
Spreading Protest

Social Movements in Times of Crisis

Edited by
Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni



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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book originates from the workshop ‘The Transnational Dimension of Protest: From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street’ that we organised at the 41st ECPR Joint Sessions in Mainz, from 11 to 16 March 2013. During that workshop we engaged in an intense week of fruitful intellectual discussions around the transnational aspects of protests that occurred, in particular in 2011: from the uprisings in the MENA region to mobilisations in the United States, passing through the anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe.

We found that the presented papers were extremely rich, not only in empirically addressing emerging protests on which little research is yet available, but also for their theoretical potential. In particular, the papers we selected for publication all address a relevant analytic issue that requires – we believe – constant attention: the changing transnationalisation of forms of contention and, related to this, the mechanisms of diffusion that were at work during this wave of mobilisation. Although literature flourished quickly on some of the countries in which massive protests occurred, during the workshop discussions it was already clear that comparative works were still to come and that a focus on the transnational dimension and the mechanisms of diffusion is a necessary starting point to understand current protests.

We hence decided to make our reflections available to a broader public of academics through a publication that was able to reflect the richness of the workshop’s debates and to trigger new questions about the transnational dimension of protest and the related mechanisms of diffusion in contemporary societies.

Although some chapters in this book were drafted expressly for this volume, the majority of the contributions included in the following pages were presented in the workshop. We are grateful to the participants of the Joint Sessions for their useful comments on the first draft of the chapters and for the passionate discussions about transnational protests and mechanisms of diffusion that stimulated the writing of the Introduction and Conclusion to this volume. Besides our contributors, we are grateful to Gema Garcia Albacete, Daniel Bochsler, Tina Freyburg, Ernesto Ganuza, Paolo Gerbaudo, Emma Jorum, Eva Klambauer, Muzzamil Hussain, Gianni Piazza, Geoffrey Pleyers, and Adrien Mazieres-Vaysee.

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Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni
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Chapter One

Patterns of Diffusion and the Transnational Dimension of Protest in the Movements of the Crisis: An Introduction¹

Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni

The mobilisations that occurred in Egypt and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries, in Spain and Greece, in the United States, as well as later on in Turkey and Brazil, took place in different times and places. However, they are often grouped together in popular, journalistic and even academic discourses. Indeed, some common features seem to favour categorising all these protests as part of the same set of events. At first glance, the similarities and linkages between all these protests are quite simple to identify: they all involved massive numbers of protestors who appeared to be autonomous from the usual political actors, and including some grassroots groups active in past cycles of contention. They also all employed social-networking sites, combined with older web applications and Internet tools, in conjunction with face-to-face gatherings and the deployment of quite radical, contentious performances, amongst them the physical occupation of public spaces.

These are, perhaps, some of the most obvious similarities that recent protests share. But there are other connections as well. This volume aims at unveiling these parallels while reflecting on the very nature of the transnational dimension in current mobilisations: the relationship between current movements and those that had been active in the past decades, particularly the protests against corporate globalisation that began in the late 1990s, as we will show below; the manifold interactions, at the expressive as well as the instrumental level, that link activists belonging to different countries who acted locally, in the urban spaces of their cities, but felt nonetheless connected to other activists engaged in protests far away; and, of course, the practices and discourses, ideas and actions that travelled from one moment in history to another and from one country to another, through mechanisms of diffusion that combined many sources of inspiration and many sites

1. The two authors discussed and wrote collaboratively and equally the present chapter. However, Donatella della Porta is the principal author of 'Introduction' and 'Protest camps and radical democracy in the movements of the crisis' and Alice Mattoni is the principal author of the sections 'Comparing the transnational dimension' and 'This volume'. Donatella della Porta gratefully acknowledges the support of the European Research Council, advanced scholar grant on the project Mobilizing for Democracy.

of adaptation. In doing so, we explore and explain some traits of recent protests, considering them not as not as isolated instances of protest that happened to have a few characteristics in common but rather as events linked to one another as part of the wave of protest that began to develop in 2008 with the revolts in Iceland and continued with protests in Turkey and Brazil in 2013.

The many events over these five years were situated in a context of which two aspects, in particular, seem significant: that of a crisis that was not only economic but also political and which affected, to varying degrees, many countries in the world. For this reason, we group the various uprisings under the tentative label of ‘movements of the crisis’. With the label ‘crisis’, we address at the same time the economic and political crisis from which these movements originated and at which they point, revealing the increasing inequalities even in those countries where the economic crisis seemed to have had a less intense impact – such as Brazil. This book is a first attempt to understand the many features of these ‘movements of the crisis’ – which are diverse, since the economic/political crisis affected different countries in different ways, but also similar, in that the crisis manifested in different regions of the world with the same seriousness, although through different specificities. Some authors have already stressed the interconnections among these different protests, considering them as part of the same ‘international cycle of contention’ (Tejerina *et al.* 2013). In this volume, we start from a similar perspective: maintaining a comparative approach among different mobilisations, we seek to discuss the diffusion of protest imageries and practices across countries. In doing so, we aim at two interrelated conceptual objectives: first, we want to understand the meaning of ‘diffusion’ when we consider current protests around the world; second, we want to grasp the qualities of the ‘transnational’ dimension in current mobilisations and the ways in which it unfolded from country to country. Both concepts – diffusion of contention and transnational protest – have quite a long tradition in social-movement studies: they became of central importance with the rise of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) in the late 1990s.

The transnational dimension in the recent wave of global protests such as the Arab Spring, the European Indignados, and Occupy Wall Street is a relevant, but largely neglected, theoretical question. In the last decade, literature on global social movements and transnational collective action has flourished, particularly with research on the Global Justice Movement (Kriesi, della Porta and Rucht 2009; Karides, Smith and Becker 2008; della Porta *et al.* 2006; della Porta and Tarrow 2005a; Tarrow 2005). This wave of protest acquired worldwide visibility due to demonstrations against the third World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle at the end of November 1999, developing through counter-summits and social forums that proved to be important venues in which activists from all over the world could construct a common, yet multifaceted, framework for radical criticism of corporate globalisation (della Porta 2007). Social-movement studies explained the emerging transnational social-movement organisations, global protests and cosmopolitan framing as an outcome of economic, social, political and cultural globalisation. While cross-national diffusion of movement ideas was a long-lasting phenomenon, the need to act globally – resting on the shifts of decision

towards international organisations and corporations but also on the opportunities offered by new technologies – gave a new impetus to the transnational dimension of protests and movements. Upward shift from the national to the transnational level of protest seemed to be an ineluctable trend in collective action. In other words, the transnational dimension of protests seemed to be here to stay.

Although the actors, discourses and practices that developed during those transnational mobilisations did not disappear, the current global anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests require scholars to update their analytical tools, revise their research questions and look for alternative explanations related to the transnational dimension of protests. Indeed, recent protests across the world have maintained a transnational stance but national governments and policies seem to be their first target. Even though the financial crisis to which the movements react is singular, and global, its timing and dynamics varied across countries. In fact, protests followed the geography of the emergence of the economic crisis, which appeared with different strengths and at different times in different European countries.

First, between the end of 2008 and the beginning of the following year, self-convened citizens in Iceland – the first country hit by the crisis – demanded the resignation of the government and its delegates in the Central Bank and financial authority. Protests in the traditional forms of general strikes and trade-union demonstrations contesting drastic cuts to social and labour rights followed in Ireland: a country until shortly beforehand considered a showcase for the economic miracles of neo-liberal economics but which then became an exemplar of rapid economic deterioration. The Arab Spring at the beginning of 2011 – later proclaimed the year of the protester by *The Times* – targeted not only the region's authoritarian regimes but its growing poverty as well as the social and geographical inequalities introduced by various waves of neo-liberal reforms that had cut public services and subsidies and created high unemployment, especially among the young. Next, in Portugal, a demonstration arranged via Facebook in March 2011 against growing economic difficulties brought more than 200,000 young Portuguese people on to the streets. Gaining global visibility, the Indignados movement developed in Spain, a country that was quickly dropping from the eighth (or the seventh, according to some ratings) position in terms of economic development to the twentieth (according to some estimates). Beginning on 15 May, protesters occupied the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Placa de Catalunya in Barcelona and hundreds of other squares around the country, calling for different social and economic policies and, indeed, greater citizen-participation in their formulation and implementation. The Indignados protests, in turn, inspired similar mobilisations in Greece, where opposition to austerity measures had already been expressed in occasionally violent ways. Mobilisations then broke out in the United States in September 2011: from New York, where the first Occupy Wall Street camp was established, protests quickly spread all over the country, and beyond. Indeed, even the mobilisations that took place in Turkey, Bulgaria and Brazil, in 2013, and Bosnia in 2014, shared some aspects of those which immediately preceded them in other parts of the world.

Chapter Four

Dramatic Diffusion and Meaning Adaptation: The Case of Neda¹

Thomas Olesen

Introduction

In recent years the unjust suffering or death of specific individuals, referred to here as violent person-events, has been at the centre of political protest in several countries: such as the case of Neda Agha Soltan, shot and killed by a regime-related militiaman during protests against the fraudulent presidential election in Iran in 2009; Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire in a protest against local authorities in Tunisia in 2010; Malala Yousafzai, shot and severely injured by the Taliban because of her advocacy for girls' right to education in Pakistan in 2012; and Joyti Singh, who died after being raped by several men on a Delhi bus in 2012. While these individuals and the circumstances surrounding their fates differ wildly, they all have become central injustice-symbols in their respective countries, motivating and galvanising political protest and activism. Yet from the perspective of global political sociology it is equally notable how the symbolic meaning of these events has been extended well beyond their national context. They have, in other words, been involved in a process of dramatic cross-border diffusion in which local/national events attain universalised (Alexander 2006, 2007) meanings for audiences in a global public sphere.

This scale-shift (Tarrow 2005) is a complex ideational process involving significant *meaning adaptation*. The latter term indicates how local/national events *change* meaning as they are disembedded (Giddens 1991). This chapter's main ambition is to theoretically outline and empirically analyse key patterns in the process of symbolic formation and meaning adaptation. It does so based on the case of Neda Agha Soltan and her visually documented and globally publicised death during protests in Iran in 2009. Existing research on Neda has so far been conducted from outside social-movements studies and political sociology (*see*, for example, Andén-Papadopoulos 2013; Assmann and Assmann 2010; Mortensen 2011; Naghibi 2011; Stage 2011). These studies offer crucial insights and inform

1. The chapter is a revised version of a paper presented at the ECPR joint sessions workshop, Mainz, 11–16 March 2013. I am profoundly grateful to the participants in the workshop for their numerous insightful comments on the paper.

this chapter in important ways. Yet, at an empirical level, the aim of the chapter is to locate and explore the case of Neda within a global political sociology framework and to demonstrate its relevance for students of global activism. In exploring the Neda case from a symbolic perspective, the chapter provides a novel perspective on the otherwise extensive literature on global activism.² In fact, it might be argued that the strand of social-movement theory least well adapted to a global level of analysis is the emotional and cultural turn of the last 10–15 years within social-movement studies (*see*, for example, Alexander 2006; Flam and King 2005; Goodwin *et al.* 2001; Jasper 1997, 2009; Johnston 2009; Williams 2004). The formation of injustice-symbols in the global public sphere has a significant dramatic and emotional character that is under-theorised in the extant literature. At a disciplinary level, the chapter's ambition is to activate such an agenda and give it some theoretical shape.³

The Neda case is relevant for the present volume in several respects. The Iranian protests in 2009 were an important, if often overlooked, forerunner of protests during the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. On a general level, even if the immediate motivation was fraudulent elections, Iranian protestors in 2009 voiced a growing dissatisfaction with authoritarian rule that would surface at a more systematic level across the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region only a few years later (*see* della Porta and Mattoni, Chapter One in this volume). On a more specific level, the protests and the death of Neda demonstrated the increasing power of new media technologies (especially, cell phone documentation and social media) for political activism and cross-border diffusion. An important element

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2. The relevance of the Neda case for social-movement studies is in fact twofold: on the one hand, because the violent person-event in question was closely related to protest and activism at the national level; and, on the other, because the subsequent formation of the Neda symbol involved political activism at a global level. However, in continuation of the second point, the chapter does not restrict itself to analysing the activities of political activists in the formation of the Neda symbol. Rather, it views this process as a multi-actor process involving activists, politicians, political parties, media and networked citizens in a broadly conceived global pro-Neda movement. This is obviously also a methodological point as it orients the choice of sources and the collection of data (*see also* the section 'Analysis', below).
 3. While the concept of diffusion figures centrally in the chapter, the approach taken here differs quite significantly from the existing literature on movement-related cross-border diffusion (e.g. Beissinger 2007; Chabot 2010; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; McAdam and Rucht 1993; Snow and Benford 1999; Tarrow 2005). The issue of adaptation is also a staple in the existing literature on cross-border movement diffusion. Snow and Benford (1999: 30), for example, define it as 'the strategic appropriation of specific foreign elements that adopting agents modify, for their own purposes, in a fashion congruent with the host culture's values, beliefs, and practices'. The existing literature, as exemplified in the quote, thus typically works with a clearly defined and strategically oriented sender-recipient relationship and with concrete 'items' being diffused across space. The dramatic cross-border diffusion perspective differs in at least two ways: First, the 'item' diffused in dramatic cross-border diffusion is not a social movement slogan, repertoire, or tactic, a focus predominant throughout the existing literature (e.g. Beissinger 2007; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002), but rather a violent person-event; second, the recipient in diffusion processes is typically a social movement. In the case of dramatic cross-border diffusion, the recipient aspect is more complex. Those actors who 'receive' or engage with violent person-events may, of course, include social movements and activists, but also the media, politicians and political parties, institutions and citizens (*see also* footnote 2).

in this power is the ability of new-media technologies to rapidly and efficiently disseminate visual memes such as, for example, injustice-symbols, both within and across borders. This pattern has been visible throughout a number of countries during the Arab Spring: for example, Khaled Said in Egypt (Olesen 2013a); Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia (Olesen 2013b); and Hamza al-Khateeb in Syria.

While the chapter thus points to intensification in both the potential and reality of cross-border diffusion, it also attempts to provide an antidote to the ‘loose’ cosmopolitanism that characterised the first phase in the study of globalisation and activism (*see della Porta and Mattoni*, in Chapter One of this volume). It does so by arguing that meaning-adaptation and global symbol-formation occurs through existing dominant *interpretive packages* (Gamson and Lasch 1983; Gamson and Modigliani 1989) available in the global public sphere. This is a dialectical process. On the one hand, as the term adaptation indicates, local/national violent person-events are shaped to resonate with existing interpretive packages. On the other, interpretive packages are not static but develop in constant interaction with the empirical phenomena they provide meaning to. In the present chapter this argument is employed to shed analytical and critical light on the political-cultural interchange between the ‘North’ and ‘South’. It is thus notable that most violent person-events attaining global resonance originate in the South. Yet their passage into the global public sphere and their transformation into global injustice-symbols are often premised on some degree of adaptation to Western-based interpretive packages. While this observation constitutes a significant line of analysis in the chapter, adaptation is not simply seen as a question of meaning reduction and of non-Western violent person-events being forced into a Western mould (for example, Said 1978; Spivak 1988). Western conceptions about the non-West are also, at least potentially, challenged, nuanced and expanded (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; Olesen 2005). In highlighting how the production of injustice-symbols takes place in a global public sphere traversed by ideational power structures in a constant process of negotiation, the chapter offers new insights into the political-cultural dimension of contemporary globalisation (Alexander 2007; Olesen 2005; Thörn 2006) in general and into the study of global activism and cross-border diffusion in particular.

Theoretical outline

The following offers a theoretical discussion of the core concepts of the chapter. The first section defines the concept of injustice-symbol on a general level. The second section adds a global dimension by theorising the process of dramatic cross-border diffusion of injustice-symbols and with a focus on meaning adaptation.

Injustice-symbols

A symbol, in the words of Elder and Cobb (1983, 28–9), is ‘any object used by human beings to index meanings that are not inherent in, nor discernible from, the object itself’. What Elder and Cobb’s definition precisely outlines is that a

Chapter Eight

Occupy London in International and Local Context

Nikos Sotirakopoulos and Christopher Rootes

Introduction

Occupy London came late to the international wave of contention that in 2011 sprang up in countries as diverse as Egypt, Spain, Greece and the United States. Although this 'International of grievance' might be represented as a transnational reaction to the severe financial crisis that unfolded from 2008, each local instance of protest had characteristics peculiar to it. The difficulty for the scholar of social movements is to understand that wave of contention as a phenomenon with core characteristics and common narratives, without underestimating the special elements of particular cases. In this chapter, we consider Occupy London, which, though it identified itself as the British 'strand' in an international cycle of struggles, bore the burdens and limitations of the social reality and historical specificities that were its local context.

We consider Occupy London as a phenomenon stimulated by three different factors: a 'passing of the baton' from other similar mobilisations around the world (especially Occupy Wall Street); a reaction to the ways in which the crisis has been experienced in Britain; and a link in the long chain of direct-action protests in Britain. We then proceed to observe Occupy London more closely. What kinds of people participated and why? What were the internal characteristics of the protest and how did they influence its outcome? Was it an anti-capitalist protest, as the media portrayed it? Might it be better understood as a social movement, a political mobilisation or as something else? To answer these questions, we will draw upon data derived from direct observation of Occupy London, more than 30 interviews with participants, and survey data, as well as secondary data and literature on the 2011 struggles and Occupy.¹

1. Observations were made at the St Paul's camp on several days over several months, chiefly by Sotirakopoulos but also by Rootes and others. The interviews employed here were conducted by Sotirakopoulos, and the survey data was collected on 9 and 12 November 2011 at St Paul's and Finsbury Square, as part of the international project, 'Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualising Contestation' (CCC), by a research team from the University of Southampton, led by Clare Saunders. The survey used a questionnaire adapted from the common research instrument of the CCC project by members of the UK partners in the CCC project (led by Saunders at Southampton).

The general frame: An international wave of contention

Economic crisis is widely supposed to entail social dislocation and political contention. Just as the economic turmoil associated since 2008 with the global financial crisis has been international, as one would expect in a globalised financial environment, so the contention that has followed the crisis has also been international. Nevertheless, the recent wave of contention can be also understood as a climax in struggles that had been going on for almost a decade, as a symptom not only of the crisis of capitalism but also of the side effects of the cycle of accumulation commonly labelled ‘neo-liberalism’.

This contention has taken various forms but the type of discontent on which we focus is grassroots protests of complaint against or direct challenge to the state. These varied significantly in size, orientation and character. The protests of the Arab Spring and Cairo’s Tahrir Square, the Indignados movement in Spain, the Outraged of Syntagma Square in Athens and the Occupy movement in its various versions in some cases leant towards violence, even riot, usually, as in Egypt and Greece, as a reaction to state repression. Because of the urgency of the conjunctures they faced (crises of governance, collapsing standards of living and state repression), only rarely did they attempt to articulate a systematic political narrative. In the case of Occupy, unable to formulate a political alternative, the protests had a prefigurative and moralistic character.

From 2011 onwards, the internationalisation and diffusion of protest conformed to the classic model proposed by Kriesi *et al.* (1995: 182): issues shared on a wide international level – in this case the financial crisis and the malfunctioning or lack of democracy – triggering mobilisations that then gained momentum and influenced one another. Such ‘eventful protest’ (della Porta 2008) produces its own dynamic that not only gives birth to new forms of organisation, narratives and repertoires of action but also challenges and transforms the existing dominant structures. At the risk of exaggerating and oversimplifying, one might say that in 2011 it was not movements that gave rise to protests but, on the contrary, protests sprang up as a reaction to social, economic and political malaise, gained a momentum of their own and gave birth to movements.

Applying McAdam and Rucht’s work on diffusion, we might identify the Arab Spring in general and Tahrir Square in particular as the ‘transmitter’ (1993: 59), the event that inspired the subsequent wave of contention, its repertoire of action, themes, values and cultural symbols (*cf.* Kriesi *et al.* 1995: 182).

The ‘trademark’ of the recent wave of contention was the physical occupation of space, usually a square. Square occupations spread like a ‘meme’ (Mason 2012: 150–1). ‘Time and again, the impulse to create areas of self-control ... led... to an almost mystical determination by protesters to occupy a symbolic physical

and Rootes at the University of Kent). The CCC project was conducted under the auspices of the European Science Foundation as an ECRP collaboration led by the University of Antwerp; UK participation was funded by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant number RES-062–23-1565.

space and create within it an experimental, shared community' (Mason 2012: 84). A heterogeneous multitude consisting of people from different classes, social backgrounds and political beliefs met in the physical space of a square, having encounters that would be difficult in more traditional forms of organisation and solidarity building, such as the political party or the trade union.

The occupation of the squares fulfilled the criteria that Soule (2007: 302, 303) identified as necessary for successful diffusion of a protest event: it gave advantages to the movement; it was compatible with already existing experiences in the milieu (as were the horizontalist, non-hierarchical, directly democratic elements from the Global Justice Movement); it was simple and came with limited risks (the occupation of a square is easier than taking over a major government building, let alone the state); it did not demand strict commitment (as, for example, does participation in a political party); and it promised to deliver results. This last element is important because a successful outcome in one instance – such as the overthrow of Mubarak – makes diffusion easier (Koopmans 2007: 26).

If Tahrir Square was the 'transmitter', then the most direct 'adopters' were the Spanish Indignados, the Greek Outraged, and Occupy. This was mirrored in the words of the participants of the London Occupy protest, who almost unanimously identified the Arab Spring as the initial inspiration for their action. But if this was diffusion, it was what Tarrow would call non-relational diffusion (2005: 104), diffusion through mostly indirect channels such as the media (and mainly social media), rather than through direct contacts between activists, as was the case in previous cycles of struggle (McAdam and Rucht 1993).

The common themes – a demand for equality and democracy – that can be traced in the recent wave of contention are key to understanding the phenomenon (Tejerina *et al.* 2013). Yet these themes are so vague and devoid of specific content that they risk being an empty form (Rocamadur 2013). There was no specific political platform or programme to unify the heterogeneous masses that filled the squares, beyond some negative consensus in cases like Egypt (against Mubarak) and Greece (against the austerity packages). Equality and democracy were principles to which no one could easily object. Yet it remains unclear what exactly equality meant. In what form, for whom and in what terms: economic, legislative, social? Who would deliver this equality? Likewise, 'democracy' took different forms and meanings, from 'true democracy' in Spain to 'direct democracy' in Athens, with the analogous difference in the scope and radicalism of each concept (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013: 446). In both cases, however, democracy sounds more like a hopeless gesture or a appeal with an unknown recipient, or one as unwilling to listen as ruling elites in times of crisis have proven to be. Thus it appeared more as a demand for a return to a *status quo ante* than a move towards something new. Similarly, Occupy Wall Street raised demands for reductions in gross social and economic inequality and for democracy but developed no political project (Rowe 2011; Žižek 2012). As Castells (2012; 186) put it, Occupy 'presented more grievances than demands'.

The short winter of Occupy London

Occupy London was a paradoxical protest. It was relatively small and quite moderate in its scope and ambition and, after months of protest, it had clearly failed to live up to the extravagant expectations it had excited. Yet Occupy London attracted an unusual level of media attention and captured the imagination of legions of sympathisers. The fact that it made such an impact and had such resonance with public opinion signals the importance of understanding a phenomenon that has so far remained under-analysed.

Because it was preceded by Occupy Wall Street and the occupations of the squares in Cairo, Madrid and Athens, but also because the London protests of the previous winter had been surprisingly subdued, Occupy London was a protest event that was widely anticipated. Thus, when it kicked off, at least among the radical milieu, it was considered a natural reaction to the crisis. 'I was watching Occupy Wall Street and was thinking how great it was that it was spreading globally and I was desperate for it to come to UK so I could get involved here', said Obi, an activist from St Paul's camp information team (interview 1). In the previous year, student protests and occupations against the increase in university tuition fees, actions by the UK Uncut network against corporations that allegedly failed to pay their fair share of taxes and the massive march organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in London on 26 March 2011, together with the riots of August 2011, had raised expectations of a 'winter of discontent', something anticipated not only by activists but also by the police (Rootes, fieldwork notes). In the event, the winter of 2011–12 brought little more than three months of peaceful and relatively small-scale occupation of two squares and one deserted building in and around the City of London.

It would, however, have been unreasonable to expect a great deal of Occupy London in view of the fact that it was obliged to pick up from the point where other mobilisations had failed. Thus, after the student protests and UK Uncut faced decisive repressive policing in the winter of 2010–11, their activists had little option but to retreat from direct action or come up with new repertoires.² The TUC, although it managed to gather a huge crowd on 26 March 2011, failed to keep up the momentum, especially when attention was diverted away from the main event towards violent incidents and small-scale rioting. In addition, the vigorous prosecution of rioters and looters after the turbulent days of August made clear that the government had and was prepared to use all the resources necessary to control the situation, as well as overwhelming public support for the enforcement of law and order. There was a need for something new and different in direct action and the radical milieu in general.

2. Interestingly, however, the horizontal organizational structures of the student occupations of 2010–11 and the alter-globalisation movement, and the narrative of UK Uncut's framing of banks and big corporations as enjoying unfair tax and other benefits, were carried over to Occupy London.

Chapter Twelve

Adapting Theories on Diffusion and Transnational Contention Through Social Movements of the Crisis: Some Concluding Remarks¹

Alice Mattoni and Donatella della Porta

Chapters in this volume addressed diffusion in contemporary mobilisations from different conceptual frameworks and employing a diverse range of methods. Indeed, the attributes of social movements that are diffused, the territorial levels and the historical moments in which they mobilise, and the way in which they spread across space and time might vary considerably. As a result, diffusion processes and their underlying mechanisms are inherently multi-dimensional – requiring scholars to employ an heterogeneity of theoretical perspectives and research methodologies. Unlike other collective volumes on diffusion in social movements (for example, Givan, Roberts and Soule 2010), however, this volume has addressed the topic as it applied to one specific wave of contention. Despite variations on the what, how and why questions about the spread 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, albeit considered from different perspectives.

In this chapter we go a step further in addressing diffusion processes. Also building on the findings presented in the previous contributions in this volume, we address two questions that are relevant, at both the theoretical and the empirical levels, to understanding current social-movement protests and their future evolution. We first consider how the diffusion processes and mechanisms that characterised anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests put into question more traditional models of diffusion; and we suggest potential new ways to rework such models. We then consider the very notion of transnational social movements: in particular, we discuss to what extent current protests, and the diffusion processes that characterised them, might bring to light some transformations relevant with regard to the transnational aspects of present and future mobilisations.

1. The two authors discussed and wrote the present chapter collaboratively and equally. However, Alice Mattoni is the principal author of ‘Adapting theories of diffusion’ and Donatella della Porta is the principal author of the sections ‘Introduction’ and ‘From thick transnational movements to thin transnational mobilisations?’

Adapting theories of diffusion

Chapters presented in this volume pointed at some relevant aspects with regard to diffusion processes, underlining the need to broaden our understanding of what happens when practices and ideas travel from one context to another. Overall, they suggest the need to expand and redefine traditional conceptual frameworks about diffusion in three main directions.

Exploring uncharted territories of diffusion

Literature on diffusion in social movements traditionally focuses on positive cases, considering countries in which protest actions and frames spread, often successfully. In this way, social-movement scholars have been able to assess under what conditions and through which mechanisms diffusion processes happened in past and present cycles of contention. We know much less, however, about what happens when ideas and actions are not able to travel from one country to another, despite the presence of a pervasive wave of mobilisation and apparently favourable structural and contextual conditions. Anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests are a good case study in this regard: while the frames of the 2011 protests moved successfully from Tunisia to Egypt and thence to Spain, Greece, and the United States, they did not travel well to countries which, like Germany or France or the United Kingdom (Sotirakopoulos and Rootes, in Chapter Eight of this volume), seemed less badly hit by recession; to those such as Italy, where protests happened but took different forms (della Porta and Andretta 2013; della Porta, Mosca, and Parks forthcoming 2014); or to the Czech Republic, where protests were intense but localised (Jiří Navrátil and Ondřej Čísař in Chapter Ten of this volume).

In fact, some of the chapters in this volume indicate the need to pursue empirical research on countries in which diffusion processes failed to happen, either completely or partially, beginning to explore uncharted territories in the field of diffusion. Mobilisation did not spread in those countries where the economic crisis had less dramatic effects. While some *acampadas* were organised in Brussels, London, Amsterdam and Berlin, their capacity to mobilise remained very limited. As Mark Beissinger (2002) had observed in his analysis of the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (2011) in their research on the Orange revolutions, while ideas might also spread where conditions are less propitious, their capacity to produce successful mobilisation is limited. Assessment of similarities, which is a relevant conducive condition for cross-national diffusion, is jeopardised by structural differences. Finally, the financial crisis had different characteristics in different countries: public debt was, for example, very high in Greece and Italy but very low in Spain; while Greece carried high levels of debt with foreign banks, this was not the case in Iceland and other countries.

A first explanation for selective diffusion could be found in a distinction between movement of opportunities versus movement of crisis. Research on the labour movement had already indicated that waves of strikes are more likely in

situations of full employment, when the working class is structurally stronger. In new social-movement theories, material well-being has been considered as a precondition for the emergence of collective action on ‘post-materialistic’ issues. This does not mean that there are no protests in moments of crisis, when threats to protestors’ very survival are more serious: movements of the unemployed have emerged during peaks of economic recession and peasants have rebelled in times of famine. These movements were, however, characterised by few (material and symbolic) resources; they were more reactive than proactive in their claims and remained rather local, spontaneous and volatile. While the Global Justice Movement denounced a crisis-to-be, the movements against austerity measures reacted against fully developed crises, but with few hopes and resources. Further research on the so-called negative cases of diffusion might contribute to developing further knowledge on the mechanisms and processes by which protest spread in some countries but not in others. Some of the chapters in this volume began to pave the way for such an endeavour.

For instance, Jiří Navrátil and Ondřej Císař focus on a case study, the Czech Republic, in which protests occurring in 2011 did not resonate with the anti-austerity and pro-democracy mobilisations that were crossing many countries around the world. In short, the chapter presents an intriguing case of lack of diffusion – of both practices and ideas – in which the transnational dimension of protest was absent, especially in comparison to mobilisations linked to the Global Justice Movement that occurred in the Czech Republic about a decade ago. Along the same lines, although from a different perspective, Nikos Sotirakopoulos and Christopher Rootes suggest that transnational diffusion also failed in the case of Occupy London: compared to their North American counterparts, the protest camp and related actions were not only much less confrontational but also unable to resonate broadly within British society. The time dimension, the authors suggest, partially explains such a failure. Occupy London came into existence late in the wave of Occupy protests across the world, as the levels of protests elsewhere were declining. Even more importantly, perhaps, Occupy London was organised after a wave of student protests and university occupations in 2010–11, against the raising of tuition fees in higher education, that achieved much higher participation. Finally, Daphi and Zamponi’s chapter sheds light on another case of incomplete diffusion, Italy. Recent research shows that protests against austerity measures did happen in this country, evoking some of the collective-action frames developed in Spain, Greece, and the United States (della Porta and Andretta 2013). However, one of the most characteristic features of the ‘movements of the crisis’ did not spread significantly within Italy, where the *acampadas*, or protest camps, were not successful (della Porta and Andretta 2013.). In Chapter Nine, Daphi and Zamponi consider the important legacy of the Global Justice Movement in Italy, and activists’ memories of some past protest events linked to it, as one of the obstacles to the diffusion of protest. Taken together, these chapters show that negative cases – that is, countries in which contentious actions did not spread during a wave of global mobilisations – might also be relevant in explaining why diffusion processes develop in other countries.