PART I

A NEW APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS
OF CONTENTIOUS EPISODES

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Introduction

A New Approach for Studying Political Contention –
Contentious Episode Analysis

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On 24 May 2011, in the middle of the parliamentary debate on the so-called mid-term adjustment plan, yet another round of austerity imposed by Greece's international creditors, a call for a demonstration at Syntagma Square in Athens and at the White Tower in Thessaloniki appeared on Facebook. By the next day at least 20,000 people assembled in the two squares, mostly chanting "thieves, thieves" at parliamentarians and cursing the Parliament. The movement of the Greek Indignados or Aganaktismenoi was born. It would prove to be massive, expansive, and innovative. Immediately after the initial demonstrations, the main squares in the two cities were occupied, and simultaneous protests began in almost all major urban centers of the country. Interest would focus on Syntagma Square, however, where the occupation was symbolically confronting Parliament, juxtaposing the public assembly and the symbolic seat of political power. In the following days, the occupation grew exponentially, eventually reaching almost 400,000 participants on June 5th. In our dataset, there is an event associated with the Aganaktismenoi on almost every single day until the end of the episode on June 30th.

At first, the Pasok government reacted to the movement in a mix of fear and embarrassment, but the original ambivalence soon gave way to growing anxiety. On the eighth day of the occupation, Prime Minister Papandreou addressed the ongoing mobilization, attempting to shift the blame to abstract "global powers" – to no avail. On the same day, the movement blocked all the exits from Parliament, effectively locking the M.P.s inside. Eventually, the M.P.s had to escape in the dark, with the help of the fire brigade, through the adjacent National Garden. Pasok M.P.s were becoming the main target, bearing the

Parts of this chapter are taken from: Hanspeter Kriesi, Abel Bojar and Swen Hutter. 2019. "Contentious Episode Analysis", *Mobilization* 24 (3).

brunt of the opposition to a policy about which they themselves had considerable reservations. They reacted by challenging the government, asking for explanations and for assurances that this austerity package would be the last one. On June 7th, in the parliamentary committee, the five ministers in charge of the bailout took fully thirteen hours to convince raging and fearful M.P.s of the need for new measures. The protestes in the squares, which were initially seen as a potential relief for Pasok, were by now fissuring the link between the government and its MPs.

At the same time, EU pressure on the government escalated, as did its pressure on the opposition leader to share responsibility for the new measures. The opposition, however, did not budge. On June 14th, when one Pasok M.P. resigned and another publicly declared that he would not vote for the midterm adjustment, the government majority shrank to only four M.P.s. At this point, the possibility of a lost vote and a subsequent chaotic default loomed large. At the same time, the unions entered the fray. On June 15th, the large strike demonstrations of the unions fused with the Syntagma Square occupation, gathering hundreds of thousands once more. The earlier blockade was repeated. For the first time after twenty days of protest, the riot police moved in forcefully to disband the blockade, and the new movement underwent its baptism of fire. Reports of police repression and brutality carried out on a crowd that was until then peaceful shocked the attending public.

On the evening of the same day, the prime minister called the opposition leader to ask for a government of national unity. The latter accepted, on the condition that the government's sole focus would be the renegotiation of the bailout and that elections would then be called. Papandreou first agreed but then withdrew his consent to such a program within a day and, instead, opted for a cabinet reshuffle, replacing his finance minister who had been the main target of the ire of the protesters and M.P.s. The new minister tried to open a dialogue with the movement and the unions. After the reshuffle, the government asked for a vote of confidence, which it received on June 21st. After having been finalized in the various committees, the midterm adjustment package was introduced in the plenary session.

The major unions responded with a forty-eight-hour general strike on June 28–29, the days of the plenary debate and the final vote on the program. The demonstration on June 29th, attended by both the unions and the Aganaktismenoi, proved to be one of the largest to date. While each organization had its own bloc, radical left parties, anarchists, a loose nationalist crowd, and Indignados united their forces in the first showing of an informal anti-bailout coalition. During the following night, while the midterm adjustment was legislated, a large group of hooded protesters clashed with riot police. As it turned out, the cabinet reshuffle and the signal of the new finance minister that he would consider social concerns sufficed to relieve the tension within Parliament and allowed the remaining Pasok M.P.s to vote compactly in order to pass the midterm adjustment program on June 30th. External pressure had

vanquished the domestic threat from the new challengers. After the passage of the bill, the challenge subsided. The combination of repression and unresponsiveness by the elites deflated the movement.

This sequence of events, which has been told by Altiparmakis (2019: 143–154) in more detail, dramatically illustrates the patterns of interactions between challengers (Aganaktismenoi, unions, anti-bailout coalition), the government, and third parties (M.P.s of the governing party, opposition parties, foreign creditors) that had been triggered by austerity proposals by European governments during the Great Recession, one of the great economic crises in our time. In this book we shall study such patterns of interaction in twelve European countries. The Great Recession, which was unleashed by the breakdown of Lehmann Brothers in fall 2008 soon spilled over to Europe, where the initial shock of the financial crisis was to be followed by the Eurozone crisis, initiated in early 2010 with the sovereign debt crisis in Greece. While the worst of the crisis seemed to be over by fall 2012 after the head of the European Central Bank had declared that he would do "whatever it takes"to save the euro, the fallout from the crisis continued to haunt Europe at least until the conclusion of the third Greek bailout in summer 2015. It is hard to overstate the sheer magnitude of the impact the economic crisis has had on the lives of people in some, although not in all, parts of Europe. As Adam Tooze (2018: 5) has observed in the introduction to his account of "the first crisis of a global age," the combination of these crises and the economic and political responses to them are essential to understand the changing face of the world we are living in today.

Initially, governments countered the economic impact of the crisis by relying on some version of "liberal" (Pontusson and Raess 2012) or "emergency Keynesianism" (Hall 2013). Once the Greek crisis deepened, however, starting in early 2010, governments turned to austerity policies, which were the key sources of economic hardship in the most hard-hit countries. While the welfare states buffered the negative consequences of the crisis initially (Bermeo and Bartels 2014), especially in the countries of northwestern Europe, which had strong automatic stabilizers, the turn to austerity impeded the redistributive functions of the state and crucially contributed to the hardship of the populations. This aspect has focused the minds of the challengers on government policy and on the supranational constraints imposed on the national governments by agencies of the European Union, fellow governments of the Eurozone, and the I.M.F.

In the present volume, we focus on the interactions between the governments and their challengers in reaction to the governments' austerity proposals. We examine the austerity proposals and ask whether and how they have been challenged by social movements, unions, opposition parties, and other actors, and how the governments, in turn, have reacted to such challenges. We are trying to understand how it was possible that austerity came to pass in spite of popular resistance by investigating in detail the contentious episodes that were

triggered by the austerity packages proposed by European governments. As we shall see in the subsequent analyses, the Greek episode that we used to illustrate the interplay between challenger actions and government reactions is an extreme case with regard to the contentiousness of the challenge and the intensity of the interaction between the two main protagonists. However, it proves to be rather typical with respect to its outcome. Even in a case of a very intense challenge such as this one, where the government was heavily shaken by the mobilization of the challengers, the authorities ended up imposing their austerity proposals. We shall try to make sense of the patterns of interaction by analyzing in detail the composition of the main protagonists, how they reacted to each other, and the extent to which their reciprocal reactions depended on contextual conditions.

In focusing on the patterns of interaction that developed during the contentious episodes unleashed by the austerity proposals of European governments during the Great Recession, we believe that we can achieve a better understanding of what happened during this crucial period of European politics. We already know that the crisis has been particularly deep in southern Europe, where it led to a wave of public economic protest against the government austerity programs, while protest remained much more limited in northwestern and centraleastern Europe (Kriesi et al. 2020). We also know that the southern European party systems have been profoundly transformed by the electoral consequences of the Great Recession, while the party systems in the other two European regions have been more resistant to change (Hutter and Kriesi 2019). However, our knowledge is based on a comparative-static analysis, and we have little understanding about the processes that have shaped the waves of protest and the electoral outcomes. It is the ambition of the present study to dig deeper into the dynamics of these processes in order to show the mechanisms that have driven the different outcomes at the macro level in the three European regions.

We have selected twelve countries to study the patterns of interaction underlying the macro-level outcomes – four countries each from the three regions of Europe: France, Germany, Ireland, and the United Kingdom in northwestern Europe; Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain in southern Europe; and Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Romania in centraleastern Europe. In this selection we find several countries that have been particularly hard hit by the Great Recession, but there also countries such as Germany or Poland that have gotten much better through the crisis. For each country we study four austerity packages that were introduced by the respective governments during the Great Recession. For comparative purposes, we also include an institutional reform proposal for each country in our study. From the perspective adopted here, the austerity proposals (and possibly also the institutional reform proposals) of the governments constitute "proposals at risk," which are likely to be challenged by some actors mobilizing in the name of aggrieved groups in society. However, not all such proposals have been challenged, nor have all been challenged to the same

extent. We shall not only describe how, by whom, and to what extent the different proposals have been challenged but also try to account for the differences in the contentiousness of the challenges and their outcomes.

For this study, we have developed what we call "Contentious Episodes Analysis" (CEA), a novel approach to the study of "contentious episodes" that aims at a more systematic analysis of the dynamics of interaction in such episodes. In this chapter, we shall introduce the broad outlines of our new approach, which is situated in the "middle ground" between the encompassing chronology of the episode, reproduced in narratives, and the micro level of the events, reproduced in simple event counts. Initially, we provide some arguments explaining why we have chosen to study the middle ground. Then we proceed to introduce the conceptual building blocks of our approach. Finally, we provide a brief summary and an overview over the contents of the present volume.

WHY AND HOW TO STUDY "THE MIDDLE GROUND"

In his book on contentious performances, Charles Tilly (2008: 206) proposed to distinguish between *three levels of analysis* for studying contentious performances: the reconstruction of single events as one action or interaction after another (what he called the "narrative"), the count of contentious events (what he called "epidemiology"), and the close description of successive interactions within contentious episodes (what he called "the middle ground"). He advocated study at the middle ground, and suggested that from this level, we can move to either one of the other levels but also in a third direction – toward analytic sequences transcending any particular episode but identifying recurrent actions and relations. In this third vein, Tilly himself had aggregated verb categories (e.g. "attack," "control," "bargain") when comparing sets of episodes and then showed which sets of relations among claimants and objects of claims prevailed within different verb categories.

The "narrative" approach is the conventional storytelling of historians, where explanation takes the form of "an unfolding open-ended story fraught with conjunctures and contingency, where what happens, an action, in fact happens because of its order and position in the story" (Griffin 1993: 1099). In contrast, the "epidemiological" approach relies on conventional Protest Event Analysis (PEA). Here, the individual event constitutes the unit of analysis. According to this approach, we can describe an episode in terms of its aggregate *event* characteristics (e.g. the number of protest events in an episode, the number of events produced by different types of challengers) as well as in terms of the dynamic development of events over time (e.g. the weekly counts of protest events). The "middle ground," by contrast, focuses on the *interactions between challengers and authorities*.

Most notably, this middle ground has been the focus of the programmatic *Dynamics of Contention* (DoC) (McAdam et al. 2001). The goals of this

seminal study were manifold. Among others, it aimed to (a) overcome the prevailing static approaches in social movement studies, (b) extend the field of study to include other types of actors, (c) introduce a new language to describe/reconstruct processes of contentious politics, and (d) explore the black box between independent and dependent variables, that is, to identify the mechanisms connecting the two. Reflecting on the book's impact ten years later, its authors (McAdam and Tarrow 2011) self-critically observed that they might have been trying to do too many things, that they had invoked too many mechanisms too casually,[1] that they had been too indifferent to measurement, and that theirs had still been a state-centric bias. We might add, most importantly, that they failed to provide a framework for the systematic study of interactions across a set of contentious episodes.[2]

Building on DoC, our goal is to further explore the "middle ground." We do so because we share Tilly's (2008: 21) view that this level of analysis offers the "opportunity to look inside contentious performances and discern their dynamics" without losing the opportunity to systematically analyze these dynamics. In other words, we suggest that CEA holds out the promise to go beyond the narrative approach by infusing it with the rigor and explicitness of PEA without losing its dynamic quality. At the same time, CEA aims to move beyond a narrow focus on protest activities by challengers (as in PEA-based research). In this it follows political claims-analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

In addressing the middle ground, the challenge is to provide an analytical approach to the study of the dynamics of contention that allows for the systematic comparative analysis of causal patterns across single narratives. Instead of comparing entire narratives (as in sequence analysis), the strategy we propose in CEA is to break down the narratives into their component elements. This is in line with DoC, which insisted on the analysis of smaller-scale causal mechanisms that could then be concatenated into broader processes, that is into "causal chains," as Gross (2018) has proposed to call such sequences of mechanisms. As Gross points out (2018: 345), such causal chains have structures that may vary in the time period over which a mechanism sequence unfolds, in the number of mechanisms tied together, in the levels of social complexity spanned by actors, and in the abstract patterns formed by connections across mechanisms. CEA is designed to study such sequences of mechanisms systematically.

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[1] Lichbach (2005: 228) has already pointed to the key problem of the introduction of mechanisms – multiplicity. As an antidote he proposed to embed causal mechanisms in theories and evaluate the mechanism by using stylized facts and historical narratives. He argued that generating mechanisms is easy but locating them is not. In his view, the real challenge is to embed mechanisms in larger and more organized structures of knowledge so as to deepen our understanding of interesting and important causal processes (Lichbach 2005: 233f).

[2] The same applies to Alimi et al. (2012), who adopt the mechanism approach but who use it in their narratives in a rather loose sense.

Generally, the goal of CEA is to specify the concepts of DoC in such a way that they can be applied to systematic comparative analyses across episodes.[3] Before introducing the building blocks of the proposed CEA in more detail let us highlight three more general points: First, in conceptual terms, CEA privileges the interaction between governments and their challengers. While this focus allows us to move away from the "starkly Ptolemaic view of social movements" that puts movements at the center of the political universe (McAdam and Boudet 2012), it keeps the state-centric perspective of DoC and its inherent limitations. It does so by largely drawing on the political process model, which has long since argued that social movements are sustained interactions between challengers and powerholders (Tilly 1978). In this perspective, challengers' actions can only be understood in relation to the actions by authorities. Relatedly, we shall only allow for a rather reductionist conceptualization of other participants in the episodes, and we shall limit the possible action repertoires of the various actors, too. In other words, there is a price to be paid for the systematic approach we propose here. In a way, the ontology we propose is rather "flat." That is, in line with the tradition of social movement research inaugurated by Tilly (1978), CEA adopts a structural-relational perspective focusing on interactions between challengers and authorities, neglecting other components of the mobilization process – in particular, the subjective dimension of contentious politics including processes of framing, the construction of collective identities, emotions, motivations, beliefs, and values. While focusing on interactions, CEA is distinguished from relational accounts of social movements focused on dynamics of interactions within social movements: that is, on interactions among challengers (see Diani 2015), thus excluding the analysis of groups, or "catnets" (Tilly 1978). In contrast, CEA aims to build the sequence of interactions within an episode by considering the actions by several types of actors – challengers as well as authorities and third parties – and it proposes a fairly parsimonious conceptualization of the action component on which it focuses.

Second, some details of the suggested approach are tailored to the examples that we shall study here – sixty contentious episodes that have taken place in Europe in the course of the great financial and economic crises that shook the continent from 2008 to 2015. However, we would like to insist that the approach is more flexible than it might seem at first. It is, for example, not restricted to interactions between the government and its challengers in the public arena. The type of arena and the type of actors studied may vary. For example, one might study the interactions between challengers and other types of authority – such as supranational or local political authorities, churches,

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[3] In this respect, our approach differs from the one chosen by Griffin (1993), who relied on "event structure analysis," a procedure developed by Heise (1989) that allows reconstructing the causal structure of the narrative about an *individual* episode – in his case a lynching episode that took place in Mississippi in 1930.

business corporations, or media – or focus on the interactions between movements and countermovements. What we would suggest, however, is that one cannot do all these possible applications at the same time. In order to keep any analysis manageable, we have to make choices depending on the specific research questions.

As with classical PEA, we think that this flexibility might also be a major strength of the approach (see Beissinger 2002: 460f.). That is, CEA provides a common conceptual language and general guidelines for data collection and analysis, but ultimately researchers can and should adapt it to the specific research questions at stake. In our study, we ask questions about the variety of contention related to economic and institutional reforms in the Great Recession with regard to the intensity of conflict, the actors involved, the configurations of actor coalitions, and their action repertoires, as well as the outcome of the episodes. In addition, we ask about patterns of interaction in the course of the episodes – interactions between the two main contestants, government and challengers, and between each one of them and potential third parties. We are also interested in identifying critical moments in an episode that decisively redirect the sequences of actions from one state of interaction dynamics to another.

Finally, let us point out that it is possible and, indeed, necessary to complement the bare bones of an analysis based on the CEA framework we propose here with narratives (or process tracing) in order to get a more complete account of the dynamics of contention in the episodes in question. We would maintain that the skeleton of the structural-relational analysis we propose here will make it easier to put flesh on the bare bones in order to get to a full understanding of the episodes one is studying and to systematically compare the various cases. However, it only complements but does not replace a more qualitative and in-depth analysis.

THE CONCEPTUAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE CONTENTIOUS EPISODE ANALYSIS

Our conceptualization of "contentious episodes" follows the tradition of DoC (McAdam et al. 2001), but we have adapted it to our specific purposes. McAdam et al. (2001: 5) defined *contentious politics* as

episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.

They defined episodes as "continuous streams of contention including collective claims making that bears on other parties' interests" (p. 24). More than a decade later, Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 7) reiterated and clarified the notion of contentious politics: