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# NEOLIBERALISM AND AUSTERITY IN SPAIN, PORTUGAL AND SOUTH AFRICA: THE REVOLUTION OF OLDER PERSONS

**Running head title: The Revolution of Older Persons in Spain, Portugal, South Africa**

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## KEYWORDS

Activism; pensioners; neoliberalism; resistance; social policy; global financial crisis

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## **ABSTRACT**

In Portugal, Spain and South Africa, there has been a noted anti-neoliberal resistance, marked by the significant participation of the older generation in protest movements. Changing demographics, the global financial crisis, unemployment, poverty, and the reliance of the family nucleus on the pensioner, coupled with neoliberal and austerity-based reductions to welfare programmes, pensions, health, and social care, has caused the “silver revolution”. As a population group that is often considered to be less politically active and robust members of society, such resistance is a noteworthy moment in society that needs to be considered and responded to.

## **KEYWORDS**

Activism; pensioners; neoliberalism; resistance; social policy; global financial crisis

## INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the growing dissatisfaction with neoliberal and austerity measures within global civil society. The negative effects of the related welfare reforms and socio-economic policies have been discussed broadly in academic literature, and resistance movements within civil society, social service professions and academics have been noted across the EU and non-EU contexts. However, what is perhaps most telling about this growing resistance movement toward such reforms has been the emergence of the older generation in anti-neoliberal and anti-austerity activism – their voices carry significant weight in highlighting the negative consequences of neoliberal advancement in our global world today. “Images of aging picketers carrying canes and protest signs are potent weapons in the advocacy arsenal” (Interview excerpt, Wallice, 2014) and deserve attention.

The participation of the older generation in anti-neoliberal and civil resistance will be reflected on within the contexts of Spain, South Africa, and Portugal; three country case study examples where increasing civil resistance has recently been recognized through a Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange scheme (FP7-PEOPLE-2011-IRSES). These countries, still young in their democratic achievements, are seeing such development “trumped by the transition to neoliberalism” (Desai, 2002: 16) and austerity measures, demonstrating increasing challenges for the wellbeing of citizens. Older persons are experiencing unique challenges within this context and as a result, many groups have been actively participating in anti-neoliberal and austerity resistance (Wallis, 2014).

## **DEMOCRACY, NEOLIBERALISM AND AUSTERITY IN PORTUGAL, SPAIN AND SOUTH AFRICA**

Although the infiltration of neoliberal ideology in Spain, Portugal and South Africa are not uniform, their case-studies offer a similar trajectory, with neoliberal and austerity-related measures being implemented in the vacuum of late democratic transition, external pressure from groups such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and the global financial crisis of 2008.

In Portugal, after a four-decade dictatorship, the military revolution of 1974 institutionalized democracy in the country. With the construction of a democratic political system and socialist ideals, civic participation booms were seen across the country, envisioning the restoration and activation of fundamental freedoms and rights of a democratic State, and the guarantee of basic needs of the population. The end of the colonial war and the establishment of the democratic Constitution in 1976 allowed for the development of systematic public and social policies according to a Social State model within Portuguese society, reinforced by the integration of the country within the European Union in 1986. This promoted a new generation of social policies. Similarly, Spain's civil war from 1936 through to 1939 led to the dominance of fascism, which remained up until the democratic Constitution of 1978, thereby severely limiting the role of the state in the development of a welfare system. Under the governance of Felipe Gonzalez and the socialist party, however, from 1982-1996, Spain implemented welfare reforms, expanding pension funds, national healthcare systems, and the provision of much needed social services (Barbero, 2002; Matos-Silveria, 2013). Thus, the 1980s and 1990s saw a greater awareness of, and focus on, community work initiatives in

Spain, the support of the democratic municipal governments, and a growth in social care and citizen protection.

South Africa's devastating apartheid policies, isolating non-white citizens from much state-provided basic care and service provision, remained up until the 1990s, resulting in mass inequality within the South African population. However, the end of apartheid ushered in the democratically elected African National Congress, "an alliance of black nationalists with socialist unions and radical social movements that stands for fundamental social, economic, and political change" (Peet, 2002: 54). The ANC demonstrated a strong commitment to a transformative and developmental socio-economic framework, promoting economic growth through redistribution and the empowerment of the disadvantaged (Bond, 2005). This was clearly outlined in the introduction of the 1994 socialist and basic-needs-oriented Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, 1994), as the popular foundation for South Africa's post-apartheid economic policy (Peet, 2002).

However, Spain, Portugal and South Africa's socialist democratic achievements were to be short lived, fast "trumped by the transition to neoliberalism" (Desai, 2002: 16). This shift contradicted and challenged socialist and social democratic ideals with a global influence toward competition, the prioritisation of the market, privatisation, reductions to state spending on welfare and the valuing of economic gain over human-related social progress (Harvey, 2005).

During the post-apartheid transition and early years of democracy, South Africa came under increasing scrutiny and disciplinary pressure from the IMF, the World Bank, as well as internal business organizations and the media (Peet, 2002). As prelude to a 1993 \$850 million loan (Peet, 2002), the IMF began exerting pressure on South Africa to adopt an outward-looking macroeconomic strategy, one that would emphasise private sector growth, cutting down of state deficits, controlling inflation, imposing wage restraints, and recognizing the

superiority of the market over state regulatory and redistributive interventions (Padayachee, 1994). Within two years, the ANC had replaced the socialist Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, 1994) with a macro-economic and neoliberal Growth, Employment, and Redistribution policy (GEAR, 1996) (Bond, 2005; Habib and Taylor, 1999) and continued to demonstrate policy changes based on neoliberal ideals, such as that of increasing privatisation, thereby isolating the poor from necessary services (Bond, 2005; Desai, 2003).

Within Portugal and Spain, such contradictions also became increasingly evident: the implementation of neoliberal policy in these two countries followed the global tendency within the European Union. Initially, the Portuguese Social State continued to thrive despite the changing global context, due to the socialist political impulse in the country after the 1974 revolution. However, neoliberal ideology emerged in Portugal after the nationalization of important economic sectors, slowly beginning with the privatization of banking in 1984 (Reis et al., 2013), and further developing through the action of following governments, as well as the growing neoliberal political climate of the EU. This intensified around the start of the new century. Similar movements were seen in Spain since the year 2000, regardless of the political party in power. However, these were especially intensified with the conservative Popular Party under Mariano Rajoy, which took term in 2011, aligning itself with right-wing neoliberal ideals (Matos-Silveria, 2013). Such neoliberal infiltration was then further radicalised with the introduction of austerity measures in Spain under the guise of the 2008 economic crisis (Martínez-Román and Domenech-López, 2014; Martínez-Román et al., 2015). This was reiterated in Portugal, through the implementation of an economic adjustment programme negotiated with the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission; this was implemented between 2011 and 2014 by a liberal-conservative government under prime minister Passos Coelho. Reductions and

reforms in social services, health care, labour and salary conditions were at the core of these austerity-related agreements in both countries (Ioakimidis et al., 2014). Although South Africa did not undergo austerity rules, its sharp turn to market-driven commitments has continued through external and internal disciplinary pressure. According to Peet (2002: 79), as neoliberalism became the undisputed picture of economic progress, “even the whisper that deviation might taint this idealized vision brought instant retribution - most obviously in the form of runs on the rand - from the bears of the world’s financial markets”.

These shifts have placed Portuguese, Spanish and South African citizenry in a context of deterioration of social cohesion, lack of social protection, decreased welfare support, increasing inequality, failure to address previous grievances, and rising risk for groups such as children, women, the chronically ill and disabled people, and older persons.

## **CHALLENGES FACING OLDER PERSONS IN SPAIN, SOUTH AFRICA AND PORTUGAL**

Within such changing socioeconomic contexts, older persons in Spain, South Africa and Portugal are seen to be at the heart of the impact of neoliberal and austerity-related reforms. This generation, who fought for democracy and social changes throughout the 70s-90s, are now facing complex challenges to their wellbeing. The neoliberal-influenced precariousness of the labour market, progressive scarcity of jobs, changes in the structure of households (single-person, late emancipation of children, single parent families, resulting in a welfare-family), demographic changes to the population, and inequalities in health care and quality of life, has seen a context where the squeezing out of social security by austerity and neoliberal-related measures is detrimental to the larger citizenry, and is being actively resisted. Such reforms are ushering in particular challenges for older persons, whose welfare, dignity, and



rights is being increasingly disregarded by policy shifts and austerity cuts. These challenges will be discussed under three broad umbrellas, namely: changing demographics of the population; poverty, pensions, and neoliberal policy changes; and family dependency.

### **Changing demographics: the aging population**

Demographic changes in much of Europe have led to important increases in the size and proportion of the older generation. The increasing number of older people associated with demographic ageing of the population is an emerging phenomenon across Europe and is becoming prominent in Spain and Portugal (Santana, 2000). Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE, 2014) estimated in 2014 that the percentage of the Spanish population aged 65 years and over, which stood at 18.2%, is likely to reach 24.9% in fifteen years (in 2029) and 38.7% in fifty years (in 2064). If the current demographic trends were to continue, the dependency rate would increase more than seven points, to 59.2% in 2029, and a possible 95.6% in 2064 (INE, 2014). In 2001 the percentage of the population over the age of 65 years in Portugal overtook the percentage of those under 15 years, with a great increase in life expectancy (Capucha, 2014). According to the Census data of 2011, the Portuguese population aged 65 or more corresponds to 26% of the current active population, and to 19% of the country whole population (INE, Census 2011). Similarly, in South Africa, the aging population has been growing, with the number and proportion of persons aged 60 years and older relative to those aged 59 and younger showing an evident rise between 1996 - 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Projections suggest that such an increase will continue toward an estimated seven million persons over the age of 60 years in South Africa by 2030 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Considerations of changing demographic dividends is necessary when reflecting on welfare policy shifts and civil resistance movements, for,

“As older persons become an ever greater proportion of the total population, they will become an even greater force to be reckoned with in society – politically, economically and socially... The impact of population ageing on the socio-economic development of society engenders the need for continuing integration and empowerment of older persons, including the removal of barriers and obstacles which serve to exclude or discriminate against them” (Kelly, 2005: 1).

As a result of changing demographic trends, the sustainable wellbeing of older persons is of rising significance and concern. Yet, austerity and neoliberal-based welfare reforms have only served to heighten challenges for older persons within Portuguese, South African and Spanish society.

### **Poverty, pensions and neoliberal policy changes**

As discussed earlier in the text, neoliberal influences through international pressure and austerity have placed immense pressure on the social ideals of Spain, Portugal, and South Africa. Under the conservative Popular Party and austerity agreement post the 2008 crisis, funding for varied public services in Spain have been drastically reduced (Guillén, 2010; Matos-Silveria, 2013). With a belief that the State is unnecessarily social (Fonseca, 2014; Martínez Román et al., 2015), cuts to social spending have been particularly evident in the areas of education, health, social services, social protection, and pensions (González Pascual, 2014). Caritas Europa (2015) highlights specific changes in the Spanish welfare system from 2008 to 2014, in terms of: reductions to pension arrangements; the implementation of measures aimed at curtailing health expenditure, including long-term care; unemployment benefit reductions; as well as changes to child benefits. A further unique challenge within Spain exists as a result of the distribution of Spanish society into various autonomous communities. Therefore, although the public social services system has developed some services to deliver care to dependent older adults and support their caregivers, there is noted inequality of implementation and opportunity in this regard (Garcés et al., 2010). For

instance, the 2006/39 Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care of Dependent Persons Act represented a great step forward in the institutionalization and universalisation of care, which had received little support until then, leaving the families to bear with the main responsibility of this care (Garcés et al., 2010). However, the implementation of this act has been very uneven and implemented in accordance with the political will of the different governments of communities (Barriga et al., 2015).

In Portugal, noted reductions in pensions (Leahy et al., 2013), recent discussions around the freezing of minimal pensions (Martins, 2015) and continuing social security cuts (Simões, 2015), has meant that older persons are receiving less and less support from the state and social service providers. While until recently Portuguese workers with more than 36 years of work experience, and aged 60 years or more, were entitled to their whole retirement pension, those currently in a similar situation get as a pension no more than 40% of their salary. In an article in the Portuguese *Publico* by Ana Isabel Mendes (2014), examples of such reductions were highlighted, as in the case of reductions of up to €600 being removed from a retired subway worker's pension of €1350. Such a reduction is almost halving an individual's monthly means of income and has detrimental impact. According to Casimiro Menezes, President of Portuguese National Confederation of Pensioners (MURPI), there are "many retired households knocking on the door of the association asking for a soup for dinner...situations of hunger and poverty [are] very sharp" (Renascença, 2015). More recently, in Portugal, there have been growing protests and fear from older persons and their families regarding the recent Urban Letting law (Law no. 31/2012, 14<sup>th</sup> August, *Diário da República*, 1<sup>a</sup> série, n.º. 157) which allowed for a drastic increase in previously frozen rent control; the ending passage of several generations of leases; faster evictions; the shortening of the time for a penalized breach; and creating a space where the displacement of older persons

is increasingly threatened (Expresso Sapo, 2012).

Older persons in South Africa face some similar challenges, yet within a unique context. South Africans over the age of 50 years spent much of their lives under apartheid rule. Thus, older black South Africans have lived their most productive years under restrictions on education, employment, and residence. Equal pension and welfare benefits for all races only began to be implemented in the 1990s (Duflo, 2003). In post-apartheid, however, South Africa's public welfare system was considered to be, in theory, exceptional among developing countries and a major pillar in its highly redistributive social policies. Yet, a large percentage of South Africans continue to live in dire poverty, as a result of post-apartheid challenges that have not been sufficiently addressed, neoliberal-related reforms and inequality in wealth and opportunity, as well as the impact of HIV/AIDS (Bond, 2005). Research shows that four in ten older persons in South Africa are considered to live in poverty (Statistics SA, 2014). The South African Department of Social Development (2002a, b) has further estimated that over 80 percent of older persons have no access to income apart from the social pension and that the pension reduces the poverty gap of older persons by 94 percent. However, as discussed earlier in the text, neoliberal-based contradictions to South Africa's social democratic welfare model are becoming increasingly evident, and limiting the nature of such redistributive and universal care. Furthermore, the pension rates are meagre and cannot be said to significantly reduce the poverty risk of the aged. According to Matthias and Zaal (2009), rather than diminishing, South Africa's inequality, poverty, and the urgency of need for intervention has increased post-apartheid.

### **The generational factor: Considerations of Dependency**

Pension reductions and threats to the wellbeing of older generations is not just a concern for older persons. In literature, discussions around dependency ratios often focus on the burden that rising percentages of older persons can often lead create for young and working adults.

This can generate strain on the labour and financial productivity of a country's economy. However, older persons are, themselves, often a key source of financial support for younger generations. The financial contribution of older persons to the social protection of young people and working adults is often not accounted for, particularly in studies that measure poverty as a reflection of income, as opposed to where and how that income is spent. A 2013 Living Conditions Survey in Spain for example, estimated that the population over 65 years of age presented the lowest at-risk-of-poverty percentage (6.8% in 2013), with the highest percentage registered among the persons under 16 years (27.2%) (INE, 2014). However, these statistics focused on older people as passive recipients of pensions, without sufficiently taking into account the important contributions, in cash and in kind, which allowed for the protection of family members (Alaminos and Penalva, 2013). Therefore, although many older persons have an income from a retirement or old-age pension, which in theory frees them from poverty, they are at a risk, or actively experiencing poverty, as a result of the use of their pensions to cushion their families' crisis. According to Daley (2012) in an article in the New York Times, "retired people, sharing their pensions and dipping into their savings, have been the silent heroes of the economic crisis, and that without them Spain would be seeing far more social unrest. In many cases, they stand between their middle-aged children and homelessness".

Similarly, in Portugal, a growing phenomenon within the youth and young adult generations in Portugal, referred to as the "€500 Generation" (Deco Proteste, 2015) is having an impact on the wellbeing of older persons. This generation, despite education achievements or qualifications, are entrenched in a context of labour precarity and wage reductions, to the point where their maximum income, regardless of profession or status, has been deemed as reaching no more than €500 per month (Aguiar, 2007). As a result, many are reliant on their

parents or grandparents for financial and living support, in what has been termed the welfare family, associated with the concepts of welfare society and the familyist model of welfare capitalism (Santos, 1991).

Such challenges are also evident in the South African context. Key demographic trends, such as the large population share of school-going youth, high unemployment rates and the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on younger age cohorts have placed the social pension and older persons at the centre of the livelihood strategies of many South African households. In this context, the social pension plays a vital role as a poverty-alleviation mechanism (Duflo, 2003). Reduced welfare from the state; increasing privatisation of services, which many cannot afford; the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on the middle generation; the rise in unemployment and precarity; the challenges in pursuing secondary and tertiary education; and continuing widening inequality between the elite and the majority of the population, is a burden that often, older persons in South Africa are forced to carry. As is outlined by Burns, Keswell and Leibbrandt (2005: 112), "The fact that the pension program is having a large number of desirable outcomes does not obviate the need for additional social security assistance for other vulnerable groups in society... The introduction of such additional social security programs seems not only inevitable, but also critical if South Africa's older persons are truly to receive the poverty-alleviation assistance they require".

Thus, the impact of neoliberal and austerity-related policies, welfare changes and cutbacks has a significant impact on the wellbeing of older persons in Spain, Portugal, and South Africa, as well as their right and capacity to participate in society, contribute to the wellbeing of their families, and enter changing life stages with dignity. As in the words of Maria do Rosário Gama, President of the Portuguese Retirees Association, in reflecting on the changes to pension payments, "What they are doing to retired persons and those who will retire after us is an injustice, an indignity, and we stand for dignity. Human life is worthy and they want

to destroy the life of pensioners" (Mendes, 2014). It is against this grim backdrop that empowered older persons rise in protest.

## **THE RESISTANCE OF OLDER GENERATIONS**

In reflecting on the resistance of the older generation in recent years, it is necessary to understand this within the context of broader protest movements within Portuguese, Spanish and South African societies. The rise in active protests within South Africa, Portugal, and Spain over the last few years is significant, and highlights a significant shift within global society. To sufficiently cover all recent resistance movements in their entirety in this paper would be challenging. However, an overview for each country and its most notable movements, which have been supported or initiated by older persons, has been presented below, sufficient in shedding light on the growing challenges of this generation, and their heightened response. Many of these protests have been largely successful in creating pressure on the state, raising much international attention and at times, achieving set-out demands.

### **Resistance in Spain**

The extraordinary public support demonstrated by the Spanish society in recent protest movements in 2011 suggests an emerging anti-capitalist critique (Ioakimidis et al., 2014). Primary examples of this can be seen through the development of a movement known as the *indignados*, which was launched after a small gathering in May 2011. After the violent repression of the indignados' mobilizations, the anti-austerity 15M movement spread across the country creating local assemblies and has since continued to organize nationwide protests that have caught the attention of international media (Taibo, 2013). Such resistance has been furthered still by the *Marea Ciudadana* platform, where at least three-quarters of the

population supported protest manifestos (Castells, 2012: 116) in the form of different coloured waves. For example: defence of health (white wave); defence of education (green wave); defence of social services (orange wave); and defence of water as a human right (blue wave). The *Marea Naranja* (orange wave) movement, in particular, has been acting as a common platform for NGOs, social workers, service users, trade unionists, social activists, and citizens to unite in their commitment to defend public services (Ioakimidis, Santos and Herrero, 2014). Many older people in Spain have been actively participating in such demonstrations (Ortiz et al., 2013), as well as initialising movements of their own.

One such movement is known as the “Iaioflautas”, named after the Catalan word for ‘grandparents’, representing a group of older activists who organize regular protests against government cuts to public spending, pensions and welfare. Since their first protest in November 2011, they have come to be known as the “rebellion of grandparents”, marching in the streets and chanting. Similar resistance has been demonstrated through The Platform in Defence of Old People, organised around reclaiming the rights of older persons and protesting spending cuts. Further widespread protests have also taken place outside bank offices in Spain’s major cities, as citizens witnessed the vanishing of their savings in Spain’s recent banking crisis. Around 300,000 people were encouraged to convert their savings into complex preference shares that they were reassured was a safe option and payment would be paid out through a fixed dividend. About 80% of the Spanish citizenry who claimed to be deceived by the banks were pensioners; this sparked mass protests from older persons on the streets (Fotheringham, 2013). The rise in such opposition movements has been met with political repression. Apart from the legalistic acts of constitutional manipulation, states have also used excessive police force to contain public discontent (Ioakimidis et al., 2014). The implementation of new laws such as that of the “gag law” has greatly limited protest



freedoms, however in a recent resistance movement in April 2015, Spanish citizenry established the world's first ever hologram march, demonstrating that their commitments to justice could not be stifled (Al Jazeera, 2015).

### **Resistance in South Africa**

In South Africa, popular protests have been drastically on the rise in the last decade, leading to the country being dubbed by some in the media as the protest capital of the world (Bianco, 2013). The majority of protests have been centred on service delivery, housing and land distribution, electricity cuts, evictions, and wages amongst the poor. In 2013, there was a service delivery protest in South Africa at least once every two days, with official police data revealing more than 3 000 protests in the past four years (Saba and van der Merwe, 2013). However, more recently, nationwide protests have been aimed at the ANC and its larger macroeconomic and social policies. The devastating Marikana massacre in 2012, which resulted in the unjust police-led killing of 34 striking miners, as well as the wounding of a further 78, led to nationwide outcry and has been viewed as the catalyst for increased protest and anger (De Waal, 2012). In September 2015, several thousand protesters marched in South Africa's three biggest cities, with over 350 civic-rights groups, religious organisations, and labour unions, to protest corruption within the government (Vecchiatto and Cohen, 2015). The popular #FeesMustFall movement, which was initially launched by students in November 2015 but quickly joined by older generations, protested the rise in student fee prices and the isolation of many South Africans from tertiary education, as a result of increasing privatisation, fee hikes and racial discrimination (Iaccino, 2015). This movement raised further demands, including challenging the outsourcing policies of universities, particularly for low-paid and older workers, as well as the continued existence of white privilege and racial-based inequality within the country (Baloyi and Isaacs, 2015). The older

generation have openly voiced their solidarity with the student's movement, as many older persons support or supplement family incomes and schooling fees through their pensions, within the context of increasing labour precarity and unemployment (Williams, 2015). In April 2015 (and again in November), pensioners gathered outside Parliament in Cape Town to demand a state pension wage increase, claiming that the current rate of R1420,00 (roughly €83) puts many pensioners below the breadline in South Africa (Williams, 2015). In October 2015, a further 200 pensioners camped outside Parliament, demanding the payment of owed rail company pensions and unemployment insurance funds (Gqirana, 2015). These protests were met with heavy police repression and the image of older citizens, many of whom marched against apartheid, again standing in front police blockades demanding their basic rights, is chilling.

### **Resistance in Portugal**

Within the Portuguese context, rising anger amongst older persons has come from the notion that recent austerity and welfare-based reforms are a violation of the rights that they fought for and won in April 1974 with the dismantling of the authoritarian state. Older persons have thus mobilized to protest cuts in their pensions, increased taxes and fees and a significant decline in their purchasing power (Ortiz et al., 2013). A retiree's civic association called APRE! (an expression which in Portuguese means: irritation, it is too much!) formed in November 2012, as a platform for older persons to develop an active role in the definition of public policies. This was followed by the Outraged Pensioners Movement (*Movimento dos Reformados Indignados*) initialised in March 2013 by Filipe Pinhal, a former president of the BCP-Millennium private Portuguese bank. This movement represented 70 high-end pensioners who stood against the Solidarity Special Contribution (CES) that the government had recently imposed, but were immediately criticized because they were complaining about cuts on their pensions of 25000 euros a month (Rodrigues, 2013). In January 2014, in protest

of the violation of the welfare state values and cuts in pensions, dozens of pensioners showed up at Portuguese Parliament with placards, singing “Grândola Vila Morena”, a popular song that marked the start of the Revolution in 1974 (Mendes, 2014). This was supported by groups such as the APRE! association.

In April 2015, pensioners participated in an organised demonstration in 14 different cities in Portugal, offering a unified stand against the rising cost of living and the need to recognise the value of retirement and pension security (Renascença, 2015). “We feel that pensioners are increasingly impoverished by the Government policy” was the primary argument of the organizers of the event, the National Confederation of Pensioners and Elderly (MURPI). MURPI was created after April 1974 by communist militants, with the objective of defending the rights of older persons and pensioners. A further thousand-strong crowd of retirees protested in Lisbon in September 2015, against state cuts to pensions, accusing the government of stealing from older persons and demanding the resignation of the Executive (Redação, 2013). In many protests, much as in South Africa and Spain, there have been police repression and state resistance. More recently, as a result of some disagreement regarding the political goals of the APRE! association, a new aged-based party emerged in Portugal: The United Party of the Retirees and Pensioners (PURP). This political party stems directly from social media within Portuguese society and aims to be the political voice of older persons, whether against or for the austerity programme and diverging both from the left and the right wings of the party spectre. This party participated in the last elections for Parliament on the 4th October 2015, but was only able to gather 0,26% votes, and therefore did not achieve any representation in the Parliament. However, it needs to be noted that recent elections have seen the Socialist Party take the lead, with the new government based on a political agreement that, for the first time in Portuguese democracy, involves all left-wing deputies. This shift was a

sign of the crescent and thick discontent with the economic adjustment programme and neoliberal policies. Furthermore, a significant number of the respective supporters are Portugal's older generation, but with a younger generation leading the small left wing party.

## **WHAT THE RESISTENCE OF THE OLDER GENERATION TELLS US**

As stated earlier in the text, much has been written about the motives, scope, and nature of growing anti-neoliberal and anti-austerity resistance movements in global society. The protests of older persons have not been in isolation, but rather through a rising activity of resistance in overall society. Their resistance has been through personal initiatives, as well as through participation in larger movements. Significance is found therefore in the synergy of the demands and nature of the protests of older persons with other popular movements. Thus, in addition to fighting for their own rights, they are in support of, and bind themselves to other social groups in the struggle for issues of general and macro interest.

However, the resistance movements of older generations offer insight and reflections which should be considered outside of the larger resistant movement, particularly in terms of the taking up of citizenship, the development of solidarity, and reactions to political repression.

### **The history of democratisation and taking up citizenship**

According to Glasius and Pleyers (2013), three interconnected concepts have been at the core of both the demands and the identity of the protest movements of older persons: democracy, social justice, and dignity. Traditionally older persons have not necessarily been a group that is as actively expressive as perhaps younger generations, and have often been less political and influential actors of civil society, regardless of their pivotal role in years before (Campos Lima and Martin Artiles, 2014; Cerrillo Vidal, 2013). However, within the context of the current austerity crisis and neoliberal reform, the older generation have lost many of the rights

that took years of struggle, advocacy, and protest to achieve. Thus, their reaction to such a loss has been to reclaim their role as civil society actors, and denounce policies they consider unfair to the general public, youth, families, and they themselves. Beyond this, has been the loss of dignity experienced by older persons as their wellbeing and history is overlooked, leaving them feeling discarded, “finished” or uninfluential, rather than active members of society. Indignation is transformed and results in awareness within the older generation of the need for active citizenship; their own potential for change is not resigned, but instead they are launched. Rather than simply viewing such movements as pure resistance, one must see this instead as an exercise of citizenship, dignity, and the taking up of rights long worked for.

### **One of the main motivations for protest is solidarity between generations**

Older people have become active in protesting against austerity and neoliberal reform as a form of solidarity with the needs of their families, children, grandchildren, and the world they are leaving them to. Young people are one of the social groups most vulnerable to crisis and changes in welfare and social policy (Ortiz and Cummins, 2012). This can be a further motivation for resistance (Ortiz et al., 2013). Such solidarity needs to be reciprocated, whereby resistance to the violation of citizenship rights and increased vulnerability as a result of welfare cuts needs to be resisted as a larger citizenry, as well as with respect to specific generations and the unique challenges they face. Older persons can often be left out of this discourse, spoken about or for, without encouraging active participation and solidarity. Furthermore, as neoliberal ideology perpetuates individualism and self-responsibility for wellbeing, collective solidarity is ever more required for groups and individuals that may not always have the capacity, opportunity or means to engage in resistance themselves.

### **Political repression is a catalyst**

In some cases, the older generation have joined protests from the very beginning. However, in others, they have become involved as a result of the policy response to such movements, as

well as the ordered police repression against their families and they, themselves. Such response from the State has only heightened the anger of older persons and is a catalyst for further action. In addition, cutbacks on social pensions as often initial austerity-related implementations can lead to a feeling of isolation within older groups.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The neoliberal project of economic reform, austerity and reduced welfare is failing citizens. This is an ideological debate that is complex and vast. Yet, the active resistance of the older generation is a notable movement in today's global context of austerity, welfare cutbacks, and social policy changes that isolate and marginalise older persons. This requires both ideological and practical consideration. In his recent review of the rising resistant movements in South Africa, Heistein (2016) refers to the people of South African society as being 'awake'. Evidence in South Africa, Portugal and Spain suggest that the older generation is certainly 'awake' and facing significant challenges to their wellbeing and ability to age with dignity and security. Perhaps, therefore, the most appropriate response, as readers, academics, social service professionals and citizens, would be the furthering of such collective awakening and awareness, toward actively reclaiming a citizenship which refuses to acquiesce to the loss of human rights and dignity, for any citizen, and particularly for those of the generations that went before. Gerbaudo (2014: 2) remarks that people reclaim with "the ancient belief that there is such a thing as 'the people', and that this collective actor is the ultimate source of sovereignty and legitimate power". Solidarity begins with an awareness and recognition. As a collective society, therefore, let us say: "Viva the rebellion of grandparents, viva the collective rebellion of the people"!

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