

# Guest Editors' Introduction

"The First Revolution Is Survival"  
Queer and Feminist Resistances to the Crisis and  
Austerity Politics in Southern Europe

**LA PRIMERA REVOLUCIÓN** *es la supervivencia*, or "the first revolution is survival," is a sentence from the (first) Spanish queer group, La Radical Gai, which was founded in 1991 in Madrid and was very active throughout the decade. More than twenty years later, we claim the same. We, unhappily, share the activists' anger (and also many ideas) that motivated their emergence and protest in the streets in the context of the AIDS crisis. To give an example, the Asamblea Transmaricabollo de Sol ("Transfagdyke Assembly," part of the movement of the 15-M movement, also known as the "Spanish revolution"), has been – and is still – proclaiming that the severe cuts in public health implemented by the right wing Government in Spain "are not cuts but executions." The same massive cuts in health, education and social services are being carried out in Portugal, Italy, Greece and other countries displaying what could be described as acritical obedience to the Troika's mandate. This is our current context: trying to keep our jobs at the university (the ones who are lucky enough to have one), while getting less and less funding opportunities to complete students' education, as well as to carry out research projects (except for some projects still funded by the EU), and resisting in the streets as feminists and queers within broader social mobilizations and protests, which, in turn, have become more and more violently repressed and criminalized in recent years.

As the title indicates, in this special issue we are interested in analyz-

ing social mobilizations and resistances enacted by queer and feminist groups in this very unfriendly context. The contours of what is generally described as LGBTIQ politics in Southern Europe present significant theoretical and political challenges to anyone interested in a range of topics, including social movements' experiences and outcomes, sexual citizenship, and intimate life. One thing remains clear – there are no linear accounts, in the same way as there are no single-issue demands or strategies. Just as all knowledge is situated (Harding 1991; 2004; Haraway 2004), so are the advancements and hindrances that characterize the LGBTIQ history in recent decades. Heavily dependent upon the rise of democratic regimes (in the aftermath of many years of right-wing dictatorships), the path for LGBTIQ legal and cultural recognition has ranged from step-by-step approaches to all-in-one demands. Such differences in strategy bear witness to the longstanding debate in Lesbian and Gay Studies that opposes assimilationists to radicals (and separatists). This debate stems from empirically based experiences, which varies across the geographical context, as well as in time. For instance, in Spain there is a long history of radical activism from the 1970s onwards, inspiring some of the most vivid expressions of confronting mainstream LGBT politics (Calvo 2007; Calvo and Trujillo 2011). But the story of LGBTIQ politics in Southern Europe adds layers of complexity to that rather simplistic opposition, and highlights nuances, intersections, spaces in-between – what has also been described as "syncretic activism" (Santos 2013), i.e., a way of combining priorities and forms of action that previously analytic accounts described as incompatible. Our point of departure is, therefore, the belief that Southern European LGBTIQ politics can make an important contribution to both the theoretical and the political debates concerning social mobilization processes and outcomes. Hopefully this volume will demonstrate the strength of this argument.

This special issue stems from the need to consider topics and geographical contexts that escape the mainstream focus of Lesbian and Gay Studies in general. A previous issue of *lambda nordica* (no. 4, 2012), focused on Central and Eastern Europe, had already signaled the importance of looking beyond the neat circle of North American and British

experiences, by giving voice and visibility to the strategies, expectations, and knowledges produced in places such as Poland, Russia, and other countries. Indeed, a consistent, though scarce, collection of contributions have shed light upon previously unknown histories of LGBTIQ politics in Eastern and Central Europe (Long 1999; Kulpa and Mizelińska 2011), Latin America (Quinlan and Arenas 2002; Corrales and Pecheny 2010), and African countries (Drucker 2000; Lennox and Waites 2013). In this issue we consider the reality of three Southern European locations in the current context of the crisis – Italy, Portugal, and Spain. We do so with the firm belief that the label Southern Europe is a hermeneutic device designed to highlight a series of historical facts that enhance the potential for comparative work, more so than corresponding to any strict geographical area. It would of course have been possible – and perhaps even desirable – to consider case studies conducted in Greece and Cyprus, countries in which the history and present reality of LGBTIQ politics has particular contours. But for the sake of comparability, in this special issue we chose to focus on three countries – Italy, Portugal, and Spain. There are three main reasons for considering this combination of countries, and not others, when addressing LGBTIQ politics in Southern Europe.

First of all, we are aware that the realm of politics always operates at different and simultaneous levels, the most evident of which can be described as law and culture. Overlooking the impact on those two fields of social transformation will undoubtedly provide a biased portrait of the obstacles and advancements in terms of sexual citizenship at any location and time. It is by now well established in the literature on the impact of social movements that results do not follow from linear events, but, rather, from complex, ongoing, and nuanced processes, which require “more complicated notions of movement success [in order to] understand the effects of social movements” (Bernstein 2003, 359). In this interplay, the role of social movements in generating change remains largely unacknowledged, which is detrimental not only to activists’ self-perceptions, but also to the wider cultural representation regarding the significance of collective action in contemporary societies (Roseneil

1995; Halsaa 2009; Santos 2013). This is the case particularly in countries with a lack of analytical engagement with LGBTIQ issues in the academia, despite the existence of vibrant social movements in this field for several decades in Italy (Barilli 1999; Trappolin 2006; Bertone and Gusmano 2013), Portugal (Cascais 2004; 2006; Carneiro and Menezes 2007; Santos 2013), and Spain (Llamas and Vila 1999; Petit 2003; Trujillo 2010). Therefore, the first reason for considering Italy, Portugal, and Spain in this special issue is political.

Another reason is theoretical. Despite the relatively contained geographical context, Italy, Portugal, and Spain offer interesting legal particularities in terms of LGBT issues when compared to other countries. One example is the fact that Portugal was the first country in Europe, and the fourth worldwide, to include the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Constitution (which happened in April 2004). Such an achievement is in sharp contrast with Italy, where LGBT rights remain largely unrecognized by the law. The development of the LGBT movement was similar in Portugal and in Spain. Although the first gay organization in Spain emerged during dictatorship – *Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual (MELH)*, dating from 1971 – it was really only after the 1980s, and especially from the middle of the 1990s, that the LGBT movement flourished. The Spanish LGBT movement has demonstrated its strength through many important legal achievements, which include decriminalization in 1979, and the inclusion of the discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Penal Code in 1995. And then, in 2005, Spain became the third country worldwide to legalize same-sex civil marriage. As Calvo and Trujillo say, "research suggests that social movement protest activities have been a key variable not only in the shaping of same-sex marriage politics, but more generally in the creation of new opportunities for a whole new range of public policies for sexual communities" (Calvo and Trujillo 2011, 563). Calvo concurs with the idea of movement's impact when he states that "the Spanish case is an excellent example of how public policies can be influenced by movement organizations that consciously act as suppliers of political ideas and cultural references" (Calvo 2011, 167). The rela-

tion between activism and political and legal outcomes has also been demonstrated in the case of Portugal, where there was an acceleration of LGBT recognition after decades of closeted silence (Santos 2013).

Notwithstanding these and other conundrums that could easily spark sociological imagination, the history of the LGBTIQ movement in Southern European countries has not been thoroughly researched and published, either nationally or internationally. Commenting on the situation of queer studies in academia, Quinlan and Arenas write: "Today, the development of lesbian and gay or queer studies in academia, focusing on the Portuguese and Spanish-speaking worlds, is taking place mostly within the relatively safe confines of North American universities [...]." (Quinlan and Arenas 2002, xx) And indeed, there is a general tendency to pay little attention to non-English publications on this topic, hardly any university modules devoted to queer theory or lesbian and gay studies, lack of research centers that focus on LGBTIQ issues, and hardly any funded research projects, despite scarce but encouraging exceptions, as we mentioned in the beginning of this introduction. Therefore, we are faced with a double-edged problem: on one hand, research on gender and sexual politics is marginalized by Southern European mainstream academia; on the other hand, within the international field of LGTBIQ studies the geographical focus and the language in which knowledge is disseminated have implications for the amount of centrality ascribed (or not) to contributions outside the neat circle of mainstream contexts.

Finally, our third reason is contextual. Europe is still marked by political, economic, and social differences, and unequal power relations. The economic crisis has deepened the gap between North and South, as well as between West and East. In some political and media discourses, Southern European countries now seem to be facing what they "deserve," that is, a very difficult situation, which does not stem from the financial system, the debt, and neoliberal politics, but is caused by their alleged endemic corruption and historical backwardness. In this issue, our aim is to analyze (and, by doing so, to make visible and recognize) the resistance of feminist and queer people, together with other protest groups,

to the crisis and the implementation of austerity measures. We want to challenge the widespread idea that social movements in Southern Europe have historically been, and still are, weak, or even non-existing. At an international level, the three chosen Southern European countries are still largely portrayed as not very progressive and combative but, quite on the contrary, catholic and conservative (Manuel and Tollefsen 2008; Santos 2013), which is clearly a rather simplistic and a banal account deserving further inquiry. Lacking accuracy and failing to provide an empirically based analysis that considers the track of change in recent decades, such dominant portrayal strikes us as insufficient and biased, hence highlighting the need for further studies on collective action, including feminist and sexual protests and their impacts on social, political, and cultural change. In these intersections of *other* sexualities and genders, geographies, economic crisis (plus the forced migration it is producing), and austerity politics is where this proposal was conceived, and, following this *location*, we intended it to be an interdisciplinary one from the beginning. We think that there is an important and urgent need of more dialogues and conversations South–North, and also South–South, amongst Southern countries themselves. Such dialogues are crucial as a starting point to build up an international community (or communities) of feminist and queer studies.

Thinking of and from the South we wonder what is the relationship between LGBTIQ movements, our process of democratization, Europe, and, now, the crisis. Our answers travel across the articles in the volume, which share the idea of the need for queering political processes and social movements (including mainstream LGTB discourses and representations, and institutionalized feminism). Which are the strategies of subversion and resistance to neoliberal attacks on public services and people in general, and to discursive framings (the "South," or even "PIGS" [Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain])?

To analyze these issues, we tried to gather contributions that combine different bodies of theory – social movements' theory, and queer and gender studies – underlining the need to use an accessible language that enables knowledge and experience exchange between different contexts

and perspectives. Cesare Di Felicianantonio opens the issue with "Exploring the Complex Geographies of Italian Queer Activism," an analysis of the arising of queer activism in Italy using the analytical perspective of the geographies of social movements. In comparison with mainstream LGTB groups, which seem to address mainly the national scale, calling for implementations of laws, queer activists are more dynamic at micro/lower scales, notably those of the body (queer politics as politics of the body), spaces of (other forms of) activism – such as social centers or universities – and the city (as shown by the creation of queer blocs at Pride demonstrations). Di Felicianantonio argues that the political legacy inherited from the 1970s has been reactivated by the current financial crisis, as can be seen in the reemergence of squatting initiatives in Rome and many other Italian cities, which address demands not only related to housing but to the "commons." His article underlines the notion of queer as a politics of intersectionality: in the Italian context queer groups are mobilizing together with other social movements around issues like antiracist politics, antifascism, and general strikes.

Eduarda Ferreira continues the debate on sexual citizenship and space, focusing on the intersections of genders and sexualities, in a piece titled "Lesbian Activism in Portugal: Facts, Experiences and Critical Reflections." Her work analyzes the sociopolitical history of lesbian activism(s) in Portugal and critically reflects on its accomplishments; it also considers the intersections between feminist and LGBT activism in Portugal, in particular the alliances, common fights, and tensions. Ferreira asks herself, on one hand, how identity politics can articulate themselves in the current situations people are facing in the context of the economic crisis, and, on the other, how an identity-based activism can be sustained in a time when identities are more and more acknowledged and experienced as fluid and dynamic. Semi-structured interviews with people who participate in this constellation of movements are the starting point to work through this questioning, together with analysis of printed materials and online debates, among others. The author finally underlines the need to build bridges across social movements, in particular to connect lesbian political organizations with feminist, trans,

queer, and other emerging mobilizations, such as the ones related to precarious work, housing, and sustainable economy.

Finally, with Pablo Pérez Navarro and his "Queer Politics of Space in the 15-M Movement," we focus on Spain and the processes of queerizing contemporary social movements. His article spins around the 15-M movement, a key actor in the collective response to austerity politics in Spain, and the queer activism organized within the movement itself. He starts by tracing the genealogies of the 15-M, and reflects on the radical politics of the street and, especially, of camping, that characterized the movement, in order to try to understand exactly what a *camp* is. Pérez Navarro continues with a very suggestive reflection on the spatial politics of the *camp* in the early stages of the movement, to finally study the way the queer Assembly has related with the movement as a whole, and with other assemblies, such as the feminist one. As he points out, protesting *as queers* within a general struggle for social and economic justice, such as the 15-M movement – and the multiple protest that have taken place in the last years – has little or no precedent in the history of queer activism in Spain, and is a keystone for the production of queer citizenship in these rough times.

What we see is that Southern European queer and feminist activists have organized by combining political autonomy and collaboration with leftist groups and other social protests. They are – *we* are – aware of the urgent need for networking, for building up sexual communities and strengthening solidarities, now more than ever. It is not only that material living conditions have reached a previously unknown level of precariousness for many people during these last years. In addition to such overall precariousness, vulnerable groups, which include women, queers, and migrants, are amongst the most distressed populations, often facing more difficulties than ever before. We have become the scapegoats of the crisis. As the different contributions gathered in this volume highlight, activists strongly underline the need for LGBTIQ and feminist politics to join forces in the current climate of austerity and deprivation, which also includes the emergent backlash against previously secured sexual and reproductive rights.



We, the editors of this special issue, are both academics and activists in the field of gender and sexuality studies, and from there we argue that knowledge production should be concerned with audiences beyond academia and reduce the weight of hermetic scientific jargon, and engage different types of social actors with diverse, interdisciplinary backgrounds. In addition, we are both concerned with the need to reduce not only the gaps between academia and activism, but also between "women's" and LGBTIQ issues, just as it is happening within many activist groups nowadays, as we mentioned above.

There is also another point to be made about the language issue here. Although writing in English obviously is important to be able to keep the dialogue going (and we need these conversations so much), there are problems associated with English being the academic *lingua franca*, as we know. As Joanna Mizieleńska and Robert Kulpa point out in the special issue published in this journal recently and already mentioned, "writing in English is not only (not primarily) a matter of different language (and thus, some sort of translation, so to speak), but writing in a different language is to construct/conceive knowledge differently" (Kulpa and Mizieleńska 2012, 21). To avoid some of these problems, we also support the idea of creolization of the hegemonic English speaking academia. We need it to be more *border crossing*, *una lengua* more *mestiza*, as feminist and queer activist and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa would say.

The authors who were chosen to participate in this issue are activists and researchers at the same time, and they all speak from their situated knowledges and experiences as such. In organizing this volume, we hope to contribute to the queer questioning and suppression of frontiers among disciplines, and of divisions between theorists and activists/informants. In line with Jack Halberstam (2011), we sustain the joys and urgency of indiscipline, queering academia from within, top and bottom up. An equally important challenge for the queer indiscipline is to go further by moving beyond the descriptive analysis we seem (or are told) to be trapped in, which is mirrored in reacting (more so than proacting) to questions repeated over and over again,

e.g.: What is the situation for queer people in Portugal? How is it to be a trans person in Italy? How has the catholic church reacted to same-sex marriage in Spain? We claim that, although to a large extent closeted, groundbreaking and thought-provoking theories – together with innovative and powerful political practices – are being generated from Southern European settings. To put it bluntly, Southern Europeans, we, can also *theorize*. Moreover, we maintain that there are lessons to be learned, and inspiration to be grasped, in relation to gender and sexuality studies and for feminist and queer politics. To conclude, we hope that this volume may contribute to bridging the gap across disciplines and geographical (and other) frontiers, so that knowledge production and political practices can become more inclusive and reciprocal.

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Her most recent book is *Social Movements and Sexual Citizenship in Southern Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Vice-chair of the Sexuality Research Network of the European Sociological Association, Cristina is also an activist in the LGBTQ and feminist movements in Portugal.

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