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Anti-austerity movements in Europe

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Following the financial and economic crisis that began in 2008, innovative forms of mobilization emerged in several cities across the globe. Protests combined high levels of political discontent with strong opposition to austerity measures, which substantially reduced the social investment of the states. The anti-austerity movements in Europe were far from homogeneous, presenting important differences between countries and within these countries themselves in the type of protests, intensities and durations (Flesher Fominaya, 2017).

The anti-austerity movements in Europe provide valuable information on how different political, economic and cultural contexts can influence mobilization within the same financial system through a nuanced exploration of the relationship between different political-economic configurations and patterns of protest (e.g. della Porta, 2015). The scholarly analysis of this protest cycle engages with central debates of the previous decades: 1) the importance of grievances, 2) the role of emotions in mobilization, 3) new types of organizers versus traditional actors, 4) the activist use of digital media, 5) the synergetic framing of two crises (financial economy and representative democracy) and new cross-class alliances, 6) continuities and breaks with previous cycles of contention, and 7) the effects of public opinion dynamics, violence, media, and the use of the public space. This chapter reviews the main evidence found regarding anti-austerity movements in Europe, explains the highly

disruptive capacity of unconventional types of mobilizing structures, such as the French *Gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) and the Spanish *Indignados*, stressing the growing importance of 'affiliation distrust' and other demand-side factors.

Grievances

Grievances alone do not produce protest automatically, but 'at the heart of every protest are grievances' (Stekelemburg & Klanedermans, 2010: 2). In those countries hardest hit by the financial crisis, particularly in Southern Europe and Ireland, the austerity measures imposed by the Troika — a decision group formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund — led to severe cuts to pensions, public services and education spending. In Greece, unemployment increased from 7% to 28% between 2008 and 2013, reaching 60% among young people. Similar figures were attained in Spain, with unemployment rising from 8% to 27%, exceeding 55% among young people. Evidence shows an increase of suicide rates in most European countries, particularly in regions with higher levels of job loss (Chang et al., 2013), and among men, especially unemployed 'family breadwinners' or at risk of eviction (e.g. Rachiotis et al., 2015). High increase in suicide rates was registered among males in Spain —14% higher in 2012 compared to the year before (Ruiz-Pérez et al., 2017) — and in Greece, 35% higher in 2012 compared to 2010 (Rachiotis et al., 2015).

The so-called 'Great Recession' in these countries produced a social climate of increasing distress and fear about the further evolution of the economic situation, with experts speculating the possibility of their country being expelled from the euro, the unavailability of payments to officials, pensions and intervention of the national government by the Troika. In many cities, new food banks were created to face the increasing number of households needing food, due to the rise of unemployment and precarity (see Kousis and Paschou, this volume). Across several countries, a vast

majority of the population felt that, for the first time in decades, one generation lived worse than previous generations. In fact, the important intergenerational improvement of income taking place after the Second World War was interrupted for the generation born in the early 80's, particularly in countries such as Greece, Spain, and Italy, and, to a lesser extent, in the United Kingdom, Denmark or Finland (Rahman & Tomlinson, 2018).

An important part of the population perceived austerity as an exogenous shock, directly producing a decline of their living standards. The progressive erosion of political support among the European population since the 1990's is well documented (e.g. Norris, 2011), as well as how this was aggravated by the economic crisis and the increasing distrust in political institutions and elites (Lobera, 2015). As Andretta and della Porta (2015: 49) note, the spreading of anti-austerity protests in many countries 'has brought about a renewed attention of the structural socio-economic transformations producing different grievances and collective action', mostly paying attention to grievance interpretation and framing. Understanding the acute connection between two 'intertwined crises', political and economic —as stressed by many analyses (e.g. Flesher Fominaya, 2017; della Porta, 2015; Lobera, 2011a) — is essential in explaining the European anti-austerity protests and the way they framed grievances.

Emotions

Emotions occupied a relevant place in most analysis of the anti-austerity mobilizations, particularly of the so-called 'square movements', such as the *Indignados* mobilizations in Spain (also known as 15M movement), the *Aganaktismeni* in Greece, and hundreds of Occupy mobilizations in several other countries, including notably Britain and Belgium. Arguably, there is nothing new about the central role emotions played in these movements (Cossarini, 2014); there are no politics nor political theory without emotions. But, certainly, the study of this protest cycle increased the already growing interest since late 1990's regarding the role of emotions in mobilization, and more broadly in all social

action, as a provider of both motivation and goals (Jasper, 1998). Emotions and passion, as much as interests and ideologies, drive individuals to mobilize and join collective actions (Goodwin et al., 2004).

Research in Greece and Spain showed that protestors were motivated to join collective mobilizations by their 'moral outrage', followed by anger and sadness (Simiti, 2015: 26; Likki, 2013: 10-11). Some scholars, like Castells (2012) and Langman (2013), included 'hope' as one of most defining emotions of the square movements, although evidence showed low levels of this emotion among the participants, suggesting that despite their mobilization they 'were reserved in their hopes' that their main grievances would be resolved soon (Likki, 2013:11).

Spain's *¡Democracia Real Ya!* (Real Democracy Now), one of the platforms that played a key initiator role in the mobilizations, called in these terms for an end of citizen apathy, and a facing up to the unjust situation:

> We can vote, but we don't have a voice. (…) We don't understand why we need to pay the bills of a crisis whose authors continue to enjoy record benefits. We are fed up with injustices (15M manifesto 'How to Cook a Non-violent Revolution', 2011).

Their claims refer to the bestselling tract *Indignez-vous*! (Time for Outrage! in the English translation), by the former French Resistance member and concentration camp survivor Stéphane Hessel (2010: 22):

> The worst possible outlook is indifference that says, 'I can't do anything about it; I'll just get by.' Behaving like that deprives you of one of the essentials of being human: the capacity and the freedom to feel outraged. That freedom is indispensable, as is the political involvement that goes with it.

Certainly, a 'strategic' vision was present within the initiating platforms and autonomous movements in this translation of the rapidly spreading 'Indignation' frames, aimed to

mobilize emotions to encourage participation (Cossarini, 2014; Tejerina & Perugorría, 2017). Doing so, they obtained some cases of great success of participation, such as the Spanish *Indignados* movement. They strategically framed and mobilized collective emotions, increasing group solidarity and strengthening the 'emotional energy' of collective actions (Collins, 2001).

Humour also played an instrumental role in some mobilizations, which combined indignation directed at politicians and bankers with a wide range of strategically designed actions and protests. As Romanos (2016a: e039) notes for the Spanish case, activists organized 'workshops to promote imaginative and ironic messages on placards, performances explicitly seeking an emotional connection to the public, the development of specific humour-driven initiatives within the committees, and the application of skills and technical expertise related to advertising and distribution of content on the Internet'. Strategic use of humour in political protest (Hart, 2007) has been remarkably more visible and analysed in the last decades (e.g. Bruner 2005, Flesher Fominaya 2007, Romanos, 2016a).

Due to the unpredictable nature of 'cycles of contention', emotions may evolve differently based on the responses of elites, opponents, and potential allies (Tarrow, 2011: 201), and result in new positive or negative emotions. As an example of evolution of negative emotions, a British activist refers to the interplay between police response, media representation, public opinion, and self-reflexivity within the movement: 'Our reaction against police intimidation was quite forceful and was perceived as quite threatening to people outside of the activist milieu, and that created tensions within the movement' (Cammaerts, 2018: 177). During the protests, many ordinary citizens expressed a sense of 'despair and submission': 'We know we are being exploited, but we are aware also that there is absolutely nothing we can do about it' (2018: 178).

According to some activists, this 'fatalistic submission' may be explained by a 'deliberately cultivated collective depression' to accept the existing situation (Fisher, 2014). Yet, some scholars have studied the recent expansion of the state's power to control youth dissent by extending the reach of criminal law, surveillance of public spaces, 'gag laws' and other sources of repression (e.g. Bessant & Grasso, 2018). Portos and Calvo (2018: 49) have analysed recent institutional actions in Spain aimed at stimulating the perception of threat around the young, as part of a what they call a new 'regime of governance of young people', where fear, soft repression, hard punishment, securitization and surveillance are key elements. In this vein, Cammaerts (2018: 178) warns that sentiments of powerlessness among the population are often accompanied by an "anger and sense of victimhood which desperately looks for others to blame (cf. immigrants or those on benefits)", diverting the emotional energy of anti-austerity protests out of the elites.

In sum, the analysis of anti-austerity protests has led to an increasing interest in the affective and emotional dimensions, both as dependent and independent variables. Certainly, the emotions of the participants (and non-participants) can be modified or intensified by the protests (Jasper, 1998; Collins, 2001; della Porta 2008), and the dynamics of the protests are affected by changes in the emotions of potential participants. Likewise, it is crucial to obtain a deeper understanding of how mobilization dynamics are affected by changes in the public opinion climate (e.g. Snow et al., 1986; Gamson, 1992), since the way that non-activist citizens react may have an important effect on the evolution of the contentious process (Gamson, 1992; Koopmans, 2004).

Institutional left and autonomous actors

Even though the financial crisis in Europe ignited in 2008, the massive responses in the streets were not immediate. Some trade unions' protests, student mobilizations, and the Iceland 'Saucepan Revolution' in 2009-10 were the predecessors of the anti-austerity

cycle of contention (Zamponi, 2012; Júlíusson & Helgason, 2013). Mostly, the successive calls for protests, both from the institutional left (i.e. trade unions and smaller parties) and from the autonomous movements, did not include massive participation until the May 5, 2010 general strike in Greece (heavily affected early in the process). General strikes and mass demonstrations swept the country for weeks — accompanied by controversial and deadly police actions — protesting against the government plans to cut public spending and raise taxes in exchange for a €110 billion bail-out by the Troika, aimed at solving the Greek debt crisis.

Peterson et al. (2015: 2) argue that massive mobilizations took place in Europe 'first after the new politics of austerity began to take shape' and 'their impact on the everyday lives of people became all too evident'. Nevertheless, the countries most affected by the global financial crisis and the Troika's demands for financial austerity had 'strongly different mobilization responses' (Flesher Fominaya, 2017: 3): Greece and Spain having massive and sustained mobilizations while Italy, Portugal, and Ireland had relatively moderate ones. Several factors have been analysed to explain these differences, as we will see in the last section.

The 'most innovative' forms of mobilizations succeed in mobilising a broad constituency including older people, people with more diverse incomes and/or education than the typical Left-wing protester (e.g. della Porta, 2014), as well as to count with remarkable cross-sectional support among the public (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014). According to Peterson et al. (2015: 13), these newer movements 'have indisputably captured the imagination and enthusiasm of social movement scholars' and grabbed most of the media attention, sometimes silencing the mobilizations of more traditional actors, such as trade unions.

Yet, trade unions played an important role in several countries. For example, della Porta et al. (2012) show that, although unsung, they were the single most effective

civil society actor organizing protest in Italy in 2011. Similarly, Accornero and Ramos Pinto (2015) observe that unions were more effective in initiating protests than 'newer' types of actors in Portugal. In total, 40 trade unions from 23 countries were involved in anti-austerity protests in 2010–11 (Larsson, 2013), and the European Trade Union Confederation mobilized strikes simultaneously in Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain on November 14, 2012, being the major event of transnational organization of labour conflict carried out in Europe in the last decades, although with moderate participation (Balbona & Begega, 2016).

Despite the mobilizing will of union activists, these organizations faced various challenges in 2010-14. First, the progressive transfer of sovereignty from the national to the European level had undermined the institutional bases of unions' power, based on collective bargaining and social dialogue (Bohle, 2011; Balbona & Begega, 2016). Secondly, a declining public trust in unions had reduced its mobilizing capacity in several countries (della Porta, 2012; Lobera, 2011b). This situation led unions to deploy new alliances with emerging autonomous groups, mostly with national or regional scopes. In certain cases, the position of the unions was visible and strong, as in most Portuguese protests and, later, the French Nuit Debout. In other cases, such as the Spanish *mareas cívicas* ('civic tides') and, more recently, the French *Gilets jaunes*, banners or symbols representing unions were actively rejected in their collective self-representation.

The Gilets jaunes movement was initiated by individual, inexperienced activists who used social media to create a politicized collective identity, first starting a *change.org* petition against the increase in fuel prices, followed by a Facebook event to 'block all roads', and a viral video that suggested the use of the highly-visible yellow vests as a sign of a common identity. This movement was not associated with a specific political party or trade union. In these mobilizations — with vast proportions of

unaffiliated demonstrators — a collective identity was formed bottom-up through the interaction of participants with like-minded people in a 'diffuse search for common denominators' (Klandermans et al., 2014: 705), such as the use of the yellow vest — which the French law requires all motorists to possess when driving, making them widely available and recognizable. This leaderless, bottom-up process of collective identity formation was heavily affected by the renewed dynamics of the digital public sphere, particularly by the emergence of new political intermediations (Lobera & Sampedro, 2018), which have led to profound transformations of the organizational fields in society. Thus, select online communication spaces (such as certain Facebook groups, platforms like change.org, etc.) act as parainstitutions that mediate the flow of information and the organization of protesters, strongly influencing the evolution of mobilizations.

Previously, in the case of Spain, the new organizers consciously rejected what they saw as the 'old way of doing politics' based on ideological or partisan affiliations because flags divide (Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013:433). They instead thought of themselves as a 'community of ordinary citizens' and encouraged individual messages and personalized handmade placards (Peterson et al., 2015). Their non-hierarchical organizational principle made them sceptical to collaboration with hierarchical organizations such as trade unions or political parties (Peterson et al., 2015). After the square occupiers vacated the *acampadas*, the *Indignados* movement devolved into numerous physical and online sites (Postill, 2017), in a period of great experimentation with old and new initiatives or 'civic prototypes' (Estalella & Corsín Jiménez, 2013). Some of them attained a great deal of popular support, notably the anti-eviction platform PAH and the 'civic tides'.

Coalition-building can be a powerful tool but, as Kloosterboer (2007: 56) notes, it's a difficult task and normally starts with mutual mistrust. This was specially the case

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in the Spanish mareas; in words of an activist interviewed by Köhler & Calleja (2015:251-2): '[U]nions are exploiting the situation to regain credibility (...), but the movement wants to claim a purity that unions lack... What are you doing here?... You have done nothing until now'. Not without internal tensions, the 'civic tides' began in 2012 as non-corporatist, 'horizontal, inclusive and open movement to defend public services' and 'against the cutbacks of social expenditure' (ibídem). In their demonstrations and innovative forms of protest (flashmobs, escraches, theatre, human chains surrounding public equipment, etc.), common identity was not conveyed by organizations but by the colour of the 'tide' - white tides against cuts in the public health system, and green (yellow in Catalonia) in public education (Portos, 2016). Coalition-building was primarily bottom-up, driven by working partners taking part in the protests, both by union-members and non-members. These relationships are often complex and difficult to study, but further analysis of these coalition-building processes may open new perspectives about the continuities and breaks of contemporary collective action.

Novel features of Anti-Austerity protests

The literature that has emerged on square movements has often portrayed them as unique (e.g. Langman, 2013; Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013). Anduiza et. al (2014), present evidence of some characteristics in the Spanish 15M that defy the established principles of the collective action paradigm: the 15M staging organizations were recently created, without formal membership and mainly online presence, they mobilized younger, more educated and less politically involved participants, and the main mobilization channels were personal contact and online social networks rather than co-members or broadcast media.

Activist use of digital media

Activist use of digital media played an instrumental role in the rapid diffusion of the protests and the mobilization of participants (see Casero-Ripollés, in this volume): e.g.

Facebook pages were used to mobilize, to draw back feedback from members (Kavada, 2015) and to moderate the influence of repression on the diffusion of the movement (Suh et al., 2017), while tech and media activists set up alternative media publications, established autonomous technological infrastructures, and ran 24-hour livestreams (Costanza-Chock, 2014). Scholars note that the internet increased the power of entrepreneurial activists who can organize protests without costly and complex organizational infrastructures offered by conventional organizations (della Porta & Mosca, 2005); in short, 'organizing without organizations' (Earl et al., 2014; Klandermans et al., 2014).

Arguably, this has led to a transformation of the structures of new social movements, challenging established views of what it means to be a 'member' (Chadwick, 2013), and leading to a new type of 'connective action' characterized as combining a lack of clear leadership, weak organizational structure, predominantly personal action frames, and the centrality of network technologies (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). However, other views suggest that proprietary platforms are built with certain characteristics that make them unsuitable for the creation of collective solidarity (Fenton & Barassi, 2011) or the development of a common identity (Juris, 2012), since their algorithms and design are geared towards corporate surveillance (Fuchs, 2014) and may be important factors in shaping collective action (Milan, 2015). In any case, activist uses of digital tools in the square movements were not detached from physical reality, since they were understood as a part of a broader project of re-appropriation of public space, which also involved assembling around 'occupied' places (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Antioligarchic view of citizenship and new cross-class alliances

The financial crisis fuelled a pre-existent democratic crisis. Public opinion data shows that the crisis was mostly perceived as a political crisis, not just an austerity crisis (Lobera & Ferrándiz, 2013). In this context, contesting 'really existing democracy'

engendered more visible outcomes than resisting austerity, to the point that, as Flesher Fominaya (2017: 4) points out, the post-2008 European mobilizations must be seen not only as 'anti-austerity' movements but crucially as *pro-democracy movements*.

In fact, one of the main novelties of this cycle of contention consists in putting forward an 'anti-oligarchic view of citizenship' (Gerbaudo, 2017), particularly within the square movements, calling to 'the 99%' to confront the concentrated power of financial and political elites. The idea of citizenship, and the perception of its loss because of the elites, was used as the centre of the political situation framing, through what William Gamson (1992) called the 'injustice frame'.

Such a unifying role of the subject of the citizen is unambiguous in the Spanish context, where the discourse of citizenship was regularly wielded to trace 'an explicit break from previous protest waves and their tendency towards self-ghettoisation' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 7). The new organizers aimed to unite the dispersed citizenry, building popular identity (Laclau, 2005) in these terms:

We are not leftists, nor rightists. We are the underdogs and want to do away with the elite (15M slogan, 2011).

> Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative. (…) Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical, but we are all concerned and angry about the political, economic, and social outlook, which we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, and bankers leaving us helpless, without a voice. (Real Democracy Now Manifesto, 2011).

'They don't represent us' was a main slogan of the demonstrations. In the words of a 15M activist, with a new concept of citizenship the organizers aimed to mobilise the 'entirety of the citizenry and many people who had never taken part in a protest' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 7). And they succeeded. In few days, thousands of people took the

streets in 50 Spanish cities, integrating new profiles of protesters (Tejerina & Perugorría, 2017). As it turned out, the movement and most of the critical stances that it defended were viewed very sympathetically by a majority of Spaniards, irrespective of their social and political affiliations (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014). This expanded its potential social base of participants and millions of Spaniards participated in their protests -9,75% of the population, nearly 3.4 million people-, as extracted from official public opinion data (CIS, #2920, 2011).

Square movements brought about an explosive growth and diversification of civic practices, particularly in Spain. The 15M movement actually transformed the language and practice of citizenship in the country (Postill, 2017) as well as the political behaviours' main patterns in the Spanish digital public sphere (Lobera & Sampedro, 2018), while shifting the way participants understand politics and citizenship (Feenstra et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the implementation of deliberative models was not absent of difficulties. Feenstra et al. (2016: 10) note that the combination of a willingness to consensus with open deliberation meant that decision-making processes were easily susceptible to being sabotaged by small groups, making the process excessively 'slow, laborious and demoralizing'. Arguably, the frustration in some activists derived from the difficulty of the deliberative processes (Calvo & Alvarez, 2015). In addition to this frustration, the emerging populist identity forged by the citizenism among the public opinion allowed the rise of new or revised progressive political parties (such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain) and municipal initiatives (such as Barcelona en Comú and Ahora Madrid) (Lobera & Rogero, 2017).

The emergence of the 'citizenism' as a strategic frame (e.g. Taibo, 2013) implied a more political than economic emphasis of the discourse (Gerbaudo, 2017). This brought little focus in the European sphere, since citizenism is almost implicitly oriented

to the national or local level. It is not that the EU and the Troika are not also blamed for the crisis and austerity, but the nation state is much more central as a stage and focus of collective action (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; 2017). Arguably, this raises a risk of national retrenchment, with possible negative consequences for the efficacy that social movements have in facing transnational power structures (Gerbaudo & Pianta, 2015).

In countries with a greater weight of the institutionalized left, though, there were significant anti-Troika mobilizations, including the 'Fuck the Troika' protests in Portugal (2012 and 2013), several general strikes in Greece, and anti-austerity protests in Ireland (2013) (Flesher Fominaya, 2017). In the opposite direction, in several former communist countries (such as Bulgaria and Czech Republic) a deep critique of neoliberal policies was absent, while protesters focused their demands on fixing the malfunctioning state with moderate calls for greater transparency and minimizing the scope of corruption (Císař & Navrátil, 2016; Rone, 2017).

Continuities and breaks

Existing scholarship on square movements has mostly stressed the elements of continuity with the GJM or the so-called anti-globalization protests, particularly with autonomous movements (see Daphi, this volume; see Giugni and Grasso, this volume). Some elements of continuity were 'the presence of common activists in both movements […] and the strong cultural influence of the anti-globalisation movement on contemporary practices' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 5), particularly on diagnostic framing, repertoires, and forms of organization (Zamponi & Daphi, 2014). Flesher Fominaya (2017: 2) emphasizes the fact that 'the "twin" crises' were framed 'synergistically' as a continuation of the 'double critique levelled by the GJM against neoliberal capitalist globalization and illegitimate, ineffective representative democracy', but now framed within the aftermath of the austerity policies. Yet, student movements in Italy and Spain played key roles in influencing the respective anti-austerity mobilizations and discourse

in those countries, transforming 'the anti-neoliberal discourse' of the GJM into 'an anti-austerity discourse' (Zamponi & Fernández, 2016).

As Tejerina et al. (2013: 381) note, the 'centrality of inequality as the main force' in this cycle of mobilization calls for rethinking previous decades of analyses 'focused mainly, or solely, on issues of culture and collective identity'. In this vein, Peterson et al. (2015:13-4) see in this 'materialist turn' a 'reawakening' of class conflict between labour and capital and warn that part of the literature obliterated the presence of old actors in this cycle of mobilizations.

Continuities of longer duration have been drawn, particularly with the American New Left of the 1960s, around shared goals, traits and themes (Díez García, 2017), and the May '68 protests (Romanos, 2018) around their self-management model of organization and the development of both concepts and practices of direct democracy. Arguably, these aspects would be embedded in a broader 'participatory democracy turn' (Bherer et al., 2016) affecting public and private spaces since the 1960's and, more specifically, the autonomous activists in Europe (Flesher Fominaya, 2015), which have adopted a more 'pragmatic radical reformist strategy' pursuing 'the recuperation and opening up of state institutions' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 2) and more participatory strategies to (re)mobilize their members and citizens (della Porta, 2013).

Additionally, this cycle of contention presented a high degree of transnational diffusion, where the Spanish 15-M movement is considered to be 'a model for European anti-austerity movements with far reaching influence', and its epicentre, *Acamapada Sol*, the 'most influential square in Europe' (Flesher Fominaya, 2017: 11). Its claims for 'Real Democracy Now!', squarely directed at national oligarchies, found resonance in other parts of the globe, e.g. shaping the protests of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) (Lawrence, 2012; Romanos, 2016b). As this cycle of contention clearly shows, transnational

diffusion processes are complex and reciprocal, rather than linear as transmitter-adopter models would suggest (see Romanos, in this volume).

Explaining differences between European anti-austerity mobilizations

Although mobilizations were partly a response to the crisis, the economic effects of the crisis and austerity policies are insufficient to explain their variations across countries strongly affected (Flesher Fominaya, 2017). Movements' characteristics do not fully explain, either, large differences in mobilizations results of the same organizers; i.e. why some autonomous groups had difficulties mobilizing broader support in some circumstances, while the same organizations played a paramount role in organizing mass mobilizations a few months later (Peterson et al., 2015). The high situational variability in this cycle of contention draws attention also to a list (necessarily incomplete here) of other factors that should be considered.

Frames and Public Trust

In the early stages of the cycle of contention, trade unions were the single most active civil society actor organizing protest in most countries, thanks to their capacity to mobilize their members and their resources as bureaucratic organizations, and mostly projecting their conventional messages of resistance to the loss of labour rights. Nevertheless, they mostly obtained a rather moderate impact in terms of mobilizing new social groups and having greater social resonance, arguably due to a long-term erosion of public trust in most of the European countries. However, autonomous actors across Europe 'perceive[d] the crisis as a political crisis rather than a reaction to austerity' (Kaldor & Selchow, 2013:78) and, once these mobilizations started, their resonance across mainstream public opinion was unusually loud (Flesher Fominaya, 2017: 9): the initiators' message connected directly with the widespread political anger and dissatisfaction about the long-term crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy in the continent. In this vein, Flesher Fominaya notes that the presence or absence of a

strong pro-democracy narrative helps explain significant anti-austerity mobilization in countries having 'little austerity' (Germany) and conversely its feeble presence where there was 'strong austerity' (Ireland) (2017: 4).

Hence, the role of initiator movements in forging 'master frames' that emerge early in the cycle is paramount (e.g. Whittier, 2007), but not lesser are the 'sender' characteristics, particularly their ability to generate trust among the public. Arguably, a high visibility of bureaucratic organizations in the protests moderated their ability to mobilize, in a sustained manner, new social groups in the Italian mobilizations (Andretta & della Porta, 2015; Zamponi, 2012) and the French Nuit Debout (Lobera & Martín, 2017), whereas the principles of non-representation and horizontality facilitated new cross-class alliances in the emergence of both the Spanish *Indignados* and the French *Gilets jaunes*.

Public Demand for Mobilization

Differences in characteristics and strategies of movements are crucial but also insufficient to explain their impact. A contextual translation of a 'new model' of mobilization (the square movements' organizing without organizations) did not guarantee high impacts, yet other factors outside the movements were of great importance in the mobilization ecosystem. Arguably, promoters' strategies and characteristics are constantly engaging with a certain *public demand for mobilization* (e.g. Klandermans, 2013). The increase in this demand may help to explain the increase in the mobilizing capacity of some groups in a matter of months. This public demand sympathizes with some groups' characteristics more than with others, and with some types of protest more than others, causing differences in their ability to mobilize.

In this behalf, the way the 15M emerged is linked with the specific political opportunities present in the Spanish case. The successful organizers' call took place one week before the regional and municipal elections, whereas previous similar calls

didn't have that effect. The particular media structure and attention to political events during the electoral campaign favoured a rapid diffusion of the initial events across mass media. Hence, cases of rapid and massive mobilization (such as the 15M and the *Gilets jaunes*) would correspond to contexts of high public demand for mobilization with widespread, deeply felt indignation (Walgrave & Manssens, 2000) where organizers successfully connected their frames with a broad and cross-sectional consensus (Lobera, 2015), recruiting high proportions of unaffiliated demonstrators thought 'open' communication channels (Klandermans et al., 2014), such as mass media, online social networks, friends and acquaintances.

Practices, Spaces and Experience

A sustained participation beyond episodic mass mobilizations was facilitated by the use of deliberative democratic practices in large public assemblies as a central organizing principle (Flesher Fominaya, 2014). This occurred in contexts of high erosion of political legitimacy, remarkably in Spain and Greece, 'as people withdrew commitment to the social order, creating spaces for alternative views and understandings' (Langman, 2013: 159). The peaceful and sustained occupations of public spaces in the center of the cities allowed the development of an eventful 'continuous protest', having relevant cognitive, affective and relational transformative impacts on its participants (della Porta, 2008). In this vein, Dhaliwal (2012: 256) notes that these occupations were 'not simply a seizure and reorganization of physical space, conceived as an instrumental resource for the purposes of mobilization and publicity', but they were also 'attempts to produce an alternative form of public space' undergirding a sustained transformation of social relations.

Flesher Fominaya's (2017: 8) research on Spain and Ireland shows that the presence of experienced activists was also crucial for sustaining mobilization: activists in Madrid and Barcelona 'drew on long-standing autonomous practices in and beyond the

GJM, to organize their assemblies (with facilitators, moderators, rules of engagement, etc.)' while activists in Dublin 'struggled to establish shared codes of practice that could integrate participants effectively'. In the absence of a strong core of experienced activists, movements faced more difficulties in their ability to sustain horizontal assembly practices. Pre-existing networks and urban spaces of resistance were paramount in the evolution of the protests after the *acampadas* were lifted. As Flesher Fominaya stresses (2017: 8), if Madrid's 'Indignados' could decide to 'go back to the neighbourhoods' it was because they had *somewhere to go* (e.g. squatted social centres, neighbourhood association locales), while Irish activists struggled with a scarcity of available meeting spaces and their mobilization declined until it was unsustainable.

Media, Diffusion and Timing

Mainstream media and its ability to influence public opinion are deemed to be very important external factors for a movement's efforts to mobilize political support, to reinforce the legitimacy of its demands, and to allow it to broaden the scope of conflict beyond those who are like-minded (Koopmans, 2004). In the case of the anti-austerity movement in the UK, mainstream media resonance was mixed (Cammaerts, 2018), while in the Spanish case it was predominantly positive in its emergence phase, even among right-wing TV stations. Furthermore, violence or its media framing were demobilizing factors in certain cases, such as Italy (Zamponi, 2012) and the UK (Cammaerts, 2018). These cases connect with evidences showing that perceived violence can potentially reduce public support for the protesters' movement and, thus, potential participation (e.g. Anduiza & Muñoz, 2017), as well as enhancing elite's discourses based on public order maintenance (Wasow, 2017).

Additionally, cultural and linguistic differences were of great importance in the way transnational diffusion took place (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2012; Romanos, 2016b). In this diffusion, timing mattered to a great extent. As Zamponi (2012) notes, path dependency

and pre-existing protest traditions can have adverse effects for subsequent mobilizations that impede them instead of stimulating them.

Conclusions: Mobilizing without flags? Affiliation distrust in demand-driven mobilizations

Unconventional types of mobilizing structures were forged in some of the more disruptive anti-austerity protests in Europe. Both the Spanish *Indignados* and, more recently, the French *Gilets jaunes* (despite their differences) successfully mobilized large numbers of unaffiliated demonstrators without the traditional mechanisms of membership organizations. Rejecting partisan flags, entrepreneurial activists organized protests using open channels of recruitment, such as online social networks, interpersonal networks and mass media coverage. If it can be assumed that 'movements that are successfully supplying what potential participants demand gain more support than movements that fail to do so' (Klandermans, 2013: 2), then, the evidence in this chapter suggests that, in most European societies, there is an increasing demand for 'mobilization without flags', at least when confronting the outcomes of austerity measures and the political crisis. This shift can increase the influence of both autonomous movements, particularly visible in the case of the Spanish *Indignados* (Flesher Fominaya, 2015, 2017), and connective action mechanisms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), paramount to the emergence of the *Gilets jaunes*.

A key factor contributing to the demand of this type of mobilization is a high degree of 'affiliation distrust' among several social groups, leading to the point that the presence of unions or partisan organizations would discourage participation. Some potential demonstrators prefer not to attend to a protest to avoid giving support to any conventional organization or to their leaders: they may fear that their political involvement could be used as a sort of backing or 'soft affiliation' by some organizers in order to legitimize their position. Some observers even point out that a part of the *Gilets*

jaunes movement extended their hatred of politicians to any 'would-be politicians who emerge from their own ranks' (Lichfield, 2018: 1).

I understand this affiliation distrust as a diffuse expression of the long-run crisis of institutional representation (Norris, 2011), that adds to the rest of the mechanisms identified by Klandermans et al (2014) affecting the proportion of unaffiliated demonstrators: 1) the universalistic or particularistic type of the protest, and 2) the individual's level of embeddedness in multi-organizational fields. Thus, the number of trade union or partisan flags and placards in universalistic demonstrations would be, roughly, inversely proportional to the number of unaffiliated demonstrators and the less socially embedded citizens. For this type of protesters, a horizontal organization has the advantage of avoiding 'being used' by visible leaders to play in the representative field. The increasingly relevance of affiliation distrust in protests implies a rising need for the study of the dynamics of mobilization without flags, which potentially may lead to rapid processes with a high degree of social cross-sectional support among the public (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014), coming into play the mass media coverage (Walgrave & Manssens, 2000), the effect of experienced activists and autonomous movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2015, 2017; Juris, 2012), online social networking (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), and the dynamics of public opinion and consensus building (Gamson, 1992; Klandermans, 2013).

There is no disintermediation, but new intermediations in the organization of the participants. The gap left by membership organizations can be taken by experienced activists (as in the case of 15M) and by a greater weight of connective platforms (as in the emergence of the *Gilets jaunes*). How these new intermediations are produced will determine, to a large extent, the evolution and nature of mobilizations without membership organizations. For instance, scholarship shows that less affiliated participants decide to participate at a later point in time (Klandermans et al., 2014), but

in the *Gilets jaunes* case we can observe the opposite mechanism: the initiators (individual unexperienced activists) were little embedded in organizational fields, so they rely on open channels (mainly Facebook, mass media, and interpersonal networks), recruiting mainly unaffiliated participants in a first stage. In this case, after a few weeks of doubts due to the marked nationalist, and occasionally racist, discourse of the movement in its phase of emergence (Nabli, 2018), left organizations and affiliated participants joined, influencing the evolution of the protests and taking their demands to more conventional positions of left activism (Damgé, 2018). This reverse dynamic (more affiliated participants adding later to the mobilization) may imply a series of challenges.

The emergence of massive, rapid, non-membership mobilizations (such as the 15M and the *Gilets jaunes*) challenges the traditional dynamics of contentious politics. Traditionally, political and social change has been mostly explained as the ability of organizations, social movements, or revolutionary parties to mobilize oppressed groups against a status quo. In this 'push' dynamics, the organization cognitively liberates and organize the individuals and, in return, receives their commitment, the uniformity of the voices prevailing. But today, in most European cities mobilization opportunities are constantly offered: To what extend are the organizers the ones who mobilize or are the citizens who mostly 'use' the protest opportunities that are regularly organized? Individuals choose when and what space they use to meet their mobilization needs. It is the main force that shapes these types of mobilizations: the public demand decides what form of mobilization to support. In this context, the role of experienced activists is even more important: in addition to the processes of sensitization, diffusion, and organization of protests, a central aspect is their capacity to articulate a medium-term commitment of a significant part of the participants in the protests, without the traditional tools of membership.

Without a known organization flag, without a previous record of actions, mobilizations without organizations may be articulated around meanings that are plastic or floating: democracy, citizenship, justice. This allows the construction of a populist identity, uniting protesters in their struggle: 'us' (that are the unjust victims of austerity measures) against 'them' (representing an economic and a political elite) (see Woodward, this volume). Massive mobilization around these meanings can produce the emergence of a 'plastic moment', in which 'everything seems possible' and new cross-class alliances may be established (Lobera & Parejo, 2019). In the Spanish case, the presence of experienced left-wing activists allowed the adoption of forms of mobilization of the GJM, favouring the development of an inclusive populist mobilization.

Bearing this in mind, is there a risk that a 'plastic moment' could lead to an exclusive populist logic? Could this type of mobilization be overflowed by experienced right-wing activists? My hypothesis is yes, since there is arguably a primacy of the signifier over the signified (Lacan, 1993), both in mass communication and in connective action. From this perspective, issues traditionally framed by progressive social movements may be appropriated by the far right, as indeed seems to have happened in early stages of the *Gilets jaunes* movement. In short, experienced activists will have a particularly decisive role in shaping the ideological/political orientation of this type of rapid, massive and demand-driven mobilization.

References available upon request