who are not, or are insufficiently, represented by the political establishment. The way in which populists claim to represent the people - based on an us/them rhetoric - when it comes to right-wing populism often implies the exclusion of minorities. The exclusion of some in the supposed name of the people is incompatible with the commitment to inclusion inherent to democracy. Populists have a point when they say that the people are not, or insufficiently, represented, because empirical research shows that poor parts of the population lag far behind the richer parts in terms of political participation (Schäfer and Zürn 2021). There appears to be a misalignment between the actual political preferences of citizens and the perceptions of these preferences by politicians and the policies they are pursuing (Achen and Bartels 2017; Page and Giles 2017).

The crisis of democracy entails that people are limited in their political participation and politicians are unresponsive to their sense of injustice. It has a major impact on the possibilities for collective actions of people who want to organize bottom-up responses to the large-scale socio-economic and ecological crisis. These crises evoke criticism that can lead to collective actions. Criticism (from Greek κρίνειν, meaning to distinguish) in everyday language means to judge something or someone on the basis of certain standards (Bittner 2009: 136). The judgment can be cognitive,

normative or aesthetic. In the latter case, for example, the standard can be beauty. And for instance, with a cognitive judgment, the standard is the truth and in the case of a normative judgment justice. Of course, these standards require criteria. A critical theory of the world society claims to provide such criteria. This concerns ideas about ecological justice, social justice and political justice that are linked to human rights and democracy.

For a critical theory of the world society that should be pursued, not only the distinction between these cognitive, normative, aesthetic judgments is relevant, but also that between mainstream criticism and radical criticism (Jaeggi and Wesche 2009). In the case of "mainstream" criticism, the criticism is aimed at making improvements within the current social order so that the coordination of the actions of actors leads to more effectiveness and productivity. On the other hand, "radical" criticism is directed at the social order itself, because the way in which global society is structured is responsible for the crises mentioned. This criticism is called radical (derived from the Latin word for root: *radix*), because it eradicates the root of evil. With regard to the three crises, radical criticism should address the neoliberal shape that capitalism has taken worldwide.

The collective actions of various social movements and NGOs are based on radical criticism. To the extent that it is actually radical, the criticism will have to place the crisis of democracy as well as the ecological crisis and the socio-economic crisis in a broader context, namely the capitalist-impregnated world society. The concept of world society encompasses functionally differentiated subsystems such as the economy, the media, law, culture and politics that operate relatively autonomously from each other (Luhmann 1997: 145-171). Using this concept, it is recognized that due to advanced globalization, economic transactions, media dissemination, legal rules, cultural influences and political discourse do not stop at national borders. The concept of world society also offers the opportunity to leave behind the shortcomings of methodological nationalism (the identification of society with the nation-state) and to better understand the possibilities and limitations of collective action.

As a temporal-spatial context of collective actions, the world society is constitutive of what individuals and collectives can accomplish locally and globally with regard to the crises they struggle with. The possibilities and limitations of collective actions need to be explored at both a local and global level, because both levels influence each other due to all kinds of interdependencies. For example, the so-called Arab Spring shows how a local event can inspire worldwide protests (Haas and Lesch 2013; Sadiki 2015). The cause was the suicide attempt of 26-year-old street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010 in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, who had become the breadwinner of an entire family after the death of his father (Kraushaar 2012: 17-27). After the police confiscated the scale necessary for a street trader, he lost all perspective to provide for the family and set himself on fire demonstratively in front

of the government building. That same evening, the TV channel Al Jazeera broadcast images that, in the following days and weeks, mobilized thousands of young people in Tunisia who were in the same socio-economic situation as him. Driven by their sense of injustice they protested against persistent unemployment and high food prices. After Mohammed Bouazizi succumbed to his injuries on January 4, 2011, demonstrations against President Ben Ali increased to the point that he gave up the power struggle and ten days later fled to Saudi Arabia. New elections were then called. Globally operating media reported on this. Partly because of this, young people in other Arab countries, who were also deprived and had little prospect of a better future, got the courage to take to the streets. At the end of that year, the Tunisian street vendor was also honoured on the front page of Time: "The Times today names Mohamed Bouazizi, the street vendor who became the inspiration for the Arab Spring, as its person of the year. Bouazizi was no revolutionary, yet his lonely protest served as the catalyst for a wave of revolts that have transformed the Middle East." (Time, Dec. 28, 2011).

Taking into account that in 2011 in addition to the Arab Spring, there were also the Indignados in Spain, the Occupy Movement, the protests of students in Chile against unequal opportunities in education and the more than half a million people who took to the streets in Israel for affordable housing, one can speak of a glocalization of collective actions. The concept glocalization refers to the fact that the global intensification of dependencies beyond national borders in different domains (economy, media, law, culture and politics) goes hand in hand with the articulation of local particularities (Robertson 1992: 173-174). This global-local nexus is relevant to a geometry of collective action through which people worldwide respond critically to the crises they suffer from. The glocalization of collective action refers to cases where people establish transnational networks when expressing their unease and solidarity across borders, while at the same time taking account of local differences. For instance, Greenpeace operates simultaneously on a global and local scale. In this way, this NGO can take into account the way in which a problem manifests itself locally. While global warming is something that people around the world are dealing with, its effects vary from place to place.

The concept of glocalization can yield a better understanding of a network of networks with a global as well as local character. The Occupy Movement is an example of a loosely interconnected network of networks that took shape within four weeks. The occupation of Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan on September 17 2011 (chosen deliberately because it is Constitution Day in the United States) took on a worldwide impact as in 82 countries and 911 cities people demonstrated against the financial markets and their consequences. By making clever use of social media, a network (Occupy Movement) of networks (Occupy Antwerp, Occupy Frankfurt, Occupy Melbourne, Occupy Tokyo, Occupy Baluwatar, etc.) quickly emerged (Graeber 2012; Smaligo 2014). Earlier than the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, the Global

Justice Movement had already created a transnational network with localized varieties (Walk and Boehme 2002; Vanden, Funke and Prevost 2017). And as with the Arab Spring (the suicide of Mohammed Bouazizi) and the Occupy Movement (the occupation of Zuccotti-Park) a local event, demonstrations in the fall of 1999 in Seattle during the WTO Ministerial Conference against the socio-economic and ecological consequences of neoliberalism, triggered collective actions elsewhere in the world (Levi and Murphy 2006).

All these collective actions are examples of reactions to large-scale structural crises that lead to people expressing grievances. But, as social movement scholars have shown, grievances alone do not necessarily lead to collective actions. An indispensable component of collective actions are generalized representations about the grievances experienced. Often referred to as collective action frames (Snow and Benford 2000), these discursive representations express people's sense of injustice and power struggles. The narratives and ideas which underlie these contentious representations also typically entail forms of identity politics to demarcate boundaries between protagonists and antagonists. A conflict involves power relations in which it is clear who the opponent is (during the Arab Spring the autocratic leaders of various Arab countries and in the case of the Occupy Movement the 1%). The resistance is often triggered because the opponent is violating certain cultural values, such as dignity, freedom and equality. The sense of injustice will be awakened when these cultural values are violated. The opponents of the Global Justice Movement are especially the representatives of the so-called Washington Consensus, especially the Washington, D.C.-based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which promote neoliberal macroeconomic policies worldwide (Walk and Boehme 2002; Vanden, Funke and Prevost 2017). Characteristic of a social movement, according to Alain Touraine (1991: 389), is "a collective action aiming at the implementation of central cultural values against the interest and influence of an enemy which is defined in terms of power relations."

In order to figure out the possibilities and limitations of resistance through collective action power relations must be analysed. Due to the existing power relations, the collective actions of, among others, the Global Justice Movement, the Occupy Movement and those involved during the Arab Spring were only partially successful. In the meantime, there are again autocracies in North Africa and, in the words of Colin Crouch (2011), there is "the strange non-death of neoliberalism". However, that does not imply that social movements are powerless. The power of some agents (autocratic leaders, IMF, World Bank, WTO, multinational companies) is not totalizing. People have always possibilities to establish countervailing powers.

Regarding a geometry of crises, criticism and collective action it is important to distinguish different forms of power at play in a given geographical and historical context. Following Jürgen Habermas it is relevant to distinguish between social

power, administrative power and communicative power (Habermas 1992: 415-467). Administrative power is the coercion that the state can exercise on citizens through the enforcement of law. This power rests on legally defined sanctions that state instituitons can exercise. Social power is the ability to impose one's own will on others notwithstanding their resistance. This power is based on the resources (knowledge, money and media) available to actors and their status. The countervailing powers that citizens can mobilize against the administrative power of the state or the social power of, for example, multinational companies, rests largely on what Habermas calls communicative power. Communicative power is the human capacity to ask for reasons, that is, raise questions why an agent acts in a specific way.

Habermas is not an unworldly idealist because he is aware that there is no social area in which communicative power is present in pure form. However, by exercising communicative power, citizens can question the legitimacy of administrative and social power. The collective actions of social movements are often characterized by critical questions about the legitimacy of the actions of other actors. That communicative power poses a danger to the administrative power of authoritarian governments or the social power of influential companies is evident in all kinds of attempts to silence social movements, critical journalists and intellectuals.

2.   The political experiment called European Union

The EU is a good case to demonstrate the importance of the experiential dimension of the intersecting socio-economic crisis, ecological crisis and the crisis of democracy. The experiences generated during these crises often encourage citizens to engage in collective action, especially if their experiences are accompanied by a sense of injustice. To understand their experiences, the personal story needs to be heard. Literature often gives an intriguing expression to the way in which people struggle with one of the crises mentioned. In his literary work, the French writer Édouard Louis describes how his mother and father, as well as himself, experienced the socio-economic crisis in France that started in the autumn of 2008 after the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers. After the father had a serious accident, the family became poor and the French state forced him to look for work when in fact he was unable to do so because of health problems. In contrast to underclass families, ruling-class families do not suffer from the socio-economic crisis. Thus Louis writes in *Who killed My father*: "...the ruling class, they may complain about a left-wing government, they may complain about a right-wing government, but no government ever ruins their digestion, no government ever breaks their backs, no government ever inspires a trip to the beach. Politics never changes their lives, at least not much. What's strange, too, is that they're the ones who engage in politics, though it has almost no effect on their lives. For the ruling class, in general, politics is a question of aesthetics: a way of

seeing themselves, of constructing a personality. For us, it was life or death." (Louis 2019: 34).

The class difference described by Louis is also at the root of the Yellow Vests Movement which, on November 17, 2018, sparked around 288,000 protesters across France (Charles Devellennes 2021; Hajek 2020; Wilkin 2021). The initial 'spark' for their radical criticism and protests was the intention of the Macron government to increase fuel taxes, especially on diesel fuel. But it soon became apparent that the Yellow Vests Movement was about more than preventing the increase in these taxes. On the basis of an internet vote, 42 demands were drawn up on 29 November 2018, including an increase in the pension and the minimum wage, the termination of the austerity measures and the reintroduction of the wealth tax. It is remarkable that more transparency and accountability on the part of the government and more direct forms of democracy were also part of the requirements. The strong support that the Yellow Vests Movement initially had among the French population faded over time as both the police and a small part of the protesters were violent and the government meet their wishes at some points. But it was also the Covid-19 pandemic that contributed to the movement becoming virtually meaningless. Although the Yellow Vests Movement started in France, it quickly became a worldwide movement. It manifested itself not only in various European countries (including Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Spain), but also in Australia, Burkino Faso, Israel, Libya, Russia, Taiwan and the United States, among others. The Yellow Vests Movement was supported by numerous artists, writers and scientists. For example, a manifesto signed by Juliette Binoche, Édouard Louis and Didier Eribon was published on 5 May 2019, stating: "The most threatening violence is economic and social. It is the violence of a government that defends the interests of a few at the expense of all. It is the violence that leaves its mark on the minds and bodies of those who work their way to survival" (Collectif Yellow Submarine 2019). Not only in France, but across Europe, governments have failed to act on the socio-economic crisis. As long as the gap between rich and poor within and between countries is not politicized, the further integration of the EU will not get off the ground. In 2021, 21.7 % of the EU population was at risk of poverty and exclusion (Eurostat 2022).

The risk of poverty and exclusion is not the only risk that many citizens in Europe experience and that puts them in trouble. This also applies to the ecological crisis, which includes climate change, biodiversity losses, deforestation and extreme weather. The Earth Overshoot Day is relevant to indicate that this is actually a crisis. This is the day when the world's population will use more resources than the earth can sustainably regenerate (Catton 1980). In 2022, July 28 was the day the resource consumption exceeded the world's biocapacity to regenerate these resources that year. Due to the global lockdowns because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Earth Overshoot Day in 2020 was more than 3 weeks later than in 2019 (Global Footprint Network 2021). The critical threshold at which humanity uses more resources from

nature than ecosystems can regenerate in a year was already exceeded in the early 1970s. To meet current global consumption, 1.75 Earth would be needed. Given their high consumption levels, all European countries reached the Overshoot Day before 28 July. For example, Romania on June 11, Germany on May 4, Denmark on March 28 and Luxembourg already on February 14 (Global Footprint Network 2023).

The environmental movement addresses the ecological crisis indicated by the Earth Overshoot Day. It encompasses a wide variety of more locally and globally acting movements that have in common that they want to change the relationship between humans and their environment by, for instance, combating climate change, biodiversity losses, deforestation and extreme weather and developing alternatives for the use of resources (Pettenkofer 2014; Spears 2020; MacIntyre 2021).

Local activism can have a global ripple effect when transnational networks are mobilized (Méndez 2020). The environmental movement Extinction Rebellion (XR) with its radical criticism can serve as an example in this regard (Extinction Rebellion 2019; Berglund and Schmidt 2020). This movement, which rebels against the extinction of plants, animals and habitats, was first manifest in Great Britain on October 31, 2018, but is now active worldwide at a local level. XR is very conscious of the importance of a decentralized network of local grassroots movements that in practice often collaborate with others. These autonomously operating movements can take action in the name of XR as long as they follow the core values formulated in the Declaration of Rebellion. XR aims at three goals: "1. Tell the truth. Governments must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change. 2. Act now. Governments must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025. 3. Go beyond politics. Governments must create and be led by the decisions of Citizen's Assembly on climate and ecological justice." (Extinction Rebellion 2021). In view of these goals, XR's protests are nonviolent. Civil disobedience is deliberately not shunned, even if this implies the violation of often democratically established laws. According to XR, the goals that are being pursued justify disrupting other people's lives by blocking bridges and streets. For example, to compel government action to avoid a climate breakdown, Swiss activists blocked streets in Zürich on October 5, 2021 (Reuters 2021).

Civil disobedience is not undisputed as a form of action. After all, how can the violation of democratically established laws be justified? Civil disobedience refers to intentionally unlawful and principled collective acts of protest that have the political aim of changing specific laws, policies or institutions (Rawls 1971: 363-368). It serves to be distinguished from legal protest, criminal offenses, riots and a revolution. Philosophers such as John Rawls and Habermas consider illegal acts of social movements under strict conditions as morally justified. The latter claims: "Civil disobedience is a morally justified protest which may not be founded only on private

convictions or individual self-interests; it is a public act which, as a rule, is announced in advance and which the police can control as it occurs; it includes the premediated transgression of legal norms without calling into question obedience to the rule of law as a whole; it demands the readiness to accept the legal consequences of the transgression of those norms; the infraction by which civil disobedience is expressed has an exclusively symbolic character – hence is derived the restriction to nonviolent means of protest." (Habermas 1985: 100). Without being able to discuss it further in the context of this article, the question must be raised whether civil disobedience has an exclusively symbolic character (Celikates and Gabriëls 2012: 2-3; Celikates 2015). Is it nothing more than a responsive public-oriented moral appeal to a sense of injustice? Or does civil disobedience also contribute to the politicization of issues that were previously depoliticized? Does it revitalize democracy to some extent, because through this form of activism, citizens contribute to reclaiming a lost democratic right of self-determination?

It is noteworthy that the re-conquest of the democratic right of self-determination, as demonstrated by the Yellow Vest Movement and XR, among others, is an important theme in the political struggle against the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis. Many citizens perceive the limited possibilities to do something about the consequences of the crises they experience as a democratic deficit. Take, for example, the consequences of the austerity measures imposed on Greece to solve the socio-economic problems that manifested themselves in the aftermath of the mentioned bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (Pelagidis and Mitsopoulos 2017). These consequences included government spending cuts, the closure of businesses, an increase in unemployment, loss of income and property and an increase in poverty, suicides and homelessness. Due to the austerity measures, the Greek government was unable to do anything about this seriously. And after a majority of the population expressed in a referendum on 5 July 2015 that they did not agree with the bailout terms of the so-called Troika (consisting of representatives of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the government buckled under by largely accepting the austerity measures imposed on Greece. Understandably, much of the Greek population thereafter felt that they had lost their sovereignty and were completely at the mercy of the Troika.

The perceived loss of sovereignty is not unique to Greek citizens. In Europe, many citizens have the impression that they have little or no influence on political decisions that largely affected the quality of their lives. The result is often that they either stop voting because they no longer feel represented by politicians or vote for right-wing as well as left-wing populist parties that promise with an anti-European ideology that they will ensure that the country in which they live regains sovereignty (Schäfer and Zürn 2021: 11). No more voting or supporting the nationalism of populists does not contribute to the solution of the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis, because these crises can only be solved successfully if there is also cooperation at

the transnational level. While the European Union is a political experiment to get things done through transnational cooperation, it clearly shows serious democratic deficits.

Habermas underlines that the EU struggles with a democratic deficit by pointing out that the legitimacy of its institutions rests at most on "output legitimacy", which means that citizens are satisfied with the services they enjoy (Habermas 2013). The way in which many citizens in Europe reacted to the socio-economic crisis that their country had to deal with after 2008, illustrated by Greece, shows that output legitimacy falls short. The response of the EU institutions to this crisis has been technocratic, i.e. exercise administrative power beyond the will of the affected citizens. Without input legitimacy, according to Habermas, there will always be a democratic deficit in the EU. According to him, the input legitimacy derived from the communicative power of citizens requires a functioning European public sphere, an active citizenry and a constitution. A European public sphere is the locus where citizens actively participate in the deliberative process of opinion- and will-formation regarding issues that transcend national borders. It is the sphere where social movements could generate their communicative power in an open-ended discourse about political issues. In the public sphere, social movements can force the political system with its administrative power or multinational companies with their social power to respond to people's grievances.

Despite the rejection of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005, Habermas thinks it is important to strive for a constitution. Such a constitution has to underpin a double coding of citizenship based on the idea that individuals should understand themselves as national citizens and as European citizens (Habermas 2011: 39-96). The constitution should guarantee a balance between the EU parliament (representing European citizens) and the European Council (representing national citizens). In this way, it can be avoided that individuals focus on their role as national citizen at the expense of their role as European citizen. A transnationalization of the existing national public spheres should also contribute to this. European citizens need a sphere where they can deliberate about policies and proposed laws that affect the entire EU. Not only mass media should pay attention to these policies and proposed laws, but also public intellectuals, political parties, NGOs and social movements. It is the communicative power of social movements that can play a mediating role between the everyday experiences of citizens and the legislative bodies of the political system. Thanks to their communicative power they can shed light on the often painful experiences of citizens and give a voice to their sense of injustice.

A social movement that tries to tackle the crisis of democracy in Europe is the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM 25). It is a pan-European movement founded in 2016 with the aim of democratizing the EU. According to DiEM25, the democratization of Europe is very urgent, because it has reached a point where it is no longer possible (DiEM25 2021). The movement has set itself the goal of creating a

democratic constitution until 2025 that makes all existing European treaties superfluous. To prevent the EU from disintegrating this constitution aims not only to give citizens a voice, but also to address the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis. DiEM25 launched the Green New Deal for Europe in April 2019. This is a campaign with the aim of a just, rapid and democratic transition to a sustainable Europe. With a bottom-up approach, DiEM25 tries to mobilize citizens at a grassroots level to develop a shared vision of environmental justice. The movement consciously uses communicative power against the administrative power of the EU and the social power of multinational companies. It is, among other things, this administrative and social power that is responsible for the colonization of the lifeworld of citizens in Europe and elsewhere in the world. By colonization of the lifeworld, Habermas understands the ever deeper penetration of the lifeworld, which is reproduced through communicative action, by the imperatives of the state and the economy (Habermas 1981: 522). Thereby the unfolding of communicative potentials that are inherent in the lifeworld is undermined by administrative power and money. It is the task of social movements to break through the resulting systematically distorted communication between citizens and the political system. DiEM25 tries to do that with regard to Europe and thus contributes to its decolonization.

3.   An unfinished project: decolonizing Europe

The colonization of the lifeworld is a worldwide phenomenon that is due to neoliberal capitalism. Inherent in neoliberal capitalism is the accumulation of capital and consequently the search for new markets. In this context, nation-states compete with each other to attract businesses and thus work (Harvey 2007; Ther 2016). In order not to be on the losing side in this competition, many nation-states have lowered taxes to make it attractive for companies to make investments. As a result, the possibilities for nation-states to use resources obtained through taxes for the benefit of the quality of life of all citizens became ever smaller. In order to meet the needs of citizens to some extent, more and more debts were taken up. Wolfgang Streeck points out that neoliberal capitalism is responsible for the transformation of the welfare state into a debt state (Streeck 2015). As a result, many nation-states and their citizens have become dependent on developments of capital markets. This decreased the opportunities to intervene in the economy via democratic politics. Without a radical democratization, the possibilities to move something regarding the socio-economical crisis and the ecological crisis through collective actions remain limited. For good reason the Yellow Vests Movement, XR and DiEM25 are so keen on democratization. The collective actions of populist movements, such as that of the pan-European Identitarian movement, for example, are in a sense aimed at democratization, because they pretend to speak on behalf of the people that are no longer represented by the

elite (Häusler and Virchow 2016; Bruns, Glösel, Strobl 2017; Speit 2018). In their view, the EU undermines the sovereignty of the people to decide whether migrants are allowed to enter a Member State.

Following Habermas, it is useful to distinguish a nationalist perspective on the crisis of democracy from a cosmopolitan perspective. While the nationalist perspective presupposes that citizens can and should democratically address the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis with their collective actions only at the level of the nation-state, the cosmopolitan perspective assumes that citizens can and should also do so at the transnational level. Social movements that base their collective actions on a nationalist vision of democratization assume that only within the framework of the nation-state, citizens can shape society through political means. They presuppose that nation states have sufficient steering power to develop and implement policies to solve the problems inherent in the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis. However, the nationalist social movements are fighting a rearguard action, because due to a globally unleashed neoliberal capitalism, nation-states are hitting their limits to do something about its undesirable socio-economic and ecological consequences. The interdependencies of a global economy make it utterly impossible for nation-states to sufficiently protect citizens against the consequences of decisions made by actors beyond their borders. With their collective actions, nationalist social movements fight de facto for the potential and actual losers of the neoliberal transformation of state-embedded markets to market-embedded states. These movements hardly realize that nation-states can no longer regain their steering power of the past.

In contrast, social movements that base their collective actions on a cosmopolitan perspective of democratization assume that nation-states have been disempowered by the global economy and that there is a need to work together on a transnational level to address the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis, as well as the crisis of democracy. Their point of departure is what Ulrich Beck calls the 'reality of cosmopolitanism', that is, the fact that the dependencies of people on this planet in subsystems of the world society such as the economy, the media, law, culture and politics, among others, have advanced so far that they already extensively cooperate transnationally in all these subsystems (Beck 2007: 110-112). Hence, not only Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Greenpeace operate on a transnational level, but also numerous other movements concerned with socio-economic inequality, environmental pollution and democratic deficits. Thanks in part to social media that facilitate the opinion- and will-formation, they can give shape to a public sphere that does not stop at the borders of the nation-state, so that "the violation of right at any one place on the earth is felt in all places" (Kant 1991: 216). Only in this way can a global civil society be constituted that forms a counterweight to the colonization of the lifeworld.

With their collective actions, cosmopolitan social movements not only express the sense of injustice of citizens of a specific nation state, but also point out what, despite all kinds of differences, citizens worldwide have in common with regard to the suffering of the socio-economic crisis, the ecological crisis and the crisis of democracy. Under the umbrella of global justice, they address social justice, environmental justice and political justice. In this context, one can speak of social justice if the economic and social rights, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are not violated (Pogge 2002: 91-117). This implies that social movements that manifest themselves in this field with their collective actions fight for "the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." (United Nations 1948: Article 25). Environmental justice is the fair distribution of the consequences of environmental damage, such as, for example, pollution and climate change, and the avoidance thereof (Singer 2002: 14-50). As in the case of social justice, activists who address environmental justice could be guided by a negative duty, namely not to harm people and nature. Thomas Pogge links this negative duty to the fulfilment of human rights: "Our negative duty not to cooperate in the imposition of unjust coercive institutions triggers obligations to protect their victims and to promote feasible reforms that would enhance their fulfilment of human rights." (Pogge 2002:172). Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is particularly central to environmental justice: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" (United Nations 1948: Article 3). Political justice refers to a situation where not only the political rights stated in this declaration are fulfilled, but where citizens actually see themselves as the authors of the laws they must obey (Habermas 1992: 153). Apart from the substantive issues that social movements bring to the fore with their collective actions, their struggle usually also involves political justice: the opportunity to raise these substantive issues in the public sphere and to be heard by politicians. For social movements that base their collective actions on a cosmopolitan perspective, the EU should be an interesting political experiment, because it tries to solve at a transnational level problems that can no longer be solved exclusively at the level of the nation-state. But as a political experiment, the EU encounters limits that social movements have to address publicly. This involves the issue how to shape solidarity both within the EU and globally.

Internally, the EU is wrestling with a dilemma: what needs to be done with regard to the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis is currently impossible or hardly possible on a democratic path (Brunkhorst 2014a: 143-155; Offe 2016: 19-29). In order to solve these crises, much more socio-economic and environmental measures have to be taken at a EU level, but the democratic commitment for this is lacking because many citizens are fixated on the level of the nation-state. The socio-economic inequalities between the member states in the North and the South in

particular threaten the cohesion of the EU and require redistribution and social rights at an EU level. But in the member states of the North, many political parties and nationalist social movements reject any step towards solidarity with the member states of the South (Blyth 2013: 51-93). In turn, political parties and nationalist social movements in the southern member states are opposing the austerity measures imposed on them, because they not only affect citizens' social security but also undermine their political space for action. Regarding the ecological crisis, solidarity among member states of the EU is also missing. An example is the necessary but failed attempt to bind member states to the same ecological standards so that the EU becomes climate neutral as soon as possible. In October 2019, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Romania in the European Council blocked the EU 2030 climate target by reducing its emissions not by 40 percent, but by 55 percent by 2030.

The dilemma that arises here is that nation-states lack the steering power to ensure social security and sustainability and at EU level there is too much division among the EU member states to muster the necessary solidarity. This situation undermines trust in politics, as politicians are unable to deliver on their promises about vital issues due to their limited space for manoeuvre, which only exacerbates the crisis of democracy. Against this background, social movements have no choice but to exploit the possibilities of enhancing democracy in order to create more space for successfully fighting poverty and environmental pollution. They will have to fight against the resentment unleashed and used by nationalist social movements towards the EU and the companies and investors who champion a neoliberal Europe, because they only perpetuate or augment the socio-economic crisis, the ecological crisis and the crisis of democracy. Since these crises should not only be solved on a local or national level, but also on a transnational level (because of the aforementioned global interdependencies), more market forces or a return to the classical nation-state is not a viable option. For cosmopolitan social movements, only a more social, sustainable and democratic EU is a viable option on which their collective actions should focus. This implies that they should be aware of the glocalization of protest and address the actually existing Eurocentrism.

The actually existing Eurocentrism is characterized by upholding values such as human rights and democracy, while at the same time allowing European interests to prevail over non-European interests. What this means in practice can best be clarified with reference to the concept of externalization developed by Stephan Lessenich (Lessenich 2017: 24). By this he understands the transfer of the socio-economic and environmental costs that are incurred within a certain context, for example, the EU, to the outside world. Externalization is a well-known concept for economists. They are talking about external costs of economic activity that play no role in decision-making. The classic example is a company that does not factor the ecological costs of the production of commodities into the price. For example, if the water in a river is polluted

during production, the costs for a water treatment plant are not borne by that company. Third parties must, as it were, internalize the negative costs of the actions of such a company. The taxpayer could be called upon to provide the money for the water treatment plant. In addition to ecological costs, the externalization entails socio-economic costs. For example, many children from poor countries cannot develop themselves because they are forced to manufacture products for rich countries (Nesi, Nogler and Rertile 2016). In India, for example, children work under appalling conditions in quarries where they beat stones for the European market (Glocal Research, India Committee of the Netherlands & Stop Child Labour 2020). They do not go to school, often have lung diseases and a low life expectancy. Externalization means that the rich part of the world separates itself from the poor part, while at the same time they are connected by all kinds of threads that are usually hidden from view. The ornamental stone that a European has in his garden carries the person who follows such a thread via the garden centre and the wholesaler who earn a lot of money with it to children who are exploited in India.

The economic perspective is not sufficient to properly understand externalization, because it is fixated on the decisions that actors make in their actions. As a result, the system side of the externalization is not taken into account. From the perspective of a critical theory of the world society, externalization is inherent in a neoliberal capitalist system. This system penetrates every corner of the world society and places its social-economic and environmental costs on the plate of the southern hemisphere. The rich part of the world lives at the expense of the poor part of the world. According to Lessenich, this is a zero-sum game (Lessenich 2017: 24-30). For example, the wealth of one implies the poverty of the other. Increasingly, the victims of the externalization of the peripheries will migrate to the centres of neoliberal capitalism. The migratory pressure will increase fears among many people from rich countries that they will lose their privileges. In the EU, politicians try to keep this fear in check by setting up Frontex or a treaty with Turkey. However, the boomerang effect of externalization cannot be stopped.

The centres of neoliberal capitalism will have to pay a price for the socio-economic and environmental costs they externalize. And that will be more than the costs associated with closing the borders. The credibility of the EU, which appreciates values such as human rights and democracy, is also at stake. The costs of losing credibility is immeasurable. Didier Fassin points out that one of the consequences of externalization is that there is a sharp contrast between universal values that express respect for human dignity and the way the world society is ordered (Fassin 2018). World society is so ordered that de facto some people's lives are worth less than others. The lives of black people, women, so-called illegal immigrants and the poor count less than that of white people, men, people with civil rights and the rich. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic or the misery in which refugees live on Greek islands shows that the lives of EU citizens matter more than those who do not have their

status, despite all confessions regarding human rights (Huisman and Tomes 2021; Wiel, Castillo-Laborde, Urzúa, Fish and Scholte 2021). As long as this actually existing Eurocentrism is present, social movements must radically criticize it. With their collective actions they can contribute to the decolonization of Europe (Buettner 2016).

Decolonization of Europe means closing the gap between the universal values that the EU upholds and reality (Zhang 2014). That entails two things. Firstly, that within the EU, democratic deficits will be eliminated, thus creating greater support among its citizens to tackle the socio-economic crisis and ecological crisis. Social security is indispensable for a democratic EU. For the EU, this means that citizens, politicians and social movements must support transfer payments between wealthy and poor member states, tax harmonization, a European minimum income and a fiscal union. Secondly, the decolonization of Europe entails that people who are not citizens of the EU but are seriously affected by its possible coercive measures are involved in the public opinion- and will-formation. In this way, the EU can contribute to create the conditions for a long-term goal such as a global domestic policy (Habermas 2004: 135). With regard to a global domestic policy, the EU is a political experiment that could demonstrate how to resolve crises in a democratically legitimate way at a transnational level and how to compensate for the loss of the steering power of the nation-state.

When the EU complies with the principles of social, environmental and political justice formulated above, it can be a point of departure for a cosmopolitan solidarity based on what Hauke Brunkhorst calls a patriotism of human rights (Brunkhorst 2002: 79). This is solidarity among strangers who commit to human rights and recognize that they socio-economically, ecologically and politically participate in a community of destiny. Their cosmopolitan solidarity has nothing to do with altruism, i.e. the question of what is beneficial for the other, but with the question of what is good for all those affected, for example, by the socio-economic crisis and the ecological crisis, and the crisis of democracy. In a global village, cosmopolitan solidarity is at odds with all EU measures that contribute to the consolidation of Fortress Europe. Brunkhorst rightly points out that glocally operating social movements that oppose the Fortress Europe with their patriotism of human rights can be seen as the vanguard of a transnational people (Brunkhorts 2002: 20).

Knowing that with its political measures, the EU largely determines the quality of life of people outside its borders, cosmopolitan social movements also oppose the renationalization of solidarity. Geopolitically, it is naive of nationalist social movements to think that the global crises induced by neoliberal capitalism can be solved at the level of the nation-state. Unlike the nation state, the EU is large enough to influence the global economy and manage these crises to some extent. Provided that the EU itself becomes more democratic and complies with standards of social and environmental justice, it can act as a geopolitical counterweight to the unstable

United States and an increasingly powerful China. Only social movements that express with their collective actions a patriotism of human rights can put such pressure on the EU that it will actually establish such a counterweight. Only social movements that express their collective actions as a patriotism of human rights can pressure the EU in ways that will actually establish such a counterweight. One can only hope that the global crises created by neoliberalism may force social movements to avoid the nationalist path and opt for the cosmopolitan path.

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