Spreading Protests: Changing Paths of Transnationalization of Social Movements

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ABSTRACT: While progressive social movements have always linked at the transnational level, the forms these transnational linkages take changes in time, and so do the channels of diffusion of ideas across countries. Additionally, economic globalization as well as the proliferation of international organizations are not automatically followed by transnationalization of contentious politics. Rather, resources and opportunities for multilevel campaigns vary, influenced by transformation in global capitalism and its political consequences. Reflecting on recent waves of protests – from the Global Justice Movement to the anti-austerity movements and the 'hot autumn' of 2019 – this article aims at singling out changing patterns in the spread of contestation.

KEYWORDS: Social Movements; Globalization; Diffusion; Protests; Global Justice Movement

Introduction

The Global Justice Movement has been interpreted as a sign of globalization of contentious politics. As decisions moved at the international level, social movements seemed to adapt, targeting international organizations. This was all the more the case in Europe, where the European Union had acquired more and more competences, opening various channels of access to civil society organizations. In the beginning of the new millennium, the European Social Forums offered an important public space for the convergence of various streams of progressive movements all over the continent and beyond. Acting globally, various transnational campaigns were seen to reflect but also fuel the spreading of

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cosmopolitan values.

At the beginning of the decade 2010s, mobilisations in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, and the United States, and later on in Turkey and Brazil, up to the French Nuit Debut, were considered as belonging to a common wave of anti-austerity protests. While all of them were triggered by a global financial crisis, they seemed however to be more rooted at the national level, targeting domestic institutions. What is more, against decisions made by international organizations that appeared to expropriate citizens from their capacity to affect politics through electoral accountability, they also addressed issues of national sovereignty and referred to the nation state as the space for democratic accountability (della Porta, 2015; della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). This happened also in Europe where conditionalities were imposed to the countries endowed with less competitive economies and forced to get loans from so-called Troika, including EU institutions. Research has pointed however also at the interconnections among these different protests, considering them as part of an 'international cycle of contention' (Tejerina et al., 2013; della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

Towards the end of the years 2010s, the discontent with austerity measure still mobilized strong wave of protests in various countries and with various intensity, the crisis of political legitimacy as well as social inequalities have unleashed strong social movements that, while keeping attention on social injustice, singled out some of their specific consequences on violence on women, the peripheral economies, global warming, precarious youth, self-determination. Several of these movements quickly spread at international level, through global days of action, promoting a global view of the problems and global solutions.

Fifty years after the 'hot Autumn' of 1969, with workers protests spreading in Europe, a new global 'hot Autumn' was noted in 2019, with massive protests, including millions' marches and civil disobedience, erupting contemporaneously in Lebanon and Iraq, Chile and Ecuador, Barcelona and London. Protestors often referred to each other, through the showing of each other banners and flags, calling for solidarity.

While progressive social movements have always linked at the transnational level, the forms these transnational linkages take changes in time, and so do the channels of diffusion of ideas across countries. Additionally, economic globalization as well as the proliferation of international organizations are not automatically followed by transnationalization of contentious politics. Rather, resources and opportunities for multilevel campaigns vary, influenced by the transformations in global capitalism and their political consequences.

In this article, I will reflect on the diffusion of protest imageries and practices across countries and across time, taking these three moments of contentious politics as empirical illustrations. Using my own research as well as studies by other scholars as relevant sources of information, I aim at singling out the various paths and forms in which a transnational' dimension emerges in contentious politics. After having, in the next part, briefly introduced the social science literature on transnationalization of social movements, I will look at cross-time and cross countries diffusion of protest ideas and practices since the turn of the Millennium.

Conceptualizing Social Movement Transnationalization

Late to develop in social movement studies as well as in other field of studies, the analysis of the transnational dimension has flourished with research on the global justice movement (della Porta et al., 2006; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow, 2005). Acquiring global visibility with the protests against the 3rd summit of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999, it spread through counter-summits and social forums that proved to be important venues in which activists from all over the world met to build a shared criticism of corporate globalisation and propose alternatives to it (della Porta, 2007). Social movement studies explained the emerging transnational social movement organisations, global protests, and cosmopolitan framing as triggered by economic, social, political, and cultural globalisation. While social movement ideas had often spread cross-nationally, the need to act globally increased with the shifts of competences towards international organisations and multinational corporations. Upward scale shift from the national to the transnational level of contention seemed to be an unstoppable trend.

While anti-austerity protests maintained a transnational focus, targeting the negative role of especially international financial institutions, they organized, however, mainly at domestic level with protests following the timing of developments of the economic crisis. While embedded in their national contexts, anti-austerity protests that flourished in several countries shared however many characteristics at the level of both protest visions and protest practices, so stimulating scholars to reflect on the different paths of diffusion of ideas through formal, but also informal channels, in unmediated but also mediated, thick but also thin forms of diffusion (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). As the anti-austerity protests developed a few years after the pick of the Global Justice Movement, reflections grew on the cross-time diffusion of ideas both within and beyond

national social movement cultures (della Porta et al., 2017).

Finally, as anti-austerity protests did not end, but proceeded in short waves, with social movements and their activists sometimes moving inside the institutions, a new cycle of protests seemed to emerge with massive mobilizations, often coordinated in global days of action. Focusing on violence against women understood in a broad sense and linked to social conditions, the Ni Una Menos collectives spread from Latin America to Southern Europe, mobilizing a new generation of young feminists. At the same time, the Fridays for Future protests spread fast and massive all over the globe, bridging the youngest generation with other ones already active against climate change. What is more, the 'hot Autumn' of 2019 surprised the mass media and the public opinion with the convergence in time but diffused in space of massive waves of protest against increasing inequalities as well as the corruption of the political and economic elites. The apparent lack of direct connection but also frequent expression of reciprocal solidarity is triggering a new reflection on transnationalization through learning and emulation at the distance,

Diffusion processes are multi-dimensional, requiring scholars to employ a heterogeneity of theoretical perspectives and research methodologies (Givan et al., 2010). In fact, "Despite the variations on the what, how, and why spread over the context of such mobilisations, focusing on the same time frame and, to some extent, the same types of mobilisations across different countries offers us the opportunity to compare diffusion mechanisms as they occurred (or not) within a quite homogeneous set of case studies, although considered from different perspectives" (della Porta and Mattoni 2015). As Mark Beissinger (2002) noted in his research on the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (2011) in their analysis on the Orange revolutions, ideas might also spread where conditions are less favourable, but their capacity to produce successful mobilisation is then constrained. Especially, structural differences might jeopardize that assessment of similarities, which is a relevant conducive condition for cross-national diffusion. Late comers within a wave of protest might also find particular difficulties in catching up with mobilization and so can countries in which strong waves of protest were on their declining phases.

Moments of economic instability are often considered as less propitious for mass mobilization than period of economic growth. Besides the degree of severity of the crisis, the opening or closing of political opportunities can contribute much to explain different paths of diffusion, the specific movements' cultures and traditions also play a role (see Table 1). While activists traveling

cross-country bring with them emerging ideas, the activists reactivated from previous waves of protest carry with them their specific visions and experiences. As new technologies mediate (facilitate and constrain) cross-country spread of information, memory acts as a filter in the reception of the new mobilisations occurring in other countries.

As diffusion happens in space, but also in time, forms of action can be imported from past experiences travelling from an historical context to a new one (Flesher Fominaya and Montanes, 2014). Translation, experimentation and deliberation mechanisms allow a specific protest tactic to be dislocated from its original context into another (Chabot 2010, 106) as activists engage with ideas and practices rooted in social movement experiences that took place in different historical moments and/or countries (della Porta, 2015; Wood, 2012). Learning from each other's experiences, but also reinterpreting them, is embedded in practices of remembering and comparing present and past protest contexts on the side of activists.

Table 1. Transnational Channels of Diffusion

	Cross-time	Cross-country
Relational diffusion	Reactivated activists	Traveling activists
Non-relational diffusion	Memory	New technologies

From della Porta and Mattoni, 2014b

Besides diffusion, the development of transnational social movements involves different paths of action defined as domestication, externalisation and transnationalization (della Porta and Kriesi 1999; Tarrow 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005). Processes of *domestication* develops when international organizations affect national politics, triggering discontent, that however targets especially the national governments that implement policies required by international organizations. For instance, in the early 1990s, protests against the European Union addressed the national governments that applied its directives and policies (Imig and Tarrow 2001). *Externalisation* processes are instead at work when discontent with national policies is expressed in international arenas, in the attempt to find allies that can put pressure on domestic decision makers. This has been the cases of several campaigns calling the United Nations or the European Unions to take position against violation of civil rights and political freedom in various countries. The Global Justice Movement has been considered as a typical example of *transnationalization*, as social movement organization

organized world-wide, targeting international organizations. In recent times, solidarization develops through reciprocal references and horizontal ties between movements active in different countries but with the perception of a common global enemy.

Spreading Protests Across Time

First, empirically, the three waves are interrelated, with the spreading of ideas across time, through memories and legacies but also an adaptation to the changing times through learning processes. Old and new social movement groups meet in the organization of protests. Old activists are mobilized anew, bringing in their experiences and knowledge to new generations, that develop new protest tastes, more adapted to their own conditions. In fact, while each of them involved new generations of activists, each also remobilized previous ones that brought to the new waves knowledge and experiences of past collective mobilizations.

While growing in a moment of still rampant neoliberalism, the Global Justice Movement had seen the convergence of various progressive streams in broad and fluid networks. A meta-frame had developed bridging specific concerns within broader meta-frames that targeted neoliberal capitalism, calling for justice against increasing inequalities as well as for participatory and deliberative forms of democracy. Global and macroregional forums represented arenas for encounters for thousands of groups and tens of thousands of activists, massive demonstrations took citizens back to the streets in contestation of the summits of international organizations, including the European Union (EU).

About a decade later, as the financial crisis confirmed the pessimistic prediction of the global justice movement about the lack of capacity of neoliberalism to fulfil it promises of progress and wellbeing, a new transnational cycle of protests developed, still targeting increasing inequalities and calling for another democracy. Face to massive participation of the citizens, the *acampadas* (protest camps) represented an innovative form of, at the same time, organization and action. Targeting the austerity measures that national governments had adopted, under pressure from lending international organizations, in the occupied squares activists prefigured different forms of relations, based on participation and discursive quality that adapted those invented by the global justice movement to new circumstances.

As protests against austerity periodically emerged anew, towards the end of the year 2010 new waves of protests against violence on women or global warming took over some of the frames of the previous waves, locating those issues

within a critique of the existing social and political relations. Fluid networks connected groups active on the territory, often mobilizing citizens for the first time. The struggles against extreme inequalities and corrupt elites resonated with the anti-austerity protests of the beginning of the decade, but within more global waves. While Fridays For Future, Extinction Rebellion and Ni Una Menos repeatedly organized global days of protest, the massive mobilizations of the Hot Autumn of 2019 were rooted in national cleavages but also expressed rage at a global capitalist development that increased social inequalities and constrained civil rights and political freedom. The at times brutal repression of civil disobedience in the streets and in the courts fuelled further protests in a spiral of politicization and with moments of radicalization.

At the empirical level, the three waves are also interrelated reacting to different moments in the development of neoliberalism, as a specific form of relation between the state and the market that privilege free markets over state intervention to reduce social inequalities. At the same time, they also reacted to a political crisis with declining legitimacy of representative institutions, promoting participatory and deliberative democratic practices as crucial for the creation of globalisation from below (della Porta 2009a; della Porta 2009b; della Porta 2013). In sum, the Global Justice Movement influenced the anti-austerity protests through the development of collective memory (Daphi and Zamponi 2014; della Porta et al 2018) and, filtered from the latter, also impacted on the most recent wave of global protests against social and political inequalities.

Cross-National Diffusion and the Transnationalization of Social Movements

In all of the three mentioned waves of contention, transnationalization of contentious politics happened, even if in different forms. As I argue in what follows, the diffusion process and the main agent of this diffusion changed over time (see Table 2).

Table 2: Paths of Diffusion in Three Waves of Global Protests

	Global Justice Movement	Anti-austerity protests	The Hot Fall of 2019
Diffusion Processes	Thick	Thin	Thin
Diffusion Actors	Social movement networks and coalitions	Individual activists and protest	Mediated contacts

		participants	
Media Infrastructure	Activists mailing lists and alternative informational websites	Commercial social media platforms and global satellite televisions networks	Global media-scape

The global justice movement pushed social movement studies to analyse the transnational dimension of contentious politics. Transnational counter-summits and social forums, as venues for protests and proposals against neoliberal globalisation, were empirically investigated in order to understand the organizational forms, action repertoires and collective framing at transnational level. Political opportunities – a central explanatory concept in social movement studies – started to be considered as multilevel. Transnationalization of social movements appeared as a trend driven by globalisation but also by cosmopolitan culture. Economic globalization represented a main target of the protest; that however contributed to political globalization by forming transnational political actors and calling for different global policies. Democratization of global politics was an important aim in attempts to reform international organizations, going from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to the United Nation and the European Union. Plural and cosmopolitan identities grew through transnational collective action. The global justice movement acted as a transnational public sphere in order to make powerful and secretive international organisations accountable to world citizens for their deeds and misdeeds.

Transnationalization was indeed visible on the main dimension of social movements (della Porta 2007; 2009a; 2009b). Protests were more and more often organised transnationally, challenging the idea that the nation-state is the natural arena for contentious politics. Protests moved to the places in which international organisations held their summits, especially those of the international financial organisations, such as the WTO, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund, which had played a major role in spreading neoliberal doctrine; but also to the most powerful macro-regional organisations. In particular, the European Union, was also criticised as betraying its public mission of creating better conditions for citizens, instead defending the powerful (della Porta, 2009b). Counter-summits involved a complex protest repertoire, with non-violent direct action in the street, but also forums devoted to the development of an alternative vision of world

politics. Growing in number, transnational protests were particularly influential given their capacity to network activists of different countries, during long-lasting preparations and emotionally intense performances.

The social forums helped building a different knowledge from below, fostering the development of cosmopolitan identities. Through the organization of transnational action, also transnational networks grew in members and in numbers. They also broadened their forms adding to the formal associations, characterized by small core of activists and reliance on the discrete forms of transnational diplomacy, the horizontal networks, part local and part global, growing within global protest campaigns. While social forums were active also at the local and national levels, the global dimension remained the most important one. Activists presented their action as part of a global movement calling for global justice and global democracy. Bridging the local and the global (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005), they contributed to the development of a transnational political system and cosmopolitan identities (Tarrow, 2005; della Porta and Caiani, 2009).

A few years later, the Great Regression seemed to have, if not inverted, at least slowed down what seemed a trend towards the transnationalization of social movements. In particular, "while both waves of protest speak a cosmopolitan language, claiming global rights and blaming global financial capital, the global justice movement moved to the national (and the local) from the transnational, while the new wave took the reverse root and focused on the national level of protest…Probably the most visible disjuncture between the two waves of protest, therefore, is indeed related to their territorial level: while the global justice movement often engaged in cross-border mobilisations that moved from one country to another, the current wave of protest chose relatively stable camps, deeply inserted in the urban settings of hundreds of cities across the world, as the main venue of activists" (della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

While the Global Justice Movement was rooted in national politics and social movement cultures (Sommier and Fillieule 2013; della Porta et al. 2006), the national level became all the more relevant for anti-austerity protests (della Porta 2013). National pride was often shown through the use of national flags and anthems within calls for defence of national sovereignty against the dominance of powerful states, international organisations, and big corporations. Protestors stigmatized the abduction of national democracy by financial powers and international organisations, above all the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. Given the varying timing and intensity of the financial crisis, mobilisations were particularly sensitive to national political opportunities (or the

lack thereof). Surveys carried out during protests events in various European countries signalled the increasing importance given to the national level of government as the target of the protest claims (della Porta, 2013).

Processes of cross-national diffusion of frames and repertoires of action were however also at work through both direct, face-to-face contacts and mediated ones. Direct forms of diffusion seem to have been especially important within some geopolitical areas: Egyptian activists learned from Tunisians, thanks also to some direct contacts. Egyptians exerted indirect influence on Spanish Indignados (Romanos, 2013b), who were instead in direct contact with Greek activists as well as very relevant in steering the Occupy movement (Romanos, 2013a). Across distant countries, social media helped quick information exchange and mutual learning (see Roos and Oikonomakis, 2014).

Some protests were moreover called worldwide, as in the case of the Global Day of Action launched by the Spanish Indignados on 15 October 2011, which saw protest events taking place in 951 cities in 82 countries (Perugorría and Tejerina, 2013). Transnational coordination was very grassroots: not much embedded in structured movement organisations, it was rather based on fluid networks, participatory web platforms, micro-blogging spheres (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). While activists in the GJM often belonged to various social movement organizations, the massive participation in the anti-austerity protests in several countries was based upon the mobilization of 'first comers', especially among those who were suffering more of the consequences of the crisis.

While emerging from existing social movement organisations, that kept mobilizing during the protests (Gerbaudo, 2012), the involvement of common people was praised among anti-austerity protests. As Jeff Juris (2012) noted, in the global justice movement the logic of networking in the organisation of mobilisations, with intense frame bridging during the campaigns of the global justice movement, was if not substituted at least accompanied by a logic of aggregation among individual participants that often used social media to come together around specific events. In fact, while the global justice movement presented itself as the space of encounter of various progressive movements – a 'movement of movements' –praising their differences, the anti-austerity movements claimed to represent the overwhelming majority, 'the people' or the '99%', indignant against the corruption of the elites (della Porta, 2015).

Also, in the anti-austerity protests, transnationalization of protest happened through a marked diffusion of ideas, practices, and frames (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005) that was facilitated by the perception of a shared conditions of

a global crisis. This helped the cross-national travelling of a form of protest such as the protest camps that spread from Tahrir Square in Egypt to Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and from there to Syntagma Square in Athens and Zuccotti Park in New York to many squares and parks in many other countries of the world, including Gezi Park in Turkey and the squares of the Nuit debut (see della Porta and Atak, 201; Felicetti and della Porta, 2018). While not resonating equally in all countries, when and where it spread the *acampadas* became entrenched in the very identity of the movements with occupied spaces becoming 'vibrant sites of human interaction that modelled alternative communities and generated intense feeling of solidarity' (Juris, 2012, 268).

Aiming at reconstructing a public space that had been lost in neoliberal times, the visions and practices that characterized the protest camp also spread to many and diverse countries. What is more, the experimentation with participatory democracy during the informal and formal gatherings in the squares challenged existing forms of representative democracy. In the elaboration of radical imageries related to the very idea of democracy, a semantic renovation of the terms linked to these imageries and the experimentation with participatory democratic practices allowed activists to experience, not just to imagine, different conceptions of democracy. Also, attention to deliberation became more central in the movements against austerity as it resonated with (more traditional) participatory visions but also with deliberative conceptions that underline the importance of creating multiple public spaces.

During anti-austerity protests, the prefiguration of participatory and deliberative democratic forms acquired particular relevance, not only in the movements of 2011, but also later on, in 2013, in Gezi Park in Turkey or in the Nuit Debut in France in 2016 (della Porta, 2016; Felicetti and della Porta, 2018). In fact, what is valued as democratic is:

> "the possibility to elaborate ideas within discursive, open, and public arenas, where citizens play an active role in identifying problems, but also in elaborating possible solutions… Indeed, this conception of democracy is prefigured by the very same protestors that occupied the squares, transforming them into public spheres made up of 'normal citizens'. It is an attempt to create high-quality discursive democracy that recognises the equal rights of all (not only delegates and experts) to speak (and be respected) in a public and plural space, open to discussion

and deliberation on themes that range from situations suffered to concrete solutions to specific problems, from the elaboration of proposals on common goods to the formation of collective solidarity and emerging identities" (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

Anti-austerity protests were characterized, however, by selective diffusion. Some of the ideas developed during the 2011 protests travelled well from Tunisia to Egypt, and then to Spain, Greece, and the United States but not so much in countries which, like Germany or France or the United Kingdom, less hit by recession, or not even in some countries that were indeed hit by the recession, as with Portugal, or Italy or the Czech Republic. As the financial crisis had different characteristics in different countries in terms of public debt and state dependency on foreign banks.

Diffusion has played a pivotal role in the transnationalization of the global justice movement allowing for the spreading of several social movement features, from forms of organisation to forms of contention, from one country to another (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005) but it also occurred in the anti-austerity protests. The forms of diffusion changed however, being thick in the former and thin instead in the latter. As della Porta and Mattoni (2014) summarized, in the global justice movement thick diffusion was

"based on a global organisational network in which social movement organisations as well as grassroots activist groups had a relevant role in supporting (and spreading) transnational mobilisations like counter-summits. Partially supported through information and communication technologies managed within the social movement milieu, and in particular by activist mailing lists and alternative informational websites, this global organisational network was also thickened due to transnational, but also national, gatherings like the social forum, whose practices rested on a collective conception of politics based on activist groups and organisations" (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

Vice versa, anti-austerity protests were considered as examples of thin diffusion as "information travelled quickly from individual to individual through social

networking sites, frequently in combination with portable mobile devices like smart phones. The ability of individuals to communicate the content of protests was therefore important to spreading imageries in the global wave of protest.

More important than social movement organisations and social movement groups were activists who designed and provided web platforms able to function as content aggregators, to navigate the impressive amount of information produced in the framework of protests. The diffusion of information on the protest was therefore characterised by a weak organisational process of transnationalization. Occasions for face-to-face communication might have improved in time at the individual level – activists travelling cheaply and often – but collective arenas for transnational encounters like the social forum were less central. Indeed, the protest camps like the Spanish *acampadas* quickly achieved world visibility but were mainly national, if not local in the range of people involved (della Porta and Mattoni 2014).

During anti-austerity protests, days of transnational solidarity with Greece took place, for instance, on 18 February 2012 in about nineteen non-Greek cities, targeting local branches of the International Monetary Fund and Greek embassies across Europe; on 19 January 2013, solidarity rallies and actions in front of Greek consulates and embassies were organised in twenty-six cities across the world, while demonstrations also occurred in twenty-five cities within Greece (Kousis 2015). Also, international claims referring to other countries were present in domestic demonstrations. In Portugal, "a special focus is set on social movements from other countries facing austerity measures and heavily indebted. The protests in Greece have been used as a thread, claiming 'We consider ourselves Greek.' The slogan 'Spain! Greece! Ireland! Portugal! Our struggle is international!' was prominently proclaimed during the 2011 demonstrations" (Baumgarten, 2013).

Transnational collective action, characterizing the Global Justice Movement (della Porta and Tarrow 2005) that targeted international organizations through transnational action, have also been visible as anti-austerity protests targeted the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as rating agencies. Activists linked to the 15M mobilisation in Spain called for a Global Action Day against capitalism and austerity for the 15 October 2011, with protests counted in 951 cities in 82 countries under the slogan 'United for Global Change' (Perugorría and Tejerina, 2013). On 14 November 2012, trade unions organised a Global Action Day against austerity that involved the major unions in Portugal, Spain, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, and Malta. However, "While

these mobilisations certainly had a transnational flavour, they did not imply the gathering of activists coming from various European countries within the same protest site, as regularly happened in the case of the Global Justice Movement" (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014).

In May 2012, four Blockupy days of protests, organised by a transnational network of activists, aimed at blocking the activities of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt to denounce the European financial policies and austerity measures implemented in many European countries (della Porta, 2020). Also, in the following years, activists travelled from various European countries to reach Germany and engage in several protest actions, including the attempt at a peaceful blockade of the European Central Bank. In the case of Blockupy, transnationalization was however limited, as the organization and participation remained mainly German.

While it is too early to make empirically founded assessments, diffusion certainly happened in the third wave of protests that started globally, through the interconnection of domestic contention. The campaigns against global warming as the ones against violence on women started nationally but quickly spread globally through global days of action with massive demonstrations all over the globe. Triggered by specific grievances – from the tough sentences against independentist leaders in Catalonia to the small increase in the fares of public transports in Chile or the $6 tax per month on WhatsApp voice messages in Lebanon or the increase of fuel in Ecuador or the law in Hong Kong – country-based massive waves of protests connected cross-nationally, through expression of reciprocal solidarity. In all these cases, diffusion seems to occur almost automatically, through a dense media environment in which information spread globally through the interaction of old and new media. Million marches and mass forms of civil disobedience (as well as, sometimes, general strikes) testify for the spread of discontent but also contribute to its spreading.

Highly connected through a global media-scape, the various domestic waves of protests also connect by singling out of shared conditions in the increasing inequalities and related corruption. So, for instance, while located in distant geopolitical areas, the protestors in Chile and in Lebanon in the Hot Autumn of 2019 targeted the capturing of political institutions by plutocrats, seen as physically embodying the 1% that dominate over the population in situation of extreme inequalities (suffice to remember that the richest 1% monopolize 58% of wealth in Lebanon and 33% in Chile). Together with the misère of the citizens, the corruption of the elites is a powerful diagnostic frame in the two countries as well

as in Iraq or in Ecuador, in Algeria as in Haiti.

What is more, the rich and colluded elites are perceived as united worldwide and supported by some international organizations. Deprived of consensus and delegitimated, those elites often fuel the protests through failed attempts at scaring protestors with high levels of repression that at times backfire, producing further discontent and radical expression of it. So, from relatively small and focused triggers, that inflame latent dissatisfaction, intense waves of contention see an escalation of the claims from the withdrawal of specific measures that ignited the struggles to the punishment of those who repressed, up to deeper changes in the political and social regime. As economic inequalities reduce trust in the political institutions, issues of sovereignty and territorial controls emerge as contested, with a re-emergence of cleavages between the centre and the periphery as well as the rural and the urban areas, that interact with class cleavages (as, for example, in different forms in Catalonia and Hong Kong). While the Covid-19 pandemic has temporarily hampered street protests, we can expect that the post-pandemic times will be ridden with social conflicts against the dramatic growth of inequalities.

Conclusion

In sum, transnationalization happened in different forms in the three waves of global contention that I singled out since the turn of the millennium. The processes had, however, different degrees of thick versus thin diffusion, with dense organizational networks in the first wave, aggregation of individual activists in the second and mediated contacts within loose connections in the third. The media infrastructure was more controlled by social movement organizations during the first wave, influenced by individual use of new social media in the second, and fuelled by dense interaction in a global media sphere in the third.

These three waves cannot however be taken as three isolated instances of global campaigns of protests. As I have shown, they were, rather, interconnected in time, with activists of different generations mobilizing together. In addition, the three waves of protests expressed discontent for a common global trend of neoliberal capitalism, in its rampant form in the first wave, in the eruption of its crisis in the second one, and in the consolidation of its crisis in the third wave. Central to the framing of the protests was, all over, the condemnation of extreme social inequality and or related political corruption, and the quest instead for justice and democracy.

The two observations should be combined when reflecting on the future

prospects for transnationalization of protests. First, we cannot expect that the globalization of protests follows a linearly growing trend. While a power shift at global level can stimulate global protests (as the power shift at national level during the creation of nation states focused protests at that level), the mounting of global organizations and global action is costly for social movement actors. We might therefore expect that, while ideas will keep diffusing cross-nationally, social movements will follow multi-level strategies, using leverage at local, national and international level. Transformation in capitalism as well as changes in political opportunities certainly affect these choices, opening and closing channels for international mobilization. Given the importance that communication always had for movements, technological transformations certainly influence the process of cross-national diffusion. Beside strategic calculations, however, progressive movements appear to be driven by a deep normative commitment to global justice and international solidarity. Learning from previous cycles of protests, they will also inherit repertoires of global protests and transnational networks that are adapted to further campaigns.

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