

Edited by Donatella della Porta

# Global Diffusion of Protest

Riding the Protest Wave  
in the Neoliberal Crisis

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Global Diffusion of Protest

# Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilization, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage non-native speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

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*Riding the Protest Wave in the Neoliberal Crisis*

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Donatella della Porta*

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Anonymous mask. Taken during the evening protest against the government austerity policies on November 12th 2014 in Montreal.

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As always, I am most grateful to Sarah Tarrow, for her skills, care and patience in making this volume – written by scholars from many non-English speaking countries – readable.





# 1 Riding the wave

Protest cascades, and what we can learn from them

*Donatella della Porta*

## 1.1 Social movements in late neoliberalism: an introduction

In 2013, as the cycle of protest that became most visible in 2011 seemed to subside, contentious politics began to re-emerge worldwide. By looking at protests in the most disparate parts of the globe (including Turkey, Brazil, Venezuela, South Africa, Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine), this volume will address three main debates spurred by those protests: the effects of the late neoliberal global economy on social movements; the development of contentious politics under authoritarian democracies; and the emergence of new collective identities.

In addressing these questions, we shall also discuss a more encompassing one: What happens when a wave of protest which starts in a homogeneous area affects other countries in its long ebb? Or, at least, when it is seen as a sort of continuation of that initial spark? In 2013, protests spread, inspired at least in part by the anti-austerity protest wave of 2011 but also presenting some peculiarity. Participants in the new movement often acknowledge the learning process from movements in other countries. Thus, a Turkish activist stated,

I believe they would never have taken off had it not been for the various global precedents, such as the Occupy movement. Our local park forums adopt the methods of global justice movements such as Occupy. The hand gestures to enable communication among crowds without creating noise have been emulated at some of the forums with larger participation. The open stage where individuals queue for and take turns to express their thoughts, ideas and vision freely, is another element of this movement's repertoire that is becoming more and more common (Inceoglu, 2013).

The linkages between the protests in 2011 and those in 2013 have in fact been explicitly addressed by scholars as well. As Göran Therborn (2014: 6) noted, "Paradoxically, it is not so much in the recession-struck Northern heartlands but in the neo-capitalist Second World, and in the – supposedly booming – BRICS and emerging economies, that popular anger has made itself felt."

The 2011 protests had started in the so-called PIIGS countries – Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain – which were suffering the most from the financial crisis and in very contentious environments. In contrast, some of the 2013 protests developed in countries that were considered as “winners” in economic terms (such as Brazil, Venezuela, Turkey, South Africa) or as very tame in terms of contentious politics (such as Bosnia, Bulgaria, or Ukraine). Nevertheless, despite differences, “an emphasis on urban space through the occupation of public squares has been a common characteristic of all of these protests. Real estate bubbles, soaring housing prices, and the overall privatization-alienation of common urban goods constitute the common ground of protests in as diverse places as the United States, Egypt, Spain, Turkey, Brazil, Israel, and Greece” (Tuğal, 2013: 158).

In analyzing these protests, this volume has two aims: one theoretical, and one empirical. At the theoretical level, the volume’s introduction as well as the individual chapters will address the three mentioned debates: the effect of the late neoliberal global economy on social movements; the development of contentious politics under “authoritarian democracies”; and the emergence of new collective identities.

The first debate is about the social bases of the protest. While the movements of 2011, from the Arab Spring to the Indignados and Occupy, had been defined as movements against austerity by victims of the financial crisis, the 2013 movements have often been called movements of the middle class. Departing from the observation of the participation of a large mass of well-educated youth as well as members of free professions and white collar workers, however, the debate saw a cleavage between those who talked about a positive expansion of the (tendentially democratic) middle classes in the global South, and those who pointed instead at the frustration of a middle class in status and economic decline. In addressing the social composition of the protests, the volume discusses the issue of the effect of the neoliberal economy beyond the core democratic countries – as well as the various class configurations of the protest as the protest waves broadened beyond the first-comer countries.

A second debate addresses the political conditions for the development of the protests. Defying the expectation that movements will develop when democratic opportunities open up, the volume analyzes contentious politics in what have been defined as authoritarian, or at least non-liberal, democracies. At both the theoretical and the empirical levels, the various chapters will analyze the intertwining of neoliberal economic global policies with reduced institutional channels for participation, growing repression as well as a perceived decline of civic and political rights. As rulers learn from previous

failures, protesters target exclusive and corrupt conceptions and practices of politics, proposing alternative democratic conceptions and practices.

A third debate, which will be covered both theoretically and empirically, refers to the emergence of new collective identities. In various ways, the protesters in 2013 needed to reconstitute a political subjectivity. While a traditional class discourse and an ideological vision of the Left were problematic given domestic but also transnational trends, the movements contributed to the spreading of an alternative language, bridging social and cultural concerns. In action, during the protest campaigns, a new “spirit” emerged, giving rise to a sense of empowerment that often lasted beyond the campaigns. Contentious politics contributed, in this way, to the reshuffling of political cleavages and the emergence of new norms – although with different degrees of success as latecomers rode the protest wave.

From the empirical point of view, the volume analyzes protests in areas of the world that have rarely been addressed by “mainstream” social movement studies. By looking at the protest forms, framing, and organization, the research points at the ways in which ideas spread from the areas in which a protest wave first emerged, and how they were adopted but also adapted to new contexts.

Social movement studies have developed a useful toolkit of concepts to deal with collective action in normal times – meaning structured times in which expectations can reliably be built upon previous experiences, cognition, relations. Additionally, the type of context they have mainly addressed are so-called advanced democracies, with developed welfare states, consolidated party systems, and (more or less) respected rule of law. Theorization has often been oriented towards explanation of the impact of structures on collective action. The main expectation is that protests require opportunities and resources to develop – and a democratic political system has long been considered as almost a precondition. Further, movements have been seen mainly as national actors; only more recently have they been located within transnational arenas.

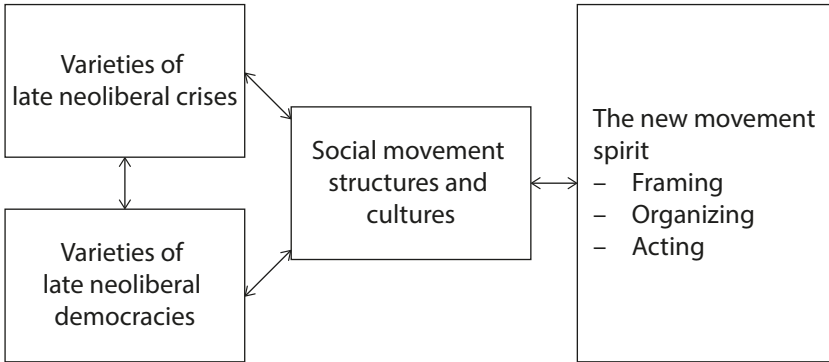
We know much less about some issues that are of fundamental importance for looking at late neoliberalism and its discontent (della Porta, 2015). First, although Goldstone and Tilly (2001) authoritatively noted that not only opportunities but also *threats* can encourage mobilization, and although there is growing attention to the threats that trigger protest, we still know little about movements that develop in times of crisis – i.e., when protest is fueled more by threats than by opportunities. Movements that develop in times of crisis have been little studied in mainstream social movement studies. We can assume that social movements that form in response to threats

have different characteristics from those emerging in times of abundance. In Kerbo's analysis (1982), *movements of crisis* are sparked by unemployment, food shortages, and dislocations, when everyday life is challenged during threatening political and social crises. Their participants are, at least in the early stages, mainly the beneficiaries of the requested changes, and protests tend to be more spontaneous, more often involving violent outbursts. *Movements of affluence*, in contrast, are found in relatively good times; they are often formed mainly by conscience members, and they are better organized and less likely to use violence (Kerbo, 1982: 654). In general, while movements of abundance (and opportunities) are expected to be stronger, larger, longer-lasting, pragmatic, optimistic, and more often successful, movements of crisis (and threats) are expected to be weaker, smaller, shorter, radical, pessimistic, and more often unsuccessful (della Porta, 2013b). As we will see, however, these assumptions seem too simplistic for the recent movements, which certainly react to crisis, but go well beyond reactive trends.

We also know little about movements in exceptional times, i.e., eventful times, when action changes relations. Social movement studies, as other areas of studies in comparative politics or sociology, have focused on stable times. Indeed, a main expectation has been that social movements belong to normal politics and society, adapting to contextual conditions that tend to be predictable. Conjunctural shifts of course happen in the political opportunities for protest, but they rarely change structures. In fact, actors' strategies are expected to be path dependent, only marginally evolving within known structures.

If path dependency is indeed a widespread assumption in several areas, however, recent societal development has shifted attention towards turning points. In fact, neoliberalism has been considered as a critical juncture that has drastically transformed modes of political integration (e.g. Roberts, 2015). At times, the crisis of late neoliberalism has also been presented as a critical juncture, bringing about dramatic changes, although constrained by previously existing structures. As typical agents of change, social movements themselves have been seen as producing critical junctures through sustained waves of protest. This has been noted in particular about anti-austerity protests in those countries in which the economic crisis has more quickly and deeply transformed previously established norms and relations (della Porta, 2015; Roberts, 2015). Protests moved, however, from the countries that had apparently suffered more from neoliberal globalization (the so-called PIIGS) to those that had apparently gained from it (the BRICS-type countries). More knowledge and theorization is certainly needed about the working of the same critical junctures in different (neoliberal) contexts.

**Figure 1.1** Explaining the movement's spirit



In order to understand movements in times of crisis, one must indeed move decisively from causal to processual approaches. As movements, as producers of their own (domestic and transnational) resources and sources of empowerment, enter into complex interactions within multiple arenas, the relations among players evolve in response to their strategic choices. In game theoretical perspective, then, not only can games be changed, but also the very identity of the players. While the socio-economic and political contexts continue to enhance and constrain actors and action, feedback loops are continuously produced and reproduced (della Porta, 2016).

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, then, we can expect a variety of neoliberal crises to affect the characteristics of the different players – not only their interests or strategies but also their very identities. Socio-economic characteristics interact with political features, as neoliberalism and its crises bring about the demise of previous forms of societal incorporation, often without a successful substitution. Social de-incorporation thus generates more or less acute crises of legitimacy (della Porta, 2015). While social movement structures and cultures, often rooted in previous social and political regimes, are directly and indirectly attacked, a new movement spirit can emerge from the mobilization, transforming structure and relations at the economic, political, and societal levels.

Looking at these processes, an additional consideration is in order. While social movement studies have tended to focus on the national level, with some attention to the local level, it is only more recently that an interesting transnational dynamic has developed, together with the increasing importance of international political opportunities and transnational activism (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; 2012). Research has looked at the

development of new actors, but also at the cross-national diffusion of frames and repertoires of action. Indeed, 2011 has been considered as a year of global contention, comparable to, for example, 1848 or 1968. In looking at the rolling wave of the protest in 2013 and beyond, we can address a specific form of cross-national diffusion. Research on the spread of social movements has often stressed proximity and similarity as facilitating factors (della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). Nevertheless, as we will see in this volume, frames and repertoires often spread in distant and diverse places and are adapted to different situations with varying degrees of mobilizing capacity.

The differential success of ideas spreading through emulation is indeed addressed in research on regime transitions that looks at regime cascades. At the micro level, the assumption is that there are “behavioral cascades,” determined as the net benefits of each individual choice are influenced by the number of people who make that choice (Granovetter, 1978), and mobilization is fueled by the action of a “critical mass” (Marwell and Oliver, 1993). The assumption is that each individual is imperfectly informed and that no one person can individually decide to overturn the status quo (Lohmann, 1994). Each individual can then undertake action in order to give a signal to large numbers, and the public is especially sensitive to the size of aggregated turnout when deciding whether to make public a private experience with the regime. In short, as “people are limited in their abilities to articulate their personal experiences and opinions on complex policy issues or to understand other people’s communications”, they “take an informational cue from this simple signal: aggregate turnout” (Lohmann, 1994: 50). In this sense, political action is a way to express dissatisfaction with the regime; the public looks for information about the size of protest; and the regime risks losing power if communication cascades are successful (Lohmann, 1993; 1994). At the macro level, the assumption is that in these moments protest for democratization also spreads cross-nationally as information is transmitted and received (all the more quickly in times of social media) at the transnational level. This does not imply, however, that the outcomes are convergent as, first of all, structural similarities might be overestimated by the activists, while regimes learn from each other to absorb and/or repress protests.

In parallel, we can assume that, even if the wave of contention in Turkey, Brazil, Venezuela, Ukraine, Bosnia, and Bulgaria originated in the 2011 events, different contexts can bring about different outcomes. In what follows, I will address three different theoretical debates that have been stimulated by this wave of protests.

## 1.2 Bringing capitalism and class back into the analysis

Social movement studies have been criticized for having paid too little attention to long-term structural transformations. Strangely, some valuable exceptions notwithstanding, concern for the social basis of protest has even declined, as socio-economic claims raised through protest remained stable or even increased (della Porta, 2016). While Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin (2013) have called attention to the strange disappearance of capitalism from social movement studies (especially in the United States), a review of political sociology studies on social movements stressed how the narrowing of the focus on the process of mobilization has, since the 1980s, diverted attention from the relations between social structures and political participation, as well as collective identities (Walder, 2009). In addressing this claim, I have elsewhere suggested that we need to take into account three temporalities of capitalism: its long-term changes, the mid-term alternance of growth and crisis, and the short-term dynamics of specific critical junctures (della Porta, 2015). One should, however, handle the challenge of bringing structures into focus, without losing the attention to agency and political mediation that have been an important contribution of social movement studies.

### Neoliberalism and its crisis

This volume focuses on late neoliberalism and its crises, with particular attention to the ways in which different varieties of neoliberalism are reflected in protest movements around the world that were seen as latecomers in the contentious wave which culminated in 2011. Exacerbated by austerity policies – imposed on countries forced to access (or just threatened with) international lending institutions – policies of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization were also widespread in expanding economies. Research in political economy has pointed at some general characteristics of neoliberalism, which can be seen within two quite different approaches: a) in a trend vision, as a form of capitalist evolution (such as a developed version of post-Fordism); b) in a Polanyi-like cyclical vision, as part of the pendulum between free market and social protection. In both perspectives, free market has emerged as an ideology that drives policies oriented not towards a retreat of the state from the market, but rather towards the reduction of investments designed to reduce market inequalities. Interventions include protection of financial capitalism, privatization of public goods, bailing out of banks, and flexibilization of labor markets, but also high regulatory activities intended to increase the opportunity for speculative advantages. As we will see, this was true not only in the countries that were hardest hit



by the economic crisis – triggering deep and strong waves of contention – but also in the so-called successful cases and in those countries in which citizens had long been “patient” (Greskovits, 1998). These developments have clear consequences for the social bases of contemporary contentious politics, although these vary in different countries.

By looking at the protests that developed later along the wave that became most visible in 2011, we extend in fact the focus on contention from the countries that were hardest hit by the crisis to a broader range of neoliberal economies, including those considered as the winners in global capitalism. Beginning in the 1980s, the core capitalist states experienced a turn towards the free market. First, the United States and Great Britain, led respectively by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, moved toward cuts in the welfare state as justified by an ideology of the free market. As increasing inequalities and reduction of public intervention risked depressing the demand for goods, low interest rates were used, in a sort of private Keynesianism, to support demand – ultimately fueling the 2008 financial crisis. In fact, in that year, the failure of Lehman Brothers produced such a shock that governments decided to come to the rescue, with increasing government debt.

Given economic decline in the United States and United Kingdom, coordinated market economies like the EU and Japan – where firms rely more on non-market relations to manage their activities – seemed to demonstrate equal or even superior competitiveness as compared to the liberal market economy, which relies for coordination on competitive market arrangements (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Streeck, 2010). However, that form of capitalism also moved towards the free market and was hit by the recent financial crisis, showing, indeed, some inherent contradictions of democratic capitalism. This could be seen especially in the EU, where the trend towards welfare retrenchment was aggravated, especially in the weaker economies, by the monetary union that (together with the fiscal crisis) increased inequalities both among and within member states. With the abandonment of Keynesian types of intervention, which assigned leading functions to fiscal policies, the monetarist orientation of the EU policies – with the abandonment of full employment as a goal and the dominance of price stability – was responsible for the type of crisis that developed in the union (Scharpf, 2011; Stiglitz, 2012: 237). The European Monetary Union (EMU) produced particular problems for countries with below-average growth, as interest rates proved too high for their economies.

In 2008, the evidence of the crisis at the core of capitalism became dramatic. As what political economists defined as “private Keynesianism” – oriented to develop public demands through low interest rates – showed

the full extent of its fragility, some countries (with traditionally weak economies) were indeed much harder hit than others. In rich states as well, however, neoliberalism had the effect of exponentially increasing social inequalities, with a very small percentage of winners and a pauperization of the working class, together with a proletarianization of the middle class.

While the welfare state under Fordism had represented a decommodification of some goods, defined as public services, neoliberalism brought about the privatization and (re)commodification of once-public goods together with a flexibilization of the labor market that weakened workers' power. The evolution of the last 30 years or so has deeply transformed the social structures. Fordism is said to have created a two-thirds society, with new social movements emerging from the pacification of class conflict, and even the *embourgeoisement* of the working class, with the crisis of the 1970s producing a short but radical wave of protest by the excluded one third. The mobilizations of 2011 seem instead to reflect the pauperization of the lower classes as well as the proletarianization of the middle classes, with the growth of the excluded in some countries to about two thirds of the population (della Porta, 2015). As protest spread worldwide, what became especially evident was the degree of social inequality that neoliberalism produced where there was economic growth as well as decline.

### Spacing, displacing, misplacing, and replacing

Common to the wave of protest is a call to reappropriate a public space that is seen as expropriated by neoliberal development. A common element in the 2011-2013 waves of protest has been a concern with public space. It has been observed that:

Protests in Greece, the USA, Egypt, Brazil, or Spain were partially directed against policies of privatization, corruption and real-estate development, which are intensified during financial crises and lead to a massive verbalization of discontent over globally raised concerns with just how democratically the public is being ruled. It is the context of globalized capitalism that conditions the protests against the commercialization of public space, and the subjugation of the corrupt and inefficient national states to obey the rule of international financial capital (Örs, 2014: 4).

Protest waves started in global cities, even if they were not confined to them. For Tilly, "the changing locations, activities, and spatial configurations of people themselves constitute a significant part of contention" (2000: 146). He underlines that "everyday spatial distributions, proximities, and routines

of potential participants in contention significantly affect their patterns of mobilization" (2000: 138). The neoliberal development changed the material spatial dimensions of social life (including the spatial practices), but also the symbolic meanings of space as well as the imposition of and resistance to dominant socio-spatial orders (Brenner and Theodore, 2002: 374). For Lefebvre, the right to the city signifies in "the most positive of terms the right of citizens and city dwellers, and of groups they (on the basis of social relations) constitute" (1996: 194-5). In the protest claims,

The right to the city thereby expands into a broader right to space in and beyond the urban scale. The right to the city privileges therefore the *perceived space* of inhabitants over the *conceived space* of developers and planners. In terms of neoliberal understanding, urban space is imagined as owned property, its role being to generate economic productivity. The right to the city destabilizes this viewpoint and offers a distinctly new vision of what the city is for. [...] In contrast to conceived space, which routinely ignores the complexities of daily inhabitancy, the right to the city underlines the needs of citizens as urban dwellers and is reflected by these particular forms of resistance (Lelandais, 2014: 1796).

The struggle over space is a struggle for democracy through the reappropriation of public spheres. In fact,

[T]oday the crisis of democracy springs up from the very public space it neglected: the people gather in the *agora*, the streets and the squares making demands, exercising their right to have a direct say, requesting a redefinition of their democracy in terms of claiming the power to determine how the public is to be ruled. In insisting on a return to the original meaning of democracy, they underline the very crisis of its current, dominating, traditional version. The contact with the physical is called back through the establishment of the virtual, enabling both direct and representative democratic demands to come to the surface: the public reclaims its space, the people redefine their democracies of the new age (Örs, 2014: 2).

As for perceived spaces, planning and urban restructuring decisions are increasingly based on maximization of private gain; surveillance is increased in public spaces to maintain law and order, punitive institution building, and social surveillance; and authoritarian governance is seen as a means of silencing dissent arising from economic contradictions. Lived

spaces thus become more polarized, with the destruction of working-class neighborhoods for speculative land development and gentrification as well as the creation of “purified” spaces, as gated communities, enclaves, and places of consumption reserved for the elite. As Harvey suggested, “this nearly always has a class dimension, since it is usually the poor, underprivileged, and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this progress” (2012: 16). In fact, “such an urban order is what is experienced, imagined, and struggled against in terms of lived space. This struggle against the current socio-spatial order can be thought of as a multifaceted and multilayered anti-capitalist struggle” (Karasulu, 2014: 171).

The commodification of urban space tended towards authoritarian forms, as increasing authoritarianism is linked to neoliberal policies: “The Gezi resistance can be considered as part of the global wave of uprisings that started in 2009, centred in countries around the Mediterranean, as reactions against various facets of the deepening of capitalist social relations” (Erkan and Oguz, 2014: 114). In this sense, neoliberalism is seen not as a dismantling of the state, but rather as “the enhancement of authoritarian governance” through various forms of intervention in urban areas, with “increasing social control, restrictions, penalisation, and exclusion of certain social groups” (Eraydin and Taşan-Kok, 2014: 111).

Resistance to this process of expropriation, in various forms, individual and collective, takes place on the territory. In fact,

In an urban space conceived in a neoliberal logic based on market value of place and without a participative process taking into account the needs and desires of inhabitants, neighbourhood becomes the place where many social groups (minorities, political and/or religious groups, and so on) create enclaves within which their identity is recognized without repression, and these environments enhance the development of a relatively shared identity, connected to the neighbourhood, within the community. Many inhabitants, especially in informal neighbourhoods threatened by several planning projects, try to organize resistance even though such resistance is sometimes weak and not a general reaction. These communities have in some instances organized themselves into independent structures and have developed their own local protest that is not specifically expressed through street demonstrations (Lelandais, 2014: 1787).

Challenges in the new wave were in fact singled out in the differing capacities of protest actors to connect various contentious spaces.

### **The social bases of the protests**

The wave of protests in its ascending phase in 2011, but also in the rolling phase around 2013, brought about a concern with the class dimension of contentious politics that mainstream social movement studies had long forgotten. In 2011, protesters were considered mostly as members of a new precarious class that had been dramatically hit by the austerity policies. Differently from those in 2011, the protests in 2013 have been interpreted as “middle class” phenomena. In fact, mobilizations have been presented by some observers as a manifestation of “a new middle-class politics – democratic, environmentalist – whose global import is predicted to grow” (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014: 103). In the words of the ideologist of the end of history, Francis Fukuyama (2013),

The theme that connects recent events in Turkey and Brazil to each other, as well as to the 2011 Arab Spring and continuing protests in China, is the rise of a new global middle class. In Turkey and Brazil, as in Tunisia and Egypt before them, political protest has been led not by the poor but by young people with higher-than-average levels of education and income. They are technology-savvy and use social media like Facebook and Twitter to broadcast information and organize demonstrations. Even when they live in countries that hold regular democratic elections, they feel alienated from the ruling political elite.

In a different vision, Therborn (2014: 16) noted that, in different combinations, the critique to neoliberalism came from pre-capitalist populations (as indigenous people), extra-capitalist “wretched of the earth” (as casual laborers, landless peasants and street vendors), but also workers and emerging middle-class layers. In sum:

pre-capitalist populations, fighting to retain their territory and means of subsistence; “surplus” masses, excluded from formal employment in the circuits of capitalist production; exploited manufacturing workers across rustbelt and sunbelt zones; new and old middle classes, increasingly encumbered with debt payments to the financial corporations – these constitute the potential social bases for contemporary critiques of the ruling capitalist order. Advance will almost certainly require alliances between them, and therefore the inter-articulation of their concerns. Which way – or ways – the new middle classes in Africa, Asia and Latin America swing will be a vital determinant. [...] The middle classes – in particular their salaried and professional components – are also potentially open to

cultural critiques of capitalism, especially to environmental and quality-of-life concerns. However, given the fickleness of middle-class politics, any progressive turn will require the mobilization of a major popular force among the first two social currents mentioned above: invaded or outcast pre-capitalist populations, and workers defending themselves in the sphere of production.

With the support of statistical definitions of middle classes as encompassing those above the poverty line – in part manipulated to push forward an image of globalization as successful in modernizing backward countries – the 2013 protests in countries such as Turkey or Brazil have been described as an emerging middle class, impatient with neoliberal forms of authoritarianism and manifesting this dissatisfaction in the streets (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014). However, the description of the 2013 movements as “middle-class” has been challenged from various perspectives: first of all, the idea that other classes did not participate in the protests is challenged empirically; second, a proletarianization of former middle classes is identified; third, urban conflicts have been defined as going well beyond the post-materialist issues that were seen as characterizing the overcoming of poverty.

### 1.3 Illiberal (post-)democracies in late neoliberalism

Socio-economic dynamics are strictly interwoven with political ones as neoliberalism, while changing them dramatically, displaced but by no means weakened the relations between the market and the state. Neoliberalism has introduced deep changes in the working of “real democracies” – i.e., in Robert Dahl’s (2000) definition, democracies in the way they really work. However, this does not mean a reduction of state intervention in the market and civil society, as neoliberalism needs the state in order to set up conditions for success, but also for bailing out banks in times of crisis. In general, neoliberalism, with minimalist visions of democracy as only electorally accountable and unconcerned with citizens’ rights, is characterized by a drop in the capacity of representing as well as in its responsibility towards citizens. I have elsewhere addressed these issues (della Porta, 2015) by moving from the concept of a legitimacy crisis, singling out the main elements of what I define as a *crisis of responsibility* – by which I mean a drastic drop in the capacity of the government to respond to citizens’ requests (what Mair [2009] called responsiveness).

Described by Colin Crouch (2004) as post-democracies, really existing democracies in rampant times of neoliberalism are in particular characterized

by the implementation of various mixes of the following mechanisms of building support:

- *Coordinated collusion.* A small oligopolistic class of politicians-businessmen is formed through the political protection of small circles of individuals who, thanks to political protection, are able to exploit the enrichment potential of financial capitalism.
- *Organized clientelism.* Having lost the capacity to create collective identities, parties build their electoral support through individual/corporate integration in patronage networks.
- *Participatory cooptation.* Some selective form of participation of citizens as individuals is used in the attempt to counteract the decrease in political trust.

However, these mechanisms for building support require resources that are diminished in the crisis of neoliberalism. New mechanisms of incorporation in illiberal democracies then include:

- *Centrifugal corruption.* As crises create divisions in the oligarchy, centrifugal tendencies develop in the organization of corrupt exchanges (della Porta and Vannucci, 2014).
- *Exclusive ideological appeal.* As crises reduce the spoils to be distributed through patronage to individuals and corporate groups, attempts at integration of the electorate go through the development of an exclusive definition of the people, throughout, for example, nationalist and religious fundamentalisms, spreading homophobic and xenophobic tendencies.
- *Repression of dissent.* Minimalistic to the extreme in the definition of democracy, the authoritarian democracies impose a drastic restriction of the space for dissent, through laws and practices.

Movements react, indeed, with very high levels of mistrust to a perceived legitimacy crisis, which has very different characteristics from the one hypothesized by Habermas (1976) for advanced capitalism. Today's legitimacy crisis is, in fact, driven not by excessive state intervention in the market in order to support the socially weak, but rather by state intervention in support of capital and the related stripping off of civic, political, and social rights (Sassen, 2006). Deregulation, privatization, and liberalization have been the main policy directions justified with the need to re-establish the efficiency of the market. De facto, these interventions did not help competition, but rather supported the concentration of power in the hands of a few huge corporations. Since 2008, public debt has increased, not because of

investments in social services and support for the weaker groups, but rather due to huge expenditures of public money to bail out banks and financial institutions from their financially-driven crisis, as well as by drastic cuts in the taxation of capital. This takes, first of all, the form of a corruption of representative democracy through the overlapping of economic and political power. On the output side of the political system, this means an abdication of responsibility by representative institutions in the face of citizens' demands.

Against the neoliberal promises of defending the market from the state, scholars of various disciplines point at the growing intermingling of the two. Segregation of economy and polity is rarely present, as governments still have to remedy market failure, and the market needs laws (for example on protection of copyrights, patents, contracts). In fact, as Crouch wrote about neoliberalism, "in its attempt to reduce certain kinds of government interventions in the economy, it encourages or provides space for a number of mutual interferences between government and private firms, many of which raise serious problems for both the free market and the probity of public institutions" (2012: 93). Rather than competition, in neoliberalism there is a concentration of capital with the development of "giant firms" that distort the market: "a 'giant' firm is one that is sufficiently dominant within its markets to be able to influence the terms of those markets by its own action, using its organizational capacity to develop market-dominating strategies" (2012: 49). Privatization, liberalization, and deregulation, allowing for the concentration of capital, derive from governments' commitment in terms of favorable legislation.

The space for political decisions has been denied, by politicians of different colors, based on the assumed absolute dominance of the so-called "logic of the market," especially of international markets. As Streeck (2011: 20) observed, having been saved by the states,

As we now read in the papers almost every day, "the markets" have begun in unprecedented ways to dictate what presumably sovereign and democratic states may still do for their citizens and what they must refuse them. Moreover, the very same ratings agencies that were instrumental in bringing about the disaster of the global money industry are now threatening to downgrade the bonds of the very same states that had to accept a previously unimaginable level of new debt to rescue that industry and the capitalist economy as a whole.

In fact, the democratic aim of obtaining citizens' trust has now been rhetorically substituted by a focus on market confidence, which is to be



obtained even at the expense of irresponsiveness to citizens' demands. The responsibility of democratic states vis-à-vis their citizens is then all the more removed, as external conditionalities impose cuts in public spending, with often dramatic consequences in terms of violations of human rights to food, health, and housing.

Neoliberalism has been described as a critical juncture that has dramatically transformed the regime of political incorporation of the masses, with dramatic effects on party systems and state institutions (Roberts, 2015). The type 3 of elite support (and at times, consensus) strategies change vis-à-vis previous (in particular, Fordist) models of political consensus building, based on party representation of the interests of labor in the representative system as well as functional integration of class interests through collective representation. That model, with the related development of welfare states as ways of decommodification and rights entitlement, had indeed sustained the vision of a democratic capitalism. Attacking (explicitly and implicitly) those forms of representation and incorporation, neoliberal states become in general less capable of integration and more oriented to the atomized individuals. Political support is achieved (or at least searched for) through various mechanisms oriented to different potential constituencies: the business-political oligarchy; the party bases of reference; the population at large. Old modes are not totally displaced, though, and new modes are implemented with different balances. We can therefore find in different countries – as well as in different neoliberal times – different constellations of strategies for obtaining political support.

Challenging the idea that economic neoliberalism brings about political liberalism, the 2011 movements were perceived as promoting either democracy or the deepening of democracy in countries in which there had been a democratic weakening. The 2013 movements focused even more on the struggle against what they perceived at the same time as corrupt and illiberal democracy. In general, "crucial to these revolts (with the exception of the Arab cases) was the shattering of a key myth of the last 35 years: the necessary link between liberalism and democracy. The development and deployment of new police state techniques intensified throughout the revolt, underlining the authoritarian tendencies of the world's liberal leaders and their followers" (Tuğal, 2013: 158). As O'Donnell (1973) had already noted in his work on Latin America, capitalism can survive very well in non-democratic environments. What is more, the more exploitative its form, the more it needs to control potential dissent, through a mix of cooptation and repression. In fact, with differences in degree and kind, democracy does not thrive in late neoliberalism; to the contrary, even in established

democracies, global neoliberalism brought back forms of tough policing of protest (della Porta, Petersen, and Reiter, 2006; della Porta and Tarrow, 2012). In the contentious politics of 2013, we might discern some specific versions of this authoritarian neoliberal democracy in the personalistic forms of power, but also in the spirals of repression and mobilization that played an important role in the spreading of the protest.

#### 1.4 The new spirit of social movements

Social movements in times of crisis see specific challenges, neither considered nor theorized by social movement studies. At the neoliberal critical juncture, with the related weakening of traditional forms of social incorporation and political legitimacy, social movements face the symbolic challenge of constructing a new subject; the material challenge of mobilizing limited resources; the strategic challenge of influencing a very closed political system. While not totally restricted by them, movement responses to the crises are in fact structured by the existing material resources, as present in movement networks, as well as symbolic resources, as expressed in movement culture. This implies a restriction of the options that are available – as Tilly’s concept of repertoires stressed – but also triggers learning processes, in terms of the lessons coming from the past as well as from abroad. Although certainly constrained by existing structures, a characteristic of the movements in times of crisis is their capacity to create resources through the invention of new frames, organizational devices, forms of action. In this sense, attention must shift to what has been termed a “politics of becoming”: identities do not yet exist, rather they are formed; networks are reconstituted through the overcoming of old cleavages, as participatory public spaces are created. In extraordinary times, as old identifications and expectations are broken, a new spirit emerges in action.

Neoliberalism grew within a specific type of cultural environment. With some pessimism about the capacity of a new collective subject to emerge, Zygmunt Bauman has located in *liquid modernity* the cultural dimension of the emerging conflicts. This implies insecurity and flexibility, which make collective identities difficult to develop. While heavy/solid/condensed/systemic modernity was composed of compulsory homogeneity, liquid modernity emphasizes momentary impulses. With the end of the illusion of a *telos* (as a state of perfection to be reached), there is a deregulation and privatization of tasks and duties from collective endowments to individual management. In this view, individualism prevails over the collectivity. As community and

corporations no longer offer protection through dense nets of social bonds, the search for substitute targets (such as criminality and terrorism) is a reaction to fear. In the past, the modern state had managed fears through protection of social state institutions that construct new webs of social bonds (Bauman, 2000: 59) or long-term involvement in the Fordist factory; nowadays, a deregulation-cum-individualization develops fears (2000: 67).

In the new context, some scholars consider collective identities to be difficult to develop. Individuals are seen as lukewarm towards the common good, common cause, good society: the other side of individualization is the end of citizenship (2000: 36). However, this is not linked to the colonization of the lifeworld by the state, but rather by its decline, as “it is no more true that the ‘public’ is set on colonizing the ‘private.’ The opposite is the case: it is the private that colonizes the public spaces” (2000: 39). The collapse of confidence is said to bring about a fading will to political commitment with endemic instability. A state induced insecurity develops, indeed, with individualization through market flexibility and a broadening sense of relative deprivation, as flexibility precludes the possibility of existential security (2007: 14). The moral appeal in movements’ discourse is seen, somehow critically, as avoiding central political issues (e.g. Žižek, 2012: 79).

A diagnosis of fragmented identities is shared by other scholars as well, although they are sometimes more optimistic about the potential for collective actors to form in liquid times. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the resistance of subjective forces develops through “activities and desires which refuse the dominant order by proposing ‘lines of flight’” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 48). Disciplinary regimes thus no longer succeed in controlling the values and desires of young people, who no longer dream of getting a job that “guarantees regular and stable work” (2000: 273). Unitarian, centralized, and hierarchical organizational forms are neither possible nor positive, as society is composed of a “multiplicity of irreducible singularities” (2000: 166). Therefore, the multitude is considered as permanently in the making, assuming rhizomatic forms and leaving no place for a political vanguard. Even identity should not aim at consolidation, while there is an emphasis on singularity as always involved in a project of becoming different (2000: 339). During action, singularities are bridged together, establishing what is common and forming a new power oriented to managing the commons.

Indeed, anti-austerity movements seem to develop what Ernesto Laclau (2005) has defined as a populist reason. According to him, populism is a political logic: not a type of movement, but the naming, the construction of the people as a way of breaking order and reconstructing it. In fact,

he stated, “democracy is grounded only on the existence of a democratic subject, whose emergence depends on the horizontal articulation between equivalential demands. An ensemble of equivalential demands articulated by an empty signifier is what constitutes a ‘people’: so the very possibility of democracy depends on the constitution of a democratic people” (Laclau, 2005: 171). Recognizing the difficulties in the construction of the people, he points at historical conditions for the emergence of popular identities in “the multiplication of social demands, the heterogeneity of which can be brought to some form of unity only through equivalential political articulations” (2005: 229). Challenging somehow both Baumann’s pessimistic view of liquid society and Hardt and Negri’s optimism about a move towards the self-extension of identities, Laclau points instead at the need for political forms of social reaggregation through a populist reason.

Nowadays, neoliberalism brings about a deepening of the logic of identity formation, but the discursive construction of the people requires frontiers. The search for a populist reason, as the need for naming the self and for recognition of the self, is driven by a crisis that challenges a process of habituation, fueling processes of (new) identification. In times of crisis, a dissonance arises between expectation and reality, as a crisis suspends the *doxa*, made up of undiscussed ideas, and stimulates opinions: a universe of discussion or arguments (Bourdieu, 1977: 168). Actual protests can then be interpreted as non-conformative action using discourse and opinions to challenge habitus and *doxa*. According to empirical analyses, in fact, in today’s protests the search for a naming of the self that could bring together different groups has indeed produced the spread of definitions of the self as the people, or even more, the persons or the citizens. These ideas have reflected and challenged the cultural effects of neoliberalism (della Porta, 2015).

The protest in and around 2013 can indeed be seen as expressing a specific search for new subjectivities. In fact, it has been noted that protests themselves represented

[A] procedure of emergence, in the sense that the emerging entity cannot be reduced to its constitutive elements. With regard to the composition of the multitude performing the resistance, this means that the protesting subject (“the protesters”) is not simply a mixture of the people and the sociological categories they represent. Rather, [...] there are specific mechanisms within the uprising that lead to a recomposition of the multitude, a “becoming” of the people. The term “becoming” expresses a modal change, a transformation in the composition of that collective subject (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014: 123-124).

As we will see in the volume, the search for new subjectivity moved from the early phase of the protest wave in 2011 to the rolling phase in 2013. Supported in 2011 by a search for cooperation among a broad part of the population powerfully hit by the crisis, the populist reasoning took different courses in the late riding wave. In fact, the process of emerging subjectivities seems to have been more successful where protesters were able to construct liberated spaces, as in Gezi. In contrast, the process was more difficult when protest was confronted with legacies of loyalty to former movement-near parties (as in Venezuela or South Africa, and partly in Brazil), or where the very definition of the Left had been delegitimized by the long experiences of “real socialism” and the promises of a neoliberalism progress that was still attractive (as in Bosnia, Bulgaria, or Ukraine).

## 1.5 The research and this volume

In what follows, the volume will address the mentioned protests in more detail. It will indeed report results from a large cross-national and cross-time project on social movements and democracy, sponsored by an ERC grant. The broad question of the effects of social movements on processes of democratic transitions, but also on the deepening of democracy, has been addressed in various other parts of the research (della Porta, 2014; 2016). This part of the research builds on a previous project that had analyzed the anti-austerity protests at their apex in 2011 (della Porta, 2013a; 2015) by looking instead at the ways in which protest spread after its peak in different contexts and with different effects.

In order to do this we have selected those cases that acquired global notoriety around 2013, being indeed considered as some sort of continuation of the protests of 2011. The research design therefore follows a most-different-cases strategy, covering contentious events in Eastern Europe, in Latin America, and on the African continent. Although aware of differences, we aim to single out, within a logic of discovery, some common global trends (della Porta, 2008). The various case studies developed on a common theoretical framework supported by empirical analysis. The research was carried out in 2014 and 2015. From the point of view of research methods, we triangulated as much as possible documentary sources (including various databases) with interviews of a theoretically sampled group of activists of recent protests in each country. In addition, within a logic of historical comparative analysis, we used secondary sources that mainly comprised research in political economy, political participation, and social movements.

The results of this research are first presented, case by case, in the following chapters, and then compared in the concluding one.

In Chapter 2, Kivanc Atak and Donatella della Porta look at “The spirit of Gezi: A relational approach to eventful protest and its challenges.” Often discussed as a case of “middle-class” politics, the protests that started in Gezi Park in 2013 converged in bringing together on the streets multi-class coalitions of collective actors and individuals. The protesters were often described as plural and heterogeneous in terms of gender, age, religion, ethnic background, and even traditional ideological background. Starting from the concern for reconquering an expropriated public space, those protests contributed indeed to the emergence of new discourses as well as claims for another (non-corrupt) relationship between civil society and state institutions.

Chapter 3, by Mariana Mendes, addresses “Brazil’s popular awakening – June 2013: Accounting for the onset of a new cycle of contention.” There as well, protest developed on issues of space and the use of the city. Often compared with the Turkish Gezi protests, the mobilization before and around the soccer World Cup are to be seen as complex claims around issues of social justice and economic development.

In Chapter 4, Juan Masullo looks at “Making sense of ‘La Salida’: Challenging left-wing control in Venezuela.” In fact, to a certain extent similar to the ones in Brazil, protests in Venezuela pointed at dissatisfaction with a populist conception of democracy – even if in a left-wing version – expressing claims for more participation.

In Chapter 5, “The Marikana massacre and labor protest in South Africa,” Francis O’Connor also looks at protest, in this case addressing a government that had emerged from past social movements: the 2013 wave of protest in South Africa that targeted continuous inequality as well as an exclusive conception of democracy.

In Chapter 6, “Left in translation: The curious absence of an austerity narrative in the 2013 Bulgarian protests,” Julia Rone looks at how, moving east, the 2013 protests in Bulgaria also mobilized dissatisfaction with both the social and the political qualities of democracy. Even if with different trends and outcomes, these campaigns articulated claims for social justice with concerns for the political role of citizens.

In Chapter 7, Chiara Milan studies “‘Sow hunger, reap anger’: From neo-liberal privatization to new collective identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.” Unexpected as they could be in countries recovering from hard experiences of civil wars, the 2013 protests in Bosnia emerged from social suffering. In the course of the mobilization, however, the broader and deeper issue of the construction of new identities became central.

Chapter 8, by Daniel Ritter, looks at “A spirit of Maidan? Contentious escalation in Ukraine.” Considered as yet another example of the “movement of the squares” that had become visible with the 2011 occupation of Tahrir in Egypt, the 2013 occupation of Maidan in Ukraine escalated into a civil war. The attempts at building an inclusive identity failed as a result of internal divisions and external interventions.

In Chapter 9, “Riding the wave: Some conclusions,” by Donatella della Porta, the main research findings are analyzed comparatively. A main theoretical issue is addressed here: What happens when a wave of protest, which starts in a homogeneous area, affects in its long ebb other countries? Or, at least, when it is seen as a sort of continuation of that initial spark? The idea of a cascade is that contentious events in one country function as inspiration for latecomers – i.e., early risers produce spinoff. Those movements that arrive later on ride on the wave of the protest, but at the same time they often lack the structural characteristics that had facilitated protest in the first place. They therefore need to adapt – domesticate, to a certain extent – ideas coming from outside.

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## 2 The spirit of Gezi

A relational approach to eventful protest and its challenges

*Donatella della Porta and Kivanc Atak*

### Abstract

This chapter brings in a relational perspective to the structure and agency across the Gezi Park uprisings in Turkey. In order to understand the social and political dynamics that played out in the course of the mobilizations, we discuss and critically elaborate the relation of class, authoritarian rule, and contentious politics to the agency of the protests. Drawing on in-depth interviews with organizationally affiliated and unaffiliated protesters, protest event analysis, public surveys, and official documents, the chapter shows how public outrage at the government's political encroachments into particular lifestyles, values, and orientations helped an ongoing urban resistance evolve into a mass rebellion. By focusing on the eventful characteristics of the protests, we also delve into the political subjectivities that have been activated, contested, transformed and in the making since the eruption of the uprisings.

**Keywords:** protest, uprising, relational approach, eventful, class, social movement, Gezi, Turkey

### 2.1 Introduction

If in addition to institutional expressions of political power we observe the evolution of popular movements, one of the most significant phenomena of recent years has been the birth of social protests and demands concerned with urban and environmental questions. Through these different ways, the city and its problems appear to have increasing importance in the practice of power. This relationship also develops in an opposite way, in that political power, the state being its concentrated expression, increasingly shapes the city (Castells, 1978: 167).

The popular uprisings that broke out in Turkey in the early days of summer 2013 showed, in line with the quote from Manuel Castells, how an urban question can turn into a battlefield between a coercive state and the social



forces that resist its power. According to the Turkish National Police, around 3.6 million citizens participated in 5,232 protest events from the end of May until the first week of September 2013. On the city level, others assess, one and a half million took to the streets in Istanbul – 16 percent of the population over eighteen years old – and half a million in Izmir – 18 percent of the population over eighteen years old (SAMER, 2013). The protests also offered insight into the mobilizing potential of contemporary urban and environmental contestations. Needless to say, an ongoing struggle against the demolition of the Gezi Park in Istanbul evolved into an anti-authoritarian mass rebellion that became much more comprehensive than the initial cause embraced by a handful of urban activists. However, this does not overshadow the centrality of the protests' urban origins, which were concentrated on the preservation of a public space.

In this chapter we will discuss the Gezi Park uprisings through a relational approach which allows the bridging of context and agency within a conception of protest as eventful. The idea of transformative “events” goes back to William H. Sewell's (1996) proposition of “eventful temporality” as an alternative to the teleological and experimental temporalities, two dominant paradigms in historical sociology. Della Porta (2008) took Sewell's conceptualization and suggested that certain protests bear eventful characteristics and have the potential to transform structures and collective identities. Protest events can be seen as critical junctures and, as such, as forms of change endowed with some specific characteristics (della Porta, 2016). As Kenneth Roberts (2015) noted, “critical junctures are not periods of ‘normal politics’ when institutional continuity or incremental change can be taken for granted. They are periods of crisis or strain that existing policies and institutions are ill-suited to resolve.” In fact, he stated, they produce changes described as abrupt, discontinuous, and path dependent:

Changes are abrupt because critical junctures contain decisive “choice points” when major reforms are debated, policy choices are made, and institutions are created, reconfigured, or displaced. They are discontinuous because they diverge sharply from baseline trajectories of institutional continuity or incremental adaptation; in short, they represent a significant break with established patterns. Finally, change is path dependent because it creates new political alignments and institutional legacies that shape and constrain subsequent political development (Roberts, 2015).

Although critical junctures are rooted within structures, they are also open-ended. In this vision, critical junctures are structurally underdetermined.

Critical junctures are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and political contingency. During these periods of crisis, “the range of plausible choices available to powerful political actors expands substantially” (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007: 343). Consolidation phases then become founding moments in which institutional and normative codes are set, with long-lasting effects. Different degrees and forms of contention could develop from specific processes that originate in transition phases. In this vision, in fact, “instead of connecting initial conditions to outcomes, events carry the potential to transform the X-Y relation, neutralizing the reversing effects that initial conditions would have otherwise produced” (Collier and Mazzuca, 2008: 485).

Once changes are produced via critical junctures, these have enduring effects on the relations that are established in new assets (or new regimes). We might therefore expect transition paths to constrain consolidation processes, as “what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time” (Sewell, 1996: 263). So, once a particular outcome happens to occur, self-reproducing mechanisms tend to cause “the outcome to endure across time, even long after its original purposes have ceased to exist” (Mahoney and Schensul, 2006: 456). It has in fact been observed that transformations stabilize as “[o]nce a process (e.g. a revolution) has occurred and acquired a name, both the name and the one or more representations of the process become available as signals, models, threats and/or aspirations for later actors” (Tilly, 2006: 421). After a critical juncture, changes over time become difficult (Mahoney and Schensul, 2006: 462) – unless there is a new rupture or disruptive event. Although critical junctures are usually considered within models of punctuated equilibriums as reactions to shocks that bring the system towards a new equilibrium (Pierson, 2000), the degree of stability also (re)creates changes. This perspective can contribute to ongoing and future debates on whether new subjectivities were formed throughout Gezi and to what extent, in terms of collective identities, one can refer to a rupture with the past.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we delve into the social bases of the uprisings with reference to the concept of class. In our discussion, we challenge alternative class theses on Gezi which variably highlight the middle class, the working class, or the multi-class currents of the protests. Drawing on earlier theoretical premises on class and its role in social movements, we suggest instead that Gezi can hardly be considered as a class rebellion per se but rather it is one that – among other dimensions such as lifestyles, values, and orientation as well as status – involves class politics

as well. In the broader context of contentious politics, we also demonstrate that even if it came as a surprise, Gezi did not arise from nowhere. In other words, it built on an existing and relatively noisy protest environment which, in addition to the remarkable participation of first-time protesters, contributed to the diverse and large-scale nature of the mobilizations as the usual suspects of contentious politics in Turkey. Second, we look at the authoritarian context that was thriving in the run-up to the mass protests. We suggest that rather than functioning as a single causal mechanism, the multifaceted authoritarianism of the Erdoğan government cemented the growth of public outrage, which came to explode at a particular moment in time. Last, we take into account the rare and extraordinary character of Gezi as an event and explore its potentially transformative effects on political subjectivities. With empirical insight from our findings, we trace some indicators of new subjectivities in the making on an individual level. In addition, we also have sufficient grounds to expect that a social transformation at the level of collective identities has been taking place.

The empirical material we use in our chapter comes from several sources. We rely first of all on in-depth interviews with protest participants. The interviews were conducted with activists from a diversity of organizations who were selected based on organizational form and political orientation. We also refer to results from an original protest event dataset, which we compiled from the online news archive of Anadolu Agency (the official press agency that was established in 1920, with local offices in 69 out of 81 provinces) covering the period from 2011 to the end of 2013. Last but not least, we consulted public surveys by private research enterprises, official documents, and articles from the news media.

## **2.2 The question of class: Gezi beyond class revolt**

Differently from the mass protests in 2011, which have been defined as moved by the losers in countries most hit by the austerity crisis, the protests in 2013 were often interpreted as “middle-class” phenomena. Several analyses have pointed to the remarkable presence and pivotal role of highly educated and young middle-class professionals in the mobilizations (Özel, 2014). This view has been contested in the scholarly literature, however, as advocates of the proletarianization thesis have pointed at the growing precariousness of employment in professional/creative jobs (Ercan and Oğuz, 2015) or underscored the somewhat anti-bourgeoisie or even anti-capitalist character of the uprisings (Boratav, 2013). Still a third interpretation presents

**Figure 2.1 Occupational profile of the labor force participants in Turkey (Jan. 2014)**



Gezi as a multi-class phenomenon, pointing at the presence of all classes, roughly in proportion to their size in the population (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014). The working classes, predominant in the population at large, were in fact numerically superior to the participants from other classes, yet protesters came from the middle classes as well.

In particular, the notion of class conceptualized in these writings either draws heavily on the demographic profile of the protesters derived from occupational categories or, as in the case of the proletarianization thesis, is extrapolated from broader socio-economic processes whose empirical link to Gezi remains unfocused. Overall, while not denying the existence of class politics in the mobilizations, we suggest that Gezi cannot be considered as a class rebellion as such.

At a broader level, the occupational distribution of the protesters beyond Gezi Park and Taksim resembles the figures in the general population (Figure 2.1). The results of a survey conducted in Istanbul and Izmir suggest that people from middle-class occupations and the petty bourgeoisie were slightly overrepresented among the protesters in comparison with the ratio of these strata in the entire sample. Furthermore, protesters with a working-class background were represented at more or less the same level as the working-class respondents in the whole sample, whereas the category of precarious workers was underrepresented in the protests by a small margin (SAMER, 2013). In fact, participants inside Gezi Park were overwhelmingly young and highly educated. Among those who were employed, many worked

in clerical and administrative jobs as well as professional occupations (KONDA, 2014).

Considering that people took to the streets in almost every province and in numerous neighborhoods, however – not to mention that the protests lasted for several weeks – observations confined to the spatial boundaries of Gezi Park and Taksim Square might produce a limited, if not biased, understanding of the social origins of the protests. As an activist observed:

[I]f you look at who was on the barricades in Nisantasi,<sup>1</sup> obviously those were people who live or work there. But it is also true that when the protests started to decline, it was those people who withdrew from the streets in the first place. Their withdrawal and the concomitant decline of the mobilizations frustrated many others. But my observation concerns the very center of Istanbul. On the periphery, however, people's social profile was different. The socially marginalized, Alevis and Kurds were in the forefronts of the protests. In Taksim, it looked like as if some groups came there to represent the marginalized, such as the Alevi organizations or even the DHKP-C<sup>2</sup> (Interview TK6).

In addition, there seems to be a discernible pattern if one thinks of the victims of police repression. With some bitterness, another interviewee noted,

Life is particularly precious for the middle classes. They know well what time to protest, what time to back away. But when we consider those who lost their lives in the course of Gezi events, we realize that they mostly resided in poor neighborhoods or came from Alevi communities; namely those people who sacrificed themselves without having second thoughts or resorting to some sort of *realpolitik*. In my opinion, this is a question of class. It explains why casualties occurred in places like Adana, Eskişehir but not in and around the Gezi Park (Interview TK2).

If the Gezi Park uprising was spearheaded by young protesters with relatively high cultural capital at the heart of Istanbul, mobilization rapidly grew into a socially and spatially much more diverse popular rebellion. This would

1 An upper-class neighborhood near Taksim.

2 Acronym for Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi [Revolutionary Party-Front for People's Emancipation], a leftist underground organization that dates back to the 1970s and is officially on the list of terrorist organizations in Turkey.

not mean, however, that Gezi can be pictured as an outright class revolt. First, it is dubious that the young and educated middle-class initiators of the mobilizations acted as “organic intellectuals” in the Gramscian sense. These participants, if anything, instead played the role of traditional intellectuals providing resources, knowledge, and skills to the protests rather than deliberately pursuing class interests or uniformly making class-based claims (on middle class as intellectuals, see Bagguley, 1992). Second, class politics in a mass movement such as Gezi is not directly a derivative of market categories of social stratification to which individual protesters belong, as earlier discussions emphasized that “class is not reducible to occupation” (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983: 10). In our effort to “forsake the essentialism” in the analyses of class (or class politics), we would agree with a relational perspective that suggests that class “lies neither in structures nor in agency alone but in their relationship as it is historically produced, reproduced, and transformed” (Wacquant, 1991: 51).

As elsewhere, neoliberal policies in Turkey have been threatening the middle classes – among others – and imposing precarious conditions, particularly upon their “work situation,” which Lockwood (1958) once defined as one of the three pillars of class. This process dates back to the Özal governments in the 1980s and lingered well into the 2000s by virtue of large-scale privatizations, the extension of subcontracting, and labor flexibility. Such developments affected first and foremost young people, including those who achieved (or were achieving) high educational levels. Indeed, “[t]heir schools are training them to become a component of qualified elements in the supply of workforce in the near future” or unemployed (Boratav, 2013). Along these lines, some critiques of the middle-class thesis on Gezi point at the proletarianization in the service sector including sales clerks or secretaries, and for independent professional groups such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, and so forth (Ercan and Oğuz, 2015). Socio-economic transformations driven by market fundamentalism, it is claimed, are reflected in the motivations of the Gezi Park protesters, who not only stigmatized precariousness and unemployment but also wanted to promote creativity. As an activist claimed:

If we graduate from the Urbanism Institute, we would like to work on urban restructuring. We would like to demonstrate that we are able to define and implement land use plans that are in line with the creation of democratic urban spaces and environmental protection. But the precariousness of employment and the fact that we cannot express our creativity in our work practices resulted in our search for autonomous

spaces – but also for achieving a real professional life – to be able to produce and publicize our work (quoted in Farro and Demirhisar, 2014).

Social transformations are particularly relevant as implications of urban renewal and environmental policies that can “no longer be seen only as ‘middle-class issues’ within a post-materialist framework, in the sense of a frivolous concern on the part of people who suffer from no ‘real’ economic or social constraints” (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014). Obviously, the uprisings emerged from an ongoing struggle against the demolition of Gezi Park as part of the transformation of Taksim. Therefore, the protests called for a right to the city and a contestation of the growing investment of profits in urban projects, or what Lovering and Türkmen (2011) called “bulldozer neoliberalism.” Gezi came to represent a culminating point of the commodification of once open spaces, with shopping malls creating “enclosures by destroying what is left of the so-called city center and eating away at what is left of the so-called countryside” (Eken, 2014).

With their insistence on reclaiming spaces, the protests targeted a central aspect of urban development in general. This focus had taken particular prominence in Turkey, where investment in urban programs had been impressive, the state taking a leading role in renewal projects but also strongly supported by an emerging capitalist class. Resistance came from those who defended use value over exchange value (Atay, 2013; Göle, 2013). These programs at times involve massive destruction-construction, resting on a policy of displacement of the socially disadvantaged, often portrayed as the troublemakers by the law-and-order regime. In the 1960s and 1970s, clientelist policies spread in response to urban social movements claiming for collective consumption, followed by new entrepreneurialism promoting participatory governance and a re-regulation of property markets. Recently, this entrepreneurial logic acquired an authoritarian character lacking democratic control. The anti-democratic politics of urban development went as far as to exempt the state giant Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) from judicial oversight.

Under these circumstances, the transformation of cities into gigantic construction sites yielded contradictory outcomes, most notably in Istanbul. The proliferation of ostensibly affordable housing opportunities for the worse-off strata came along with their expulsion from the center and involuntary resettlement in the peripheries of the city, which is not necessarily favorable in terms of economic compensations offered to the displaced people. By the same token, urban neoliberalism – which goes hand in hand with TOKİ's omnipotence – also gave rise to gated

communities for the rich to voluntarily segregate themselves from the dusts and dangers of the downtown. As a result, voluntary and involuntary detachment from the city has contrastingly led to reproduction of poverty on the one side, and the securitized insulation of the propertied class on the other (Candan and Kolluoğlu, 2008). Urban renewal was also stressed by activists, who noted:

Next to E-5 highway in Davutpaşa,<sup>3</sup> there is a sixty-hectare area they are going to ruin. As an excuse, they put forward the bad condition of buildings and scare people saying, “Would it be better that in the event of an earthquake people would die under concrete?” And then they spend 40 billion TL for the construction of highways. What a contradiction! So you collect 40 billion TL to take precautions for earthquake, then you offer people 60 m<sup>2</sup> housing (reduced from their original 100 m<sup>2</sup>) and ask them to pay 50 thousand TL in addition. [...] The housing you offer already costs 50 thousand TL anyways. [...] Why do you downsize people’s houses and why do you take their money then? You even construct an additional fifteen floors! This is exactly how capitalism transforms people’s lives into rents. [...] This is what urban renewal is about. That is why struggling against this process is very much justified. This struggle started way before Gezi and even dates back to the 70s. [...] Gezi became the peak point of all these long-lasting struggles (Interview TK8).

To paraphrase, the Gezi Park mobilizations were intertwined with ongoing urban struggles on the neighborhood level as well as targeting mega projects such as the construction of a third bridge over the Bosphorus, a new airport, and a canal to artificially connect the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea – all carrying heavy costs for the environment. In this context, the project for the reorganization of Taksim was criticized for its content as well as procedurally, given the lack of consultation with professional organizations and the citizens. The project became a symbol of authoritarian urban management and protests that started in Taksim contended for the reappropriation of a public space – the last piece of green land that survived past encroachments in the area.

Gezi as a popular uprising that was born out of an ongoing urban resistance certainly harbored elements of class politics. But as it was unforeseen even by the very actors of the resistance since its beginning, the uprisings

3 Davutpaşa is an industrial neighborhood in the Esenler district of Istanbul with a dense, working-class population.



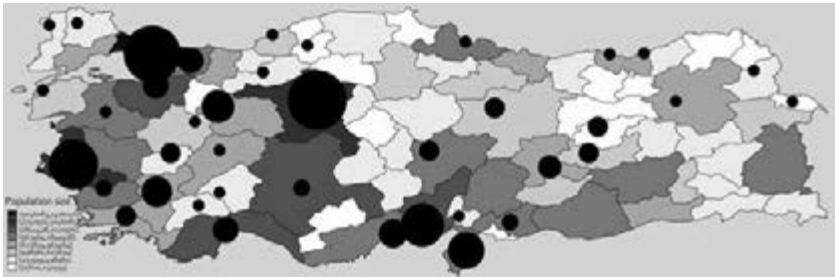
evolved into a broader social phenomenon that transcended the boundaries of an urban movement and its class-based foundations. As we have noted, Gezi turned into a public stage joined by a wide range of groups, organizations, and unaffiliated individuals who were to varying degrees and for various reasons discontented with the government and the political order in general. This composite discontent cannot be grasped only by reference to class. The same conclusion also applies to the proletarianization thesis. The erosion of social rights and of the economic rewards of education as well as the precarious nature of employment might have activated class motives for protest, as in the case of the graduate from the Urbanism Institute quoted above. Yet it would be far-fetched to generalize such motives to the entire course of the Gezi Park mobilizations. Articulations that are not compellingly related to class – such as those concerned with lifestyles, values, and orientations, or what Bryan S. Turner (1988) referred to as “status politics” – existed side by side with the class roots of the resentment of some, if not all, protesters. What brought them together in a surprising fashion was an anti-authoritarian stance against the government, and Erdoğan in particular.

### **Protest events in context**

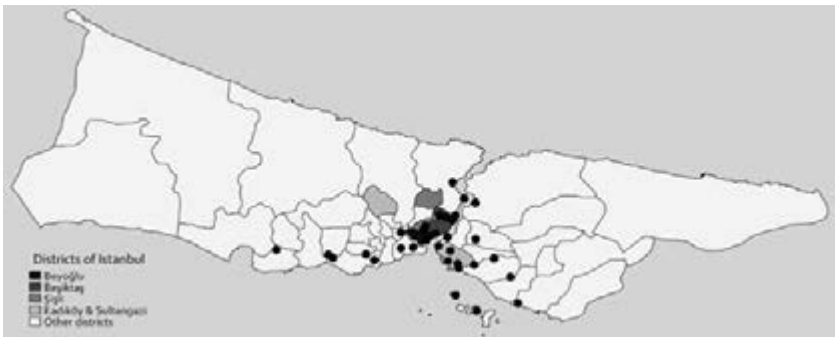
Figure 2.2 maps the geographical distribution of the Gezi Park protests at the provincial level. As protests took place in all but one (Bayburt – in eastern Black Sea region) province, the figure does not claim to represent the whole picture. Yet it still portrays the diffuse character of the mobilizations, which spread well beyond Istanbul. Obviously, protests were concentrated in more populated provinces in the west, but population size is by no means the only factor associated with protest magnitude.

Figure 2.3 focuses on the provincial borders of Istanbul. It presents the districts where the Gezi Park protests were concentrated and, in addition, it locates geographically the neighborhood forums that mushroomed throughout the city after the police eviction of the occupation in Taksim in mid-June 2013. As one can notice, people frequented the streets mostly in the central districts of Beşiktaş, Beyoğlu, Kadıköy, and Şişli. Protests were also notably common in Sultangazi, more in the west, a district with a sizeable Alevi and Kurdish population. Having said that, protest events were not limited to these districts and also occurred, perhaps more sporadically, in several other districts not highlighted in this figure. Neighborhood forums likewise did not attract the same level of mobilization everywhere, yet they spread to less central districts such as Beylikdüzü on the European and Kartal on the Anatolian side.

**Figure 2.2** Population size (shades) and Gezi Park protests (dots) at provincial level, May-September 2013

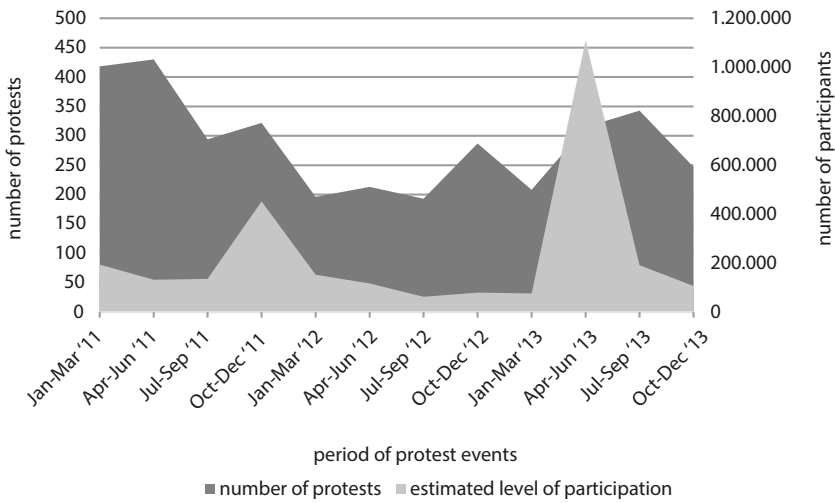


**Figure 2.3** Gezi Park protests at district level (shades) and neighborhood forums (dots) in Istanbul, May-September 2013



In fact, street protests had not been infrequent in Turkey’s political landscape prior to the outburst of Gezi. Our data show that the Gezi Park revolts were embedded in a relatively dynamic protest environment. Figure 2.4 outlines the number of protests and level of participation between 2011 and 2013 on a three-month basis. Obviously, in the period of the Gezi Park protests, the number of protesting people skyrocketed. However, the preceding periods do not seem substantially quiet as regards the reported number of protests, even if the turnout mostly proved lower in relative terms. In the period covered by our data, social and economic issues broadened the reasons citizens took to the streets, yet people also protested distinctly for civil rights and the Kurdish question, labor and environmental problems as well as to express nationalistic sentiments or Islamic resentment with suppressive regimes in the Middle East – most vividly after the military coup in Egypt or the conflict in Syria (Table 2.1). Concerning collective actors,

**Figure 2.4** Number of protest events and participants in Turkey, 2011-2013



it turns out that labor unions came to dominate the organizational realm of street mobilizations in Turkey (Table 2.2). This means that workers in various economic sectors and civil servants employed in public sector jobs override the occupational profile of protest participants in the three-year period we have examined. The salience of social and economic matters along the avenues of protest issues thus reflects on the mobilizing capacity of organizations, labor unions in particular.<sup>4</sup>

Results from our protest event data show that the Gezi Park mobilizations built on a relatively diverse and vibrant protest environment in the country. In our view, this provides a useful indication of the fact that Gezi brought together miscellaneous groups with convergent and divergent stances. The usual suspects of contentious politics in Turkey brought in their own claims, repertoires, and resources, enriching the collective agency of the Gezi Park protests.

4 Note that in 2012 trade union density in Turkey was registered at 4.5 percent, the lowest among the OECD countries.

**Table 2.1 List of classified protest issues (%)**

	2011 (N = 1,464)	2012 (N = 889)	2013 (N = 1,113)
Animal rights	.68 (10)	1.69 (15)	.45 (5)
Civil rights: LGBTQ issues	.14 (2)	–	–
Civil rights: Rights of the disabled	.41 (6)	1.35 (12)	–
Civil rights: Government repression & political prosecutions	6.49 (95)	4.49 (40)	21.47 (239)
Civil rights: Prisoners' rights and conditions	.07 (1)	.11 (1)	.18 (2)
Civil rights: Freedom of expression and assembly	.27 (4)	.45 (4)	.54 (6)
Civil rights: Press freedom and media issues	1.71 (25)	1.24 (11)	1.53 (17)
Civil rights: Freedom of religion	1.02 (15)	2.36 (21)	.81 (9)
Civil rights: Rights of other minorities	.34 (5)	–	–
Conservative social values / pro-Islamist	.75 (11)	2.02 (18)	1.98 (22)
Economic policies and problems	8.27 (121)	10.34 (92)	5.58 (62)
Environment & ecology	5.94 (87)	5.16 (46)	4.05 (45)
Feminist struggle / women's movement	5.11 (76)	4.16 (37)	3.95 (44)
Global/transnational: Anti- "Transnational Union" & anti-capital- ist & anti-imperialist movements	1.16 (17)	2.03 (18)	.45 (5)
International human and civil rights / democratization	5.32 (83)	12.60 (112)	26.96 (300)
Kurdish political movement and pro-Kurdish protests	9.29 (136)	5.62 (50)	2.70 (30)
Labor and syndical issues	7.57 (111)	6.86 (61)	5.48 (61)
National pride and Turkish identity	18.30 (247)	4.50 (40)	1.62 (18)
Peace movement	1.70 (25)	2.58 (23)	1.80 (20)
Political regime, rule of law and jurisprudence	5.26 (77)	5.40 (48)	2.34 (26)
Rural policies and problems	.21 (3)	2.47 (22)	1.17 (13)
Sports	1.09 (16)	2.14 (19)	.90 (10)
Urban policies and problems	2.59 (38)	4.27 (38)	5.48 (61)
Various social issues	15.83 (232)	15.39 (135)	8.36 (93)
<i>Unreported / unidentifiable</i>	1.43 (21)	2.70 (24)	2.25 (25)
TOTAL	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' protest event data from Anadolu Agency

**Table 2.2 Protests by classified organizations (%)**

		2011 (N = 915)	2012 (N = 706)	2013 (N = 867)
<b>Culture and recreation</b>	Culture and arts			
	Sports			
	Other recreation and social clubs	.5	.2	.1
<b>Education and research</b>	Science and technology			
	Social sciences & policy studies	–	.1	.3
<b>Health</b>	Public health & wellness education			
	Health treatment, primarily outpatient	.2	.1	–
<b>Social services</b>	Family services			
	Services for the handicapped			
	Disaster/emergency assistance			
	Refugee assistance	.5	1.2	4.8
	Income support and maintenance			
<b>Environment</b>	Material assistance			
	Environment	3.8	2.5	2.7
	Animal protection			
<b>Development and housing</b>	Community and neighborhood assoc.			
	Social development	1.3	.7	.8
	Housing assistance			
<b>Law, advocacy, and politics</b>	Advocacy associations	(8.7)	(4.6)	(5.9)
	Civil rights associations	(7.3)	(3.8)	(6.3)
	Ethnic/national identity oriented	(1.2)	(1.0)	(.4)
	Civic associations	(.4)	(.8)	(2.0)
	Students/youth	(8.5)	(6.2)	(10.5)
	Legal services	(1.4)	(.7)	(2.1)
	Consumer protection	(1.4)	(.7)	(.3)
	Political parties	(17.2)	(16.4)	(11.3)
<b>Philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion</b>	Other political/ideological	(8.4)	(7.9)	(5.7)
	Voluntarism promotion and support	.1	.1	–
	Fundraising organizations			
<b>Religion</b>	Associations of congregations	1.2	.8	10.3
<b>Business and professional associations, unions</b>	Business associations	(2.7)	(.8)	–
	Professional associations	(6.4)	(6.7)	(6.8)
	Labor unions	(28.1)	(42.6)	(27.6)

Source: Authors' protest event data from Anadolu Agency

### 2.3 Authoritarian drift and the attribution of political opportunities

The Gezi Park protests broke out in a political context of rising authoritarianism during the third consecutive term of the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) in government. As a hybrid regime, Turkey had already been a consistent player in the league of “democracies in danger,” to use Stepan’s (2009) words, where authoritarianism had never been an eliminated risk. Yet, in the subsequent terms of AKP’s single-party rule, the fragile nature of the Turkish democracy resurfaced unmistakably.

One can trace several indicators of the authoritarian path on which Turkish politics embarked under the dominant party period of AKP. As documented in a recent survey by the Associated Press, in the post-9/11 era Turkey registered as one of the most blatant enforcers of anti-terror legislation among more than sixty countries covered in the survey (İğsüz, 2014). Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the Turkish national security state has been aiming at suppressing political opposition: dissident groups as well as other actors, including the ex-allies of the incumbent party who ran into a conflict with its governing elites. In 2000, Turkish courts convicted 327 people of terrorist offences, whereas in 2013 the number of convictions reached 2,280 (Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Judicial Records and Statistics, 2015). In addition, annual reports on political freedoms and civil liberties state that Turkey’s already weak record of press freedom has been steadily deteriorating since 2010 (Freedom House, 2015). Not by chance, by 2012 Turkey had the highest number of journalists in prison (Reporters Without Borders, 2012). Reducing democratic accountability even more, in 2012 the AKP proposed a draft law constraining the competences of the Court of Accounts to impede fiscal monitoring of budgetary decisions and public institutions. Even though the Constitutional Court eventually ruled against the proposal, it was initially passed in the parliament, and the government continued with its legislative efforts to curb the auditing functions of the Court of Accounts (Soyaltın, 2013).

To summarize, while engineering a repressive law and order regime, the government put the system of checks and balances between different institutions in serious jeopardy. The project of urban restructuring in Taksim, therefore, mirrored yet another face of an authoritarian rule. The latter also thrived on a “nanny state” unduly interfering with the public morals and private lives of its citizens, starting from how they should dress and what they should drink, to how many children they should have. In doing so, the top cadres of the party capitalized on a self-assessed notion of the “nation’s

will,” i.e., the will of a formerly belittled and neglected majority of a Sunni Muslim people. Those who refused to abide with the “unobjectionable” mandate relayed to AKP through the ballot box – i.e., political parties, social movements, civil society organizations, or individuals – became the government’s enemies, more often than not criminalized or at best publicly demonized. Hence, the miscellaneous groups who took to the streets upon the police crackdown on the protest encampment in Gezi Park by the end of May 2013, in one way or another “encountered the full wrath of state authority” (Abbas and Yigit, 2014).

Under these circumstances, the Gezi Park revolts acted out an unprecedented mass outcry at the authoritarian power personified in Erdoğan’s leadership. While this was not the single cause of the protests since multiple mechanisms were arguably at play, it certainly nurtured soaring public resentment, particularly among those who were already dissatisfied with the political business of AKP. The hatred towards the government had various origins that lay bare the different political agencies of the protesters. For instance, a leading activist from the Turkish Youth Union (TGB)<sup>5</sup> underscores the *Ergenekon* trials<sup>6</sup> or parliamentary decrees rescinding public celebrations on Republic Day (October 29), as well as the anniversary of the start of the war of independence (May 19), as markers of a process in which “societal opposition was rampant while suppression was escalating” (Interview TK5). Other interviewees point to the patronizing language and the practices subjugating women as well as policies in the realm of family.

The then prime minister once stated that men and women cannot be equal. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Women has been replaced by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Domestic violence and violence against women in general has increased steadily under the rule of AKP. They did not take sufficient precautions against murders of women. Instead, all policies of AKP aim to exert control over private lives and

5 Türkiye Gençlik Birliği [Turkish Youth Union] is one of the largest youth/student organizations in Turkey. It claims to be a defender of the foundational premises of the Turkish Republic, is committed to “Atatürk’s Revolutions,” and has as a main goal: “to unite the Turkish youth, without differentiating between the left-wing and the right-wing, for the purpose of defending the homeland” (Türkiye Gençlik Birliği, 2015).

6 Broad in scope and protracted in time, the *Ergenekon* trials lasted from the first hearing in October 2008 to August 2013. The trials involved more than two hundred suspects ranging from journalists to military officers who were accused of forming a terrorist organization to overthrow the government. The vast majority of the suspects were sentenced to long-term imprisonment.

women's bodies that is shaped in a conservative, Islamist mindset. Take the example of the abortion debate and the rhetoric that "all married couples should have three children." In general, political discourse on women – starting from interfering with the cleavages of anchorwomen on TV to the misogynist statements by Bulent Arinc<sup>7</sup> – serves to strengthen patriarchy (Interview TK9).

The underlying causes of mass outrage were diverse, even if directed at the same adversary, but the most commonly cited source of public frustration was the severity of police violence. Suffice it to recall that, throughout the mobilizations, eight protesters and one policeman died, 4,329 protesters and 697 policemen were injured, and 5,513 people were taken into custody. Even if coercive protest policing had been a familiar phenomenon in Turkey, the harsh way in which the police handled the peaceful resistance in Gezi Park shocked many, above all socially privileged citizens thus far unaware of or indifferent to the violence of the state – which was well-known in segregated, impoverished neighborhoods or in the Kurdish-populated parts of the country. In fact, some activists argue that the heavy-handedness of the police was becoming more tangible in the run-up to the outbreak of Gezi.

From the closure of Taksim to May Day demonstrations to the police assault on the events commemorating the murder of Deniz Gezmiş on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May and further to the protests after the Reyhanlı bombings on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May. [...] What we noticed was that the police, for the first time, started to directly target people's heads and this recently became a common practice. We were feeling that something different was going on. Also recently, a friend of us was shot by the police purposefully at one of the university students' protests (Interview TK3).

In short, the Gezi Park protests united a sizeable proportion of people who were upset by the authoritarian drift of the government, and above all, of Erdoğan as the premier. We do not propose this drift, which had several implications in politics and society, as a single cause for the protests. Rather, we consider it as a structural factor that contributed to the growing public resentment which, under similar circumstances, could also have culminated in a scenario different from a mass uprising.

7 Then spokesperson of the government.



## 2.4 Transformative effects of protest on political subjectivities

Extraordinary moments such as the Gezi Park uprisings emerge as intense time that breaks with normality. As it happened in Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Greece, or the United States during the waves of protests against austerity (della Porta, 2013a; 2015; della Porta and Mattoni, 2014), such moments have the capacity to produce transformative effects on collective actors and individuals. In this last section, we address the question of the eventfulness of the Gezi Park mobilizations by exploring some of the rare encounters lived through the protests which seem to have set off a transformative process.

Scholarly writings as well as lay accounts commonly refer to the birth of a unique *spirit* in Gezi. The latter is denoted as a marker of new political subjectivities which derive from a recomposition of collective and individual identities within the logic of “becoming” (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014). Gezi is said to resemble a “spontaneous coming together in a moment of ‘irruption,’ when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different” (Harvey, 2012: xvii). That “something radically different” owes to a subset of practices enabled by perplexing yet simultaneously awakening encounters. Surprise at the breadth and intensity of relations is often mentioned:

Unlikely brushes of the shoulder took place, surprising encounters between feminists and football fans, secularists and anti-capitalist Muslims, members of Istanbul’s bourgeoisie and the working classes, LGBT activists and professional lawyers, Kurds and Jews. Unpremeditated meetings. Unthought criss-crossings of purpose. [...] This was the thrill, the excitement, the euphoria of Gezi Park, the life energy it exuded, the hope it created. It broke everything out of their boxes. It enabled us all to imagine, think, and possibly be, otherwise. All in the midst of tear gas and plastic bullets and debris (Navaro-Yashin, 2013).

The strong presence of the LGBTQ activists in the mobilizations was emblematic of those encounters. Their recalcitrant efforts and contributions rendered these groups profoundly visible to those eyes that willingly or unwillingly used to turn blind to their existence. In fact, as several slogans and graffiti initially contained sexist connotations and swearwords, LGBTQ and feminist activists spoke up against those internalized vocabularies

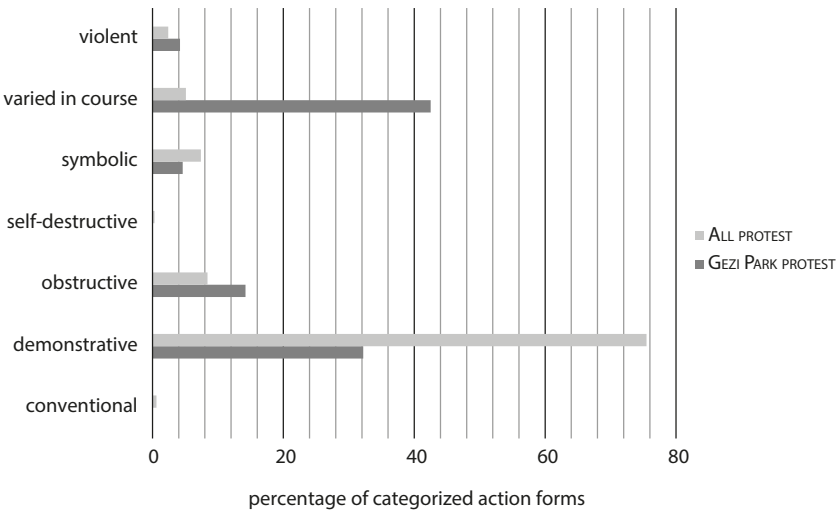
and strove for desexualizing and queering the language of contention in a figurative manner. As it has been noted, “[b]y painting over offensive graffiti, altering some swearword letters with the female symbol, and organizing an alternative ‘Swearword Workshop’ (*Küfür Atölyesi*) to dispute the humiliation of women, gays, and sex workers, queers, together with feminists, challenged the misogynist, homophobic, and transphobic language of the resistance” (Zengin, 2013). It is also noteworthy that football fans – who as a group are infamous for their frequent resorting to a notoriously sexist language – “presented their apologies and responded to the noted concerns by endeavoring to translate their political rage and passion into a more all-embracing language” (2013).

Few among the protesters, including those who regularly partook in the occupation in Gezi Park, knew about the location’s history. The intervention by Nor Zartonk, a political organization of Armenians, shed light on a pre-existing Armenian cemetery and on the history of dispossession by the Turkish state. The cemetery, a gift to the Armenian community by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman, “stretched from the north-west of the barracks to today’s TRT building” (Bieberstein and Tataryan, 2013). In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the cemetery was expropriated by the state and its gravestones used in the construction of the stairs of Gezi Park. During the occupation, Nor Zartonk erected two pieces of symbolic gravestones, writing a line reading “You took our cemetery, you won’t have our park!” and signing it as “Turkey’s Armenians” (2013). It was undoubtedly an unsettling and yet an illuminating practice for both the members of the Armenian community and for other visitors.

Such revealing encounters were probably more commonplace in and around Gezi Park due to its peculiar atmosphere, which could not equally penetrate into other avenues of the mobilizations. Still, firsthand experience of exposure to police violence and the act of fighting it back through a riotous performance shook the minds of many protesters. “I became politically more rigid,” says a non-affiliated activist. “I used to think that we can solve issues by discussion. Previously, if ever I saw someone hurling a stone to the police, I would have said, ‘Don’t do it! They are our policemen.’ In Gezi, I for the first time experienced throwing a stone to the police. That very first stone, of course, never finds its target. You don’t even know how to throw it! But after that first time, your character changes altogether” (Interview TK6).

For many, in other words, Gezi marked a watershed in personal histories. It was an extraordinary moment which implied “the suspension, sometimes spontaneous, sometimes deliberate, of an awareness of the vulnerability of individual bodies in order to cross that threshold of fear” (Parla, 2013).

Figure 2.5 Protests by main action forms, 2011-2013 (%)



Our data on protest events between 2011 and 2013 also sketches the extraordinary nature of the Gezi Park mobilizations in terms of the diversity in action as well as a remarkable drift towards confrontation including the use of violence. Figure 2.5 and Table 2.3 both show that nearly half of the protests involved some form of deviation from the main course of action. In almost one-fourth of the events, protesters proactively or reactively resorted to violence in their fights against the riot police. From the other perspective, almost half of the events were interrupted by coercive policing instruments including the extensive use of teargas, water cannons, and rubber bullets.

Table 2.3 Selected protest characteristics and police coercion (%)

	<i>Deviation &amp; diversity in action repertoires</i>	<i>Proactive or reactive violence by protesters</i>	<i>Coercion &amp; violence by the police</i>
Gezi Park protests (N = 173)	43.4	24.3	48.0
Other protests, 2011-2013 (N = 3,293)	3.2	3.9	7.4

Source: Authors’ protest event data from Anadolu Agency

The evidence of police violence is said to have laid the groundwork for a growing empathy with the Kurdish people who had long suffered under state repression. "People asked themselves: 'Looking at what kind of a state we got to know here, imagine the atrocities the Kurds had lived through.' You know, one of the greatest obstacles to a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish question has been the ignorance wrapped up in the Turkish mindset. This mindset, thanks to Gezi, is breaking down" (Interview TK4). In particular, when 18-year-old Medeni Yıldırım was killed in Lice/Diyarbakir on June 28, 2013, as a result of the gendarme's shootings at a protest against the construction of high-security military stations, the armed crackdown sparked off a wave of demonstrations in solidarity with the Kurds.

For years, people followed the Kurdish question from the mainstream media and now they realize that most of what they knew about it is not true. The demonstration for Medeni Yıldırım in Taksim was mostly attended by Turkish people. That they chanted slogans for Medeni Yıldırım was not simply a slogan commemorating a single person. I therefore believe that these were early signs of a Turkish-Kurdish rapprochement (Interview TK1).

Police violence and critical incidents such as the murder of Medeni Yıldırım certainly raised questions in the minds of *some* Turkish protesters who had previously followed blindly the Turkish state's official narrative on the Kurdish question, although with still uncertain long-term effects. As a case in point, in October 2014, indignant crowds of Kurdish youngsters in Turkey rioted after ISIS launched attacks in Kobanê (a city in northern Syria next to the Turkish border). While more than forty people lost their lives throughout the riots in just a few days, manifestations of solidarity, not least in the western regions of the country, proved to be rather limited.

Unusual encounters throughout Gezi also concern the cleavage between the secularly minded and the devout (Sunni) Muslims in the country. Typically, government authorities branded Gezi as a movement by heretics, atheists, or irreligious with no respect of the values of the Sunni majority. In this sense, the engagement of anti-capitalist Muslims as an Islamic group of activists led to a peculiar achievement in bridging secular and religious rituals. While anti-capitalist Muslims were practicing Friday prayer on Taksim Square, for instance, they were encircled by a group of non-religious activists who volunteered to safeguard the prayer. On another day, just before the

beginning of one of the Islamic holy nights (*kandil*), Gezi participants gave each other *kandil simidi* – a type of sweet bagel consumed particularly on the days of *kandil* – as a gesture of solidarity and empathy with pious citizens. Most notably, the street *iftars* – a form of action that entails self-organized dinners on the streets for breaking the fast during Ramadan, and which in fact had been introduced long before Gezi against conspicuous consumption in religious rituals – turned into a widely celebrated, inclusive performance regardless of people's faith. Few deny the innovative contribution of street *iftars* and other common activities to harnessing a strong sense of solidarity thanks to their essentially non-commodified and sharing logic. "Yet the daunting challenge," warns a leading figure from the anti-capitalist Muslims, "is that secular groups are still hesitant to engage in a genuine communication with religious groups." Pointing at the need for more intense relations in the long duration, he recalls:

[W]hen we made our first call for street *iftar*, a person with a Kemalist outlook approached us and said that he was very happy to join and would like to come again. Then, two women with a pro-AKP outlook said that they would not join our event in Taksim but if we organized the street *iftar* in Fatih (a conservative district in Istanbul), they would be willing to come. Now, street *iftar* brings together people from opposite poles. Eventually, however, this did not work out. The state (officials/actors), by contrast, understood the point. On the Tunnel Square<sup>8</sup> the police dispersed our street *iftar*. Two days later, the gay pride demonstration took place on the same square. Thousands were present and the police did not intervene. The AKP sends the following message to its constituency: "What Gezi is all about, is basically organized by marginal groups, homosexuals and that's it." But they did not think twice about dispersing our street *iftar*. So what should have happened instead was that those who participated in the gay parade should have joined us in Fatih three days later and said, "Look, I am also here!" True, some pro-AKP people joined us as well but these people were not the majority. As long as this bridge will not be built, you cannot expect that the conservatives cut their ties with this government. Why didn't they simply come to Fatih? Was it so difficult? There were about a hundred thousand people who marched at the gay parade. [...] The polarizing language of this government is so strong that it reproduces the same language on the side of the opposition (Interview TK2).

8 On the Şişhane side of the İstiklal Street.

This quote points indeed at the fluidity in the emergence of new (political) subjectivities, as embedded in the notion of subjectivities “in the making” or in a phase of “becoming.” Especially regarding the commune in the park, the most surprising element was not so much the diversity of its identities, but rather “the realization on the part of the people that their identities that were so complete and functional outside the park proved utterly inadequate during the commune. It is out of this that a long-lost feeling of solidarity and commonality visited the park, which is related not to what one is but to what one becomes” (Eken, 2014).

The experimentation with alternative imaginaries of politics, most strikingly through neighborhood forums, might also have worked as critical junctures in shaping new subjectivities. First of all, the forums as open stages to speak up and to listen with reverence embody a claim for civility, displaying “a new public culture that is respectful of the other, and careful in the rhetoric of the movement” (Göle, 2013). Secondly, the forum experiment has led to an affinity with extra-parliamentary politics whereby many participants felt empowered. As one of our interviewees observes, referring to the forums and neighborhood solidarity networks, doing “[p]olitics on a high level is not the only option available. They do not need a political party or association to solve problems. They can get organized without a hierarchical structure” (Interview TK7). The transformative effects aside, these alternative political imaginaries also promoted decentralized, locally self-organized, horizontal forms of democratic governance in society.

Here as well, the degree of consolidation of the Gezi spirit is still an open question. Established patterns of political organization, discourses of dissent, and relations of domination did not simply wither away. More often than not, these patterns prevailed over the routes of political experimentation that were supposedly emancipatory and progressive in language and practice. In turn, while attracting utmost interest among old and new generations of activists as well as the formerly apolitical, new political experimentations also created frustrations, and according to some observers, even paved the way for the decline of the movement. As one of them noted, the role of the more structured organizations, with their attempts at cooptation, had negative effects on the protest developments:

The fact that people could speak up was exactly what the feminist movement considers as a form of politics: women could speak up. There were stages where even people without organizational affiliation could come up from their neighborhoods and vocalize their views. On the other hand, I got really furious to witness the discourse held by the socialist

movement. This was a critical juncture for me. I think that they failed to understand the whole idea of Gezi. They are obsessed with maintaining their power and leadership as a political group. They wanted to speak on behalf of others. They were unwilling to leave space to individual voices. They were very judgmental in many ways. For instance, there was a Kemalist woman who came there on her own initiative. What they did was label her as nationalist, even racist. Such a form of politics made me furious. I realized, once again, that they lack a sense of participatory politics which allows people space. On the contrary, they wanted everything for themselves (Interview TK9).

Some formerly enthusiastic participants were also estranged by organizational rivalry and by the content of discussions at the forums, which at times concentrated on issues of rather low interest for the neighborhood inhabitants. This might have nourished “a movement culture where discussion for the pleasure of discussion can trump the formation of programmatic goals” (Tuğal, 2013).

In fact, they [the forums] were perfect occasions to recruit new members. And whenever someone from a particular organization was on the stage, their supporters or fellows applauded them with passion. *Yogurtcu Forum*, for instance, turned into a feminist forum. Besides, people started to discuss issues that do not concern ordinary people's lives. For example, having a squat is not a priority issue for many residents. But focusing on such issues alienated many people. For me, for that matter, forums lost their appeal (Interview TK6).

In brief, while at the individual level and in the short term protest emerged as eventful, the potential for the consolidation of the Gezi spirit needs time to be assessed.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The June 2013 uprisings in Turkey were rooted in long-lasting urban struggle against the municipal plan to transform Taksim Square in Istanbul. The protests were initially spearheaded by young and educated urbanites with high cultural capital, and yet they eventually turned into a socially diverse and spatially diffuse form of mass mobilization. It was not a class revolt as such, but class politics was certainly embedded in the motives and political

articulations of some, if not all, participants. Above all, a mass outcry at government's political encroachments into particular lifestyles, values, and orientations merged with growing public resentment against the same government's aggressively neoliberal policies in the urban space. The police crackdown on the peaceful resistance in the Park put flesh on the bones of the authoritarian face of the AKP rule personified in Erdoğan's leadership, and it paradoxically united overlapping and conflicting arrays of opposition to his rule.

Gezi certainly came as a surprise, but it did not come from nowhere. Social discontent had already taken different forms, including mass demonstrations, prior to the uprisings in June. What Gezi unexpectedly achieved is to mobilize large numbers of non-affiliated crowds without an activist background or protest record together with those groups and organizations that had been known as the usual suspects of contentious politics in Turkey. The many Gezi-inspired occupations of public places all over the country contributed to intensify relations.

In terms of its consequences, there are many questions yet to be addressed in view of future developments. The Gezi uprisings clearly unleashed transformative effects, at least on an individual level, and set the ground for the formation of new political subjectivities. Unusual but revealing encounters with violent state apparatuses, with the other and unknown dissidents on the street as well as experimentations with alternative imaginaries of politics such as neighborhood assemblies empowered people, broke routines, and let the previously unthinkable emerge. Yet, old subjectivities have not been altogether replaced by new ones, as established norms of political organization, discourse, and stigmatization did not disappear. Hence, new subjectivities, if any, are at best in the making or in a process of becoming. They are still "in formation" – a "work in progress," "an interactive and shared definition reduced by several individuals and groups that is continually negotiated, tested, modified and confirmed" (Özkırımlı, 2014). While Gezi was cleared by the police, the Gezi *spirit*, as its sympathizers would name it, survived, but not unchallenged.



## List of interviews

TK1	member of Emek Partisi. <sup>9</sup> Istanbul, October 21, 2014
TK2	member of Kapitalizmle Mücadele Derneği. <sup>10</sup> Istanbul, October 24, 2014
TK3	member of Halkevleri. <sup>11</sup> Istanbul, April 6, 2015
TK4	member of DISK. <sup>12</sup> Istanbul, April 8, 2015
TK5	member of Turkish Youth Union. April 12, 2015
TK6	Independent activist. Istanbul, April 14, 2015
TK7	member of Halkların Demokratik Partisi. <sup>13</sup> Istanbul, April 16, 2015
TK8	member of Istanbul Kent Savunması. <sup>14</sup> Istanbul, April 16, 2015
TK9	member of Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif. <sup>15</sup> Istanbul, April 16, 2015

9 Emek Partisi [Labor Party] is a left-wing political party that is a member of International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations (ICMLPO).

10 Kapitalizmle Mücadele Derneği [Association for Fighting Capitalism] was initially formed by an activist group known as the Anti-Capitalist Muslims. They challenge mainstream interpretations and practices of Islam which, in their view, is reduced to a set of rituals, fraught with a consumerist attitude and alienated from ideas of social justice. Later on, Anti-Capitalist Muslims moved into the associational realm.

11 Halkevleri [People's Houses] is a socialist association with a large network in the whole country. The association runs a broad spectrum of activities including housing, education, health, women's rights, the disabled, urban and environmental issues, and working life.

12 Acronym for Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu [Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions], one of the oldest labor confederations in Turkey. The Confederation was banned after the military coup in 1980 and legally resumed its activities in 1992.

13 Halkların Demokratik Partisi [People's Democratic Party] is a left-wing political party and for the time being the main parliamentary actor of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey. It was preceded by a number of pro-Kurdish political parties which had been outlawed by the state on allegations of terrorism and ties with the PKK. Recently, the leading figures of the Kurdish political movement set forth a new agenda with a larger public appeal in the population, not limited to claiming to represent the Kurdish people. On the top of this agenda lies the idea to promote local self-governance and democratic autonomy, but also to address various issues related to ecology, labor, women's rights, and LGBTQ issues. As a result, they founded Halkların Demokratik Kongresi [People's Democratic Congress], a broad left-wing alliance. The HDP is in one sense a by-product of the HDK.

14 Istanbul Kent Savunması [Istanbul Urban Defense] is a coordinated body of urban movements, neighborhood forums and associations, environmental organizations, and solidarity networks that arose from the Gezi Park resistance. For more information, see its inauguration at [www.yeniyol.org/istanbul-kent-savunmasi-kurulusunu-ilan-etti/](http://www.yeniyol.org/istanbul-kent-savunmasi-kurulusunu-ilan-etti/), accessed on 08.09.2015.

15 Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif [Socialist Feminist Collective] is an anti-capitalist feminist organization in Turkey.

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### 3 Brazil's popular awakening – June 2013

Accounting for the onset of a new cycle of contention

*Mariana S. Mendes*

#### Abstract

In a country that had not witnessed such a large-scale cycle of contention since 1992, the protests of June 2013 took everyone by surprise. What started as a relatively small protest against the rise of public transportation fares in São Paulo – organized by the Free Fare Movement (MPL) – rapidly escalated into a large wave of mobilization that swept Brazil from north to south. This article will take a close look at the onset of this new cycle of contention in order to trace how and why it came about. It will argue that the tactics of the MPL together with police repression – particularly its place and targets – were the triggering factors that provided the masses with a window of opportunity to join the protests and, in this process, publicly show their dissatisfaction with a variety of issues while (re)discovering the appeal of the streets. The June Journeys have shown that Brazil's record in the reduction of social inequalities and economic growth was far from sufficient for a population that expected equally visible changes in the provision of public services, in a scenario where corruption and World Cup spending signaled that public money was not being efficiently managed.

**Keywords:** Brazil, June 2013, protests, Brazilian Spring, June Journeys, vinegar revolt, Free Fare Movement

#### 3.1 Introduction

It came as a surprise to many that in June 2013, Brazil joined the group of states where massive popular uprisings swept the country from north to south. Its good economic performance over the previous decade left many analysts wondering where all the dissatisfaction had suddenly come from. When most of the world was being hit by the international financial crisis, Brazil's economy was still growing, the minimum wage was increasing, and distributive social programs were contributing to reduce social inequalities and take millions out of poverty. Furthermore, the comparatively

extraordinarily high levels of government popularity prior to June 2013, together with a stable democratic regime, differentiated Brazil from the other dozens of countries where people took to the streets.<sup>1</sup> The usual characterization (or, judging by the recent events, *mischaracterization*) of the Brazilian people as politically lethargic adds to this picture.

Indeed, in a country where hugely publicized corruption scandals – such as the “mensalão” affair in 2005 – failed to attract a substantial wave of popular indignation, a R\$0.20 increase in public transportation fares would hardly have qualified as a possible trigger for large-scale protests. And yet it was. The June 6<sup>th</sup> mobilization of the Movimento Passe Livre – MPL (Free Fare Movement), gathering around 2,000 people in São Paulo – quickly spiraled into a massive social uprising, bringing more than 1 million people to the streets of Brazil on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Together with the Fora Collor movement of 1992 and the Diretas Já campaign of 1985, these were the largest demonstrations in Brazil’s history (now surpassed by more recent protests). But while the former two movements had one clear goal, the same cannot be said about the 2013 events. The cacophony of demands issued as the protests developed goes well beyond the reversal of the R\$0.20 increase for which the MPL was initially fighting. This is why the June events – also known as June Journeys or Brazilian Spring (even though it was autumn in the southern hemisphere) – are best described as being *catalyzed* rather than *caused* by an increase in public transportation fares. After all, protests over this issue are far from new in Brazil – the MPL itself has been active since 2005 and took inspiration from previous revolts of the same type (such as Revolta do Buzú in Salvador, 2003; Revolta da Catraca in Florianópolis, 2004).

Despite being a resource-poor movement, the MPL proved to have an extraordinary capacity of mobilization, attaining levels of disruption hardly ever seen in the main streets of São Paulo. The transition from thousands to hundreds of thousands, however, appears to have been the direct result of disproportionate police repression and the diffusion of mobilizing calls through online platforms. Scenes of violence against the white middle class in the main business and shopping streets of São Paulo had an impact that the all-too-common scenes of violence in the peripheries do not have. Outrage was visible in both social and traditional media. The latter went

1 In March 2013, only 7 percent of the population considered that the government of Dilma Rousseff was doing a bad job, while 65 percent thought she was doing a good/very good one. These figures changed to 25 percent and 43 percent respectively during the month of June (Datafolha, 2013).

from a clearly hostile coverage of the protests to an almost sympathetic one, probably helping in the process of pouring people into the streets. The bigger the demonstrations became, the wider the breadth of the demands, generally targeting the poor quality of public services – such as health and education; the misuse of public money – particularly for mega-sporting events (the World Cup and the Olympics); corruption, police violence, and so on. The variety of demands is hardly surprising given the decentralized/uninstitutionalized way in which the protests came about, with social media networks and digital platforms proving to be, once more, a powerful mobilizing resource. But if repression played a crucial role in igniting the masses, this tells us little about the actual reasons why people took to the streets. The plurality of demands made clear that, far from being a grievance-free society, Brazilian people do have a lot to feel unsatisfied about.

In what follows, I will start by providing a brief overview of the socio-political context in Brazil over the years prior to 2013, highlighting that, beneath the apparent successes at the economic and social level, numerous anomalies remain. I will then proceed with a detailed account of the unfolding of the June events, focusing in particular on two key moments: (1) the start of the protests, to understand how a small movement like the MPL managed to gather thousands of people and provoke major disruptions in São Paulo; and (2) the period of massification of the demonstrations, in order to shed light on what brought so many people to the streets. In a subsequent section, I will focus on the goals and structure of the MPL, a movement without which the June Journeys would not have seen the light of day. I will finish by providing potential explanations for the *timing* and the emergence of these protests, putting into evidence the shortcomings of the main social movement theoretical approaches in this regard.

Besides a thorough examination of the existing literature, my considerations are based on media analysis, including traditional media – *Folha de São Paulo* (the newspaper with the highest circulation in Brazil) being the most extensively examined source – and social media, in particular the pages of the most active movements and groups. In addition, I carried out a dozen interviews, in a semi-structured fashion, with participants in the protests in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (including three active members of the MPL and two of Forúm de Lutas Contra o Aumento da Passagem [the most active group in Rio]). This was complemented by conversations with a few Brazilian academics and a journalist who accompanied the protests.

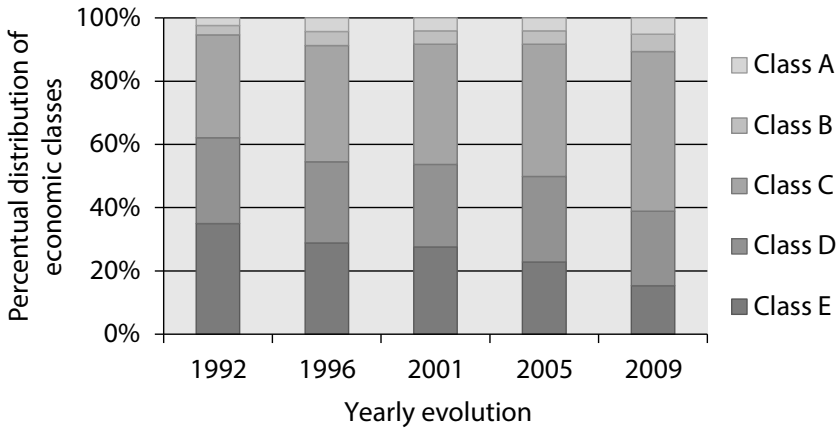
### 3.2 Brazil's socio-political scenario: A real success story?

Brazil was, until recently, repeatedly depicted as a successful case of a fast-growing economy in which economic output had a largely positive effect in the development of the country as well as on the lives of many Brazilians. Indeed, the increase in the rate of economic growth has had a direct impact on the improvement of various social indicators such as the reduction of extreme poverty and income inequality, expansion of access to public health and education, and increases in life expectancy, among others. By way of example, extreme poverty declined from 16.4 percent in 1995 to 4.7 percent in 2009 while, in the same period, the bottom 20 percent of the income distribution scale saw an increase of about 127 percent in income (compared to an average of 54 percent for the top 20 percent) (Souza, 2012: 5-6). This was not only the direct result of favorable international circumstances that stimulated the Brazilian economy, but also of internal reforms in which a pro-poor growth strategy was purposely adopted (Souza, 2012). The real and significant increases in both the minimum wage and targeted social assistance benefits were part of this strategy. These changes in indicators were so significant that the Workers' Party (hereafter PT [Partido dos Trabalhadores]) can proudly be credited with having transformed the class structure in Brazil. As shown in the graph below, the so-called "new middle class" – categorized officially as "class C" (any household with a per capita income between R\$291 and R\$1,019) – now represents over 50 percent of the population.

In short, one will not have a hard time finding the statistics that back up the picture of Brazil as a real success story. The confidence in this narrative will, however, depend on which aspects one chooses to emphasize. Indicators on the expansion of educational opportunities and better access to healthcare tell us little about the persistently poor quality of both public schools and the public healthcare system. The same applies to the focus on relative measures as opposed to absolute ones: while Brazil's progress is uncontestable, a focus on the decrease in income inequality masks the fact that, in absolute terms, Brazil is still at the bottom of World Bank data on income disparities.<sup>2</sup> Professor James Petras puts it bluntly: "The greatest indignity to those receiving subsistence handouts was to be told that, in this class-caste society, they were 'middle class' [...] as they crawled home from hours in traffic, back from jobs whose monthly salary paid for one tennis match at an upscale country club" (Petras, 2013).

2 Based on data available between 2008 and 2013, Brazil ranks as the ninth most unequal country out of the 112 evaluated. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.

**Figure 3.1 Evolution of Economic Classes, 1992-2009**



Source: Center of Social Policies – FGV, based on macrodata from PNAD/IBGE

Using income as the sole criterion for categorizing social classes has been a severely questioned method in Brazil precisely because it might be wrongly translated into life quality. Critics continuously point to the fact that the inclusion of a “new middle class” was based purely on a growth in income or subsidies and a consequent increase in access to consumer goods, a process that was not accompanied by a similar improvement in the quality of basic public services in areas such as health, education, transport, security, housing, or even leisure. As one interviewee has stated: “Brazil has now more people with means and access to consumer goods, but these same people take two hours to get to work, have their kids in low-quality schools, no access to good healthcare and few decent public spaces in the cities...” (Interview BR5).

For the economic journalist Patrick Cruz, the main problem lies with the quality rather than the quantity of public spending in Brazil. Despite having one of the highest tax rates in the world – the equivalent to 36 percent of its GDP – Brazil lags behind when it comes to the effective management of public resources. In a country where 9 percent of the GDP is directed to the health system, he says, it is hard to understand why hospital corridors continue to be overcrowded with people awaiting treatment (Cruz, 2013). Mismanagement and inefficiency seem to plague Brazil's public administrative apparatus, a problem that can perhaps only compare to the diversion of funds. According to a study of the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo, it is estimated that corruption consumes between 1.38 and 2.3 percent of Brazil's total GDP yearly (Cruz, 2013).



This, in turn, is connected to the all too common practices of patronage and patrimonialism in Brazilian politics and businesses – the former understood as the dispensing of favors and public resources to cultivate allies and the latter referring to elites' perception of public resources as personal property (Montero, 2005). If the more recent Petrobras scandal has shaken Brazilian politics and society to the core – starting in 2014 and decisively contributing to the people continuously pouring into the streets afterwards –, in 2013 there were already several good illustrations of the pervasiveness of corruption, most notably the “mensalão” (“big monthly allowance”) scandal. Through this scheme, which first became public in 2005, large sums of public money were used to buy support for President Lula's legislative program in Congress. It proved to be an endemic arrangement as it involved a total of nine parties and led to the resignation of several of the most important figures within the PT. Although it caused the Workers' Party to fall from grace, Lula's economic performance and social programs got the PT reelected in 2006 and again in 2010. For many of the PT's supporters, however, it was the ultimate proof that, contrary to all that it had advocated before, the PT constituted no alternative to “politics as usual.”

This was particularly the case for vast segments of the Left, who saw with widespread disenchantment the transformation of the Workers' Party from a large left-wing movement with socialist ideals into a catch-all mainstream party. By distancing itself from more militant sectors, significantly shortening its programmatic differences, making opportune alliances, and setting macroeconomic stability as its top priority, the PT practiced all that it had preached against before. As an ex-member of the party has put it, the PT seemed no longer to have a project for society, but only for power (César Benjamin, quoted in Flynn, 2005: 1250). Its traditional and distinctive emphasis on forms of participatory politics, leading to the creation of Councils of public policy and National Public Policy Conferences, has also been a source of disappointment since these mechanisms are generally deemed to be irrelevant. Even when it comes to social policies, its radical departure from the kind of structural reforms it used to advocate – land reform being a case in point – and its continuity with the previous incumbent government were widely noted (Hunter, 2008: 27). Some go as far as to suggest that the improvements in social indicators were part of a larger pre-Lula tendency, doubting whether there is something distinctively *leftist* to them (Samuels, 2008). The PT, however, has been generally credited with expanding social programs – such as *Bolsa Família* (a widely publicized conditional cash transfer program to the poorest families) – believed to be the source of the PT's continuous electoral support (as it is now a party supported mostly by

the poorest layers of society, contrary to when it was initially elected). The fact that it has managed to take millions out of poverty without challenging the concentration of wealth in a few elites is a genius move for some and a source of disappointment for others.

In this scenario, it is far from surprising that the social movement scene in Brazil has witnessed an almost silent but significant shift. While during the 1980s and 1990s the PT gathered around itself the most significant trade unions and social movements – committed to the implementation of the ideal of participatory democracy at the institutional level – this relationship has naturally grown increasingly tense over the 2000s. On the one hand, Lula proved to be particularly efficient at coopting the major trade unions by granting them subsidies and positions inside the government.<sup>3</sup> On the other, new kinds of social movements started to take over the streets (along with iconic ones that had always preferred non-institutionalized forms of protest, such as the Landless Workers Movement), claiming autonomy from institutionalized politics and attracting mostly the younger generation, who has no living memory of the period of democratization and its mass workers' mobilization. Many of these belonged either to a "new social movement" (LGBTQ, feminist, environmentalist) or were akin to the anti-globalization movement and the idea that "another world is possible" (as in the case of the Free Fare Movement) (Abers, 2013). Part of an increasingly diversified social movement scene are also the voices coming from the periphery of large cities – emphasizing issues of race, police violence, housing, among others – or, on the other side of the political spectrum, conservative religious movements (Tatagiba, 2014). The June 2013 protests were a definitive confirmation of the greater potential of "anti-institutionalization" movements to attract larger numbers of people at a time when the PT's detachment from the streets is more conspicuous than ever.

### 3.3 The June Journeys

#### First stage of the June Journeys

Rises of transportation fares in Brazil hardly ever come unchallenged. For every increase, small-scale protests triggered by diverse groups (mostly young people) are to be expected; even though they do not generally gather

3 In fact, the PT is commonly accused of filling the state apparatus with PT members and sympathizers, merging state and party to an unprecedented extent. Whereas some perceive this as a positive way to bring "common people" to positions of power, others see it as pure nepotism.

massive popular support (at least prior to June 2013), there were a few cases in which the pressure of the protesters made political authorities revoke or postpone their decisions (e.g. *Revolta do Busão* in Natal, August 2012; Porto Alegre in March 2013). Scenes of violence between the police and the protesters accompanied by the burning of buses, tires, or garbage bins are not a new occurrence either. The discontentment with public transportation might partially be explained by the poor quality of public transportation services (often overcrowded), coupled with the fact that they are exceptionally high-priced: when adjusting public transportation fares to the minimum wage of different countries, São Paulo and Rio come up as the cities where the highest percentage of one's income goes to public transportation (G1 Globo, 2013a). According to a *Datafolha* survey, 75 percent of the people in São Paulo consider public transportation overpriced, and 55 percent think their quality is "awful" (Oliveira, Costa, and Neto, 2013: 5-6).

In this light, the mobilization of the MPL in São Paulo and three other cities at the beginning of June, after the fare increased from R\$3 to R\$3.20, was far from unexpected. What perhaps was not predictable was its capacity to mobilize between 2,000 and 5,000 people in the first days of the protests, blocking the traffic in some of the most important avenues of São Paulo. Considering that it is a fairly small social movement, this was already quite an impressive achievement. The MPL took seriously the main slogan used in the rallies – *Se a tarifa não baixar, a cidade vai parar* ("If the fare doesn't go down, the city will stop") – and called for almost consecutive protests, causing the police and the governor of São Paulo to lose patience. One of the key differences between these protests and the previously organized performances of the MPL lies in this tactic: to convene protests on an almost daily basis, without giving a truce to the police. This is an aspect pointed out by an activist who has been close to the MPL since its birth and who, in addition, highlights the difference in esthetics:

At first the MPL went to the streets without much radicalism, with a more pacific posture, but in 2013 it adopted a more radicalized stance, which attracted the attention of the media and social networks. [...] There was no truce. Every other day there was a protest, between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> of June – 4 acts, one bigger than the other. We used our own bodies to close the avenues of the city. [...] In Brazil, the police throws the first bomb at protesters and everyone runs away. This time we did not run away. The "black block" kind of esthetics was a great agitating and propagandistic factor (Interview BR3).

This, combined with the choice of a strategic and symbolic place – the main avenues of the city – was enough to create a level of disruption the MPL had not achieved before. In the words of an MPL member,

We stopped the main avenues of São Paulo for the first time. [...] We broke, literally and symbolically, some of the barriers imposed by the spatial segregation of the city. [...] The second protest took place in Marginal Pinheiros, a place that was never occupied by people before, only by cars, traffic, overcrowded buses and merchandise in circulation. There, we felt that it was possible to win, that the city could be not only of cars, but of people too. The symbolic element in the occupation of the Marginal in the process of resistance was essential to strengthen the struggle (Interview BR8).

Protests were organized by the MPL on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of June, in what can be considered the first stage of the June Journeys. At this point, the demonstrations still had one specific aim – to revoke the fare increase – and were composed almost exclusively of young, educated people. The number of people protesting varied between 2,000-5,000 on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and 12,000 on the 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup> The form of protest remained the same: the demonstrators would walk through the busiest avenues of the city, in a previously defined trajectory, creating as much traffic jam as possible while chanting and holding posters (stating, for example, “3.20 is robbery”; “for a public and decent transport”; “for a life without turnstiles”). The marches invariably ended in confrontations with the police while various objects were set on fire and bus, subway stations, shops, or banks vandalized by a few “agitators.” Even though the MPL distanced itself from those acts, traditional media and several politicians depicted the whole of the protesters as “vandals” or “criminals.” The major news outlets – *Globo*, *Folha*, and *Estadão* – invariably focused on confrontations with the police and vandalism: “Protesters vandalize the center of São Paulo” was the headline in *Folha* on June 12<sup>th</sup>, while *Globo* described the center of São Paulo as a “war zone” (Herdy, 2013). The following day the governor of São Paulo promised to be tougher against vandalism (*Folha*, 2013a). The editorial of *Folha de S. Paulo* leaves no doubt concerning its hostility towards the MPL, urging public powers to act:

Their demand of reversing the fare increase [...] is no more than an excuse, a vile excuse. These are young people predisposed to violence

4 According to estimates by the military police, Datafolha, and the MPL itself.

by a pseudo-revolutionary ideology, searching to take advantage of the general discontentment with the fare increase. Worse than that, only the central goal of this little group: free public transport. The unrealism of this banner already denotes the intention of vandalizing public property [...]. It's time to put a full stop to this. The municipality and the military police need to enforce the existing restrictions for the protests in Avenida Paulista (*Folha*, 2013b).

The demonstrations of June 13<sup>th</sup> would prove to be a game changer in this regard: because police repression was especially brutal and indiscriminate on this date, media coverage changed radically. The fact that there were a dozen journalists among the thousands of people injured and arrested has certainly contributed to this. The story of Giuliana Vallone – a journalist at *Folha de S.Paulo* who was shot in the eye with a rubber bullet at a moment in which there were no violent protests around her (and therefore no apparent reason for such an act) – was among the many videos and accounts that went viral on social media, denouncing both the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of violence and the arbitrariness of the detentions made. Particularly ludicrous in this regard was the fact that several people ended up being arrested for carrying vinegar with them (which allegedly attenuates the effect of tear gas), prompting all sorts of mocking cries on the web and during the following protests – “legalize vinegar,” “liberté, égalité, fraternité, vinaigré” and “V for Vinegar” were some of the mottos that made the June Journeys also known as the Vinegar Revolt.

An analysis of *Folha de S.Paulo* in the days following the June 13<sup>th</sup> protest is particularly instructive in detecting the change of mood and tone in regards to the protests. The focus was no longer on “vandals” but on the excessiveness of police violence and its consequences. Already on the 14<sup>th</sup>, an editorial piece had a radically different tone from the day before: “even rejecting vandalism, one should recognize that protests can strengthen democracy. It is necessary to guarantee that movements of protest occur without judging what motivates them” (*Folha*, 2013c). While the governor of São Paulo still tried to support the police, the mayor of the city criticized its actions and called for a meeting with the MPL. The day before the next protest (scheduled for June 17<sup>th</sup>), *Folha*'s Ombudsman wrote in the newspaper that *Folha*, together with other major news sources, had made a mistake when focusing only on the destruction caused by the protests, “not measuring which share of the protesters were there just to destroy and not giving due attention to all the others” (*Folha*, 2013d). The tremendous impact of the June 13<sup>th</sup> protests on social media was visible on the Facebook

page of the MPL, where hundreds of thousands of people signed up for the next protest on June 17<sup>th</sup>.

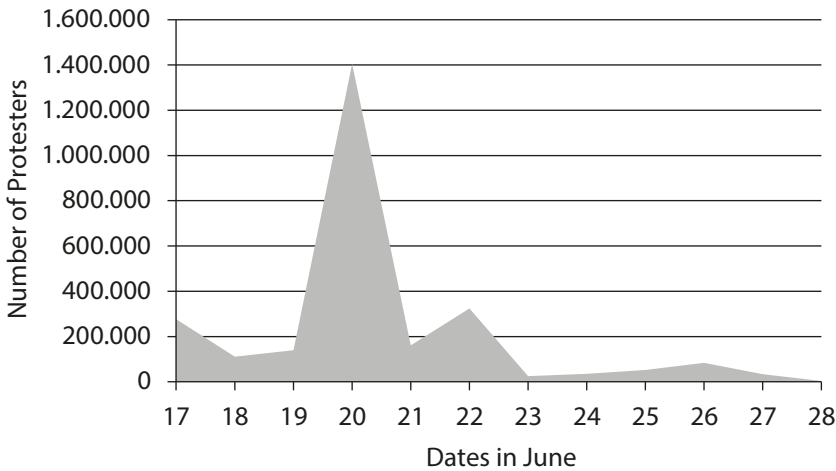
Even though the Brazilian military police has all too often shown itself to be violent and dysfunctional, it is used to applying such methods in territorial areas that are unworthy of media attention, most notably in the *favelas*. While police violence has been the focus of specific groups of activists for a long time, it rarely captured the attention of the masses. The difference, this time, was in space and targets. The heart of the city of São Paulo could not be more different from the areas where the military police is most used to acting. Avenida Paulista, where most of the protests took place, is the epicenter of business and consumerism for affluent classes. Passers-by who were affected by police violence, as well as most of the protesters, were white middle class, as opposed to the poor black people that are usually the target of the police. In an interview with a journalist who has covered the protests on the ground from day one, this difference is highlighted: “People got outraged because, this time, violence was exercised against the educated white middle class, which is not used to being repressed by the police [...]. Plus, it took place in a region that is not usually a scene of violence. [...] The whole of the white middle class felt victimized by the actions of the police, having a fundamental role in the next demonstrations” (Interview BR1).

### Second stage of the June Journeys

As a result of excessive police repression, hundreds of thousands of people joined the demonstrations, widening their demands almost in the same proportion. While an estimated 5,000 people participated in the June 13<sup>th</sup> protest in São Paulo, the following demonstration – on June 17<sup>th</sup> – gathered 65,000 people in São Paulo and 100,000 in Rio de Janeiro, apart from a couple of thousand in other Brazilian cities. São Paulo was no longer the epicenter of the protests, which rapidly spread to every single Brazilian state capital, with Rio now taking the lead in the hundreds of thousands pouring onto the streets. Protests reached their peak on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, one day after the mayors of São Paulo and Rio announced the revocation of the increase in public transportation fares, with almost 1,500,000 people demonstrating in more than 100 cities.

Beginning on June 17<sup>th</sup>, the protests took on a life of their own in the sense that, far from being controlled by the MPL or any other group/movement, they became exceptionally diffuse in organizational and spatial terms. Contributing to this was the fact that social media played a pivotal role as a mobilizing tool. Based on IBOPE's data (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics), 62 percent of protesters learned about the demonstrations

**Figure 3.2** Number of Protesters, June 17<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup>\*



\* Lower-bound estimates  
Source: G1 based on data compilation from the Police, Datafolha, COPPE-UFRJ, and NitTrans

through Facebook, and 75 percent used social networks to call other people to the protests. The fact that 46 percent had never participated in protests before (IBOPE, 2013) attests to the inclusive potential of “digitally enabled action networks.”

Indeed, following Bennett and Segerberg (2012), the second stage of the June 2013 events seems to have followed a “logic of connective action” more than the traditional logic of collective action, in the sense that technology platforms took the conventional place of established political organizations and assumed a preeminent role in mediating collective action. This contrast is consequential because, as Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue, self-organizing digital networks (as opposed to organizationally brokered networks) grant room for the development of “personal action frames” and therefore have a greater potential for larger and more inclusive action, capable of scaling up more quickly and more flexible in terms of moving political targets and bridging different issues. Because, under this logic, action is not organized based on group identity and membership in previously established networks but rather forged through loose digital networks, the potential for personalization and inclusiveness is greater.

This was clearly reflected in the number of people pouring into the streets as well as in their broad range of demands, visible in the countless banners that thousands or hundreds of thousands of individuals drafted in their homes and brought to the streets. Despite their large diversity,



a significant share of them were in fact related to the management of public money and the quality of public services (the basic idea being that the political class – for the most part corrupt – is not using public money as it should). This was visible in the thousands of banners criticizing the diversion of public funds, the excessive spending for the World Cup, and the poor quality of the health and education systems (e.g. “We want hospitals and schools in FIFA standards,” “There is money for stadiums but not for education,” “If your son gets sick, take him to the stadium,” “If robbery does not stop, we will stop Brazil,” “Where does taxpayers’ money go to?”). When IBOPE asked the protesters, on June 20<sup>th</sup>, for the three main reasons that made them participate in the demonstrations, the most commonly mentioned were the following: (1) public transportation issues (mentioned by over 53% of the interviewees); (2) corruption/diversion of public funds (49%); (3) issues related to the health system (37%); (4) excessive spending on the World Cup (31%); and (5) concerns related to the education system (30%), among several others that did not achieve such high percentages (G1 Globo, 2013b). One needs to see these results in the context of the protests of June 20<sup>th</sup>, however, which is probably the point at which the breadth of the demands was larger. A difference of a few days in the administration of the surveys might have changed the results quite substantially: even though we cannot directly compare IBOPE’s survey with any other (since it was conducted in eight state capitals while the *Datafolha* surveys were restricted to São Paulo), it is quite interesting to see that three days earlier (June 17<sup>th</sup>) the São Paulo protesters hardly mentioned the costs of the World Cup or any issue related to the education and healthcare systems. At this point, the increase in bus fares was the most commonly mentioned demand (56%), followed by corruption (40%), police violence (31%), dissatisfaction with politicians (24%), and better quality transport (27%) (Datafolha, 2013).

The heterogeneity of demands also reflects the diversity of participants. While at the start it was clear that the demands were associated with a left-wing agenda (the MPL itself recognizes and it is well-known that many of its members are part of far left-wing groups), the magnification of the protests turned them into what Singer (2013: 34) defines as a “political rainbow.” For members of the MPL and several analysts/academics, this was part of a purposive attempt of the media and right-wing sectors to deradicalize the protests and bring them closer to their own conservative agendas (focused on corruption inside the PT). It seems to me that, no matter how influential their role, the enormous amplification of the protests through more or less decentralized means would almost inevitably lead to a diversification of



demands, especially considering that, at the time, there were more resonant issues in the country's political scene than the transportation fare. Moreover, many of the demands might actually not be as out of context as it seems if one takes into account that the complaints initially made about public transportation – overpriced, offering poor service, badly managed by an oligarchy – are the same for other public services.

In fact, it is interesting to note how the most commonly cited demands match (or not) what Brazilians perceive as the main problems of the country. The quality of the health system has been at the top of Brazilians' major concerns since 2008. In December 2012, 40 percent of Brazilians ranked it as the number one problem in the country, way above the second most commonly referenced problem (violence and security, indicated by 20 percent). It is hardly surprising, then, that it appeared as one of the main demands at one point, together with the quality of the educational system, which on average ranked as the third biggest source of anxiety from 2008 to 2013 (oscillating between 7 and 13 percent). Interestingly, corruption – which according to the above-mentioned surveys was the second most prominent issue in the 2013 protests – was not placed as highly on Brazilians' list of concerns, varying between 4 and 7 percent before the protests. Tellingly, it went from the fifth to the third most often mentioned problem right after the biggest demonstrations in June. Because the “mensalão” trial was taking place beginning in August 2012, the corruption theme was often on the news and therefore ripe for salience-increasing effects. Moreover, corruption and inadequate spending in infrastructure for the World Cup were often closely associated. The latter was a particularly prominent theme in June 2013 (one year before the World Cup) since the Confederations Cup (a sort of World Cup rehearsal) took place at the same time as the protests and transformed the stadiums where matches were being played into an additional space for protests.

One should, however, be cautious not to overestimate the preciseness and fragmentation of people's motivations to join the protests. Almost from the beginning of the demonstrations, there was a call for people to “come to the streets” and, particularly after June 13<sup>th</sup>, to show their overall dissatisfaction. The general feeling was that these were times of change, that it was time for people to take their own destinies in their hands and therefore come to the streets, fight for their rights, and build a better country, while sending a powerful message to political elites. Some of the most popular chants and banners simply said, “Come to the streets,” “The giant woke up,” “We are out of Facebook,” “Sorry for the inconvenience, we are changing Brazil,” or “We closed the streets to open new ways.” *Vem pra rua* (“Come to the streets”) and

**Figure 3.3 Public perceptions of Brazil's main problems**

	March 2011	January 2012	December 2012	27/28 June 2013
Health	31	39	40	48
Violence/security	16	14	20	10
Education	12	8	11	13
Unemployment	11	9	6	4
Corruption	3	7	4	11

Source: Datafolha. Retrieved from: <http://media.folha.uol.com.br/datafolha/2013/07/01/avaliacao-dilma.pdf>

*O gigante acordou* (“The giant woke up”) were also two of the most popular Facebook pages created at the time, with the purpose of publicizing new protests and keeping “netizens” updated as to what was happening in the streets. This is to say that the act of protesting in itself – i.e., publicly showing dissatisfaction – might have been an end in itself for many.

Another important feature of the second stage of the June Journeys was the general rejection of political parties, a clear symptom of the rejection of the political class. Although it was possible to spot far left-wing parties from the beginning, hostility towards the presence of political parties in the demonstrations grew in the same proportion as the protests. This was visible not only in the treatment of party militants by some of the protesters (to the point of flag-burning and physical harassment), but most notably in the various banners denoting people’s discontentment with politics – “without parties,” “no right, no left, I just want to go ahead,” or “parties do not represent us” were some of the messages often heard. According to an IBOPE survey, 89 percent of the protesters said they did not feel represented by any political party (96 percent also declared lack of party affiliation, even though 61 percent said they were very interested in politics) (IBOPE, 2013). The occupation of spaces representative of political power – such as the rooftop of the Brazilian Congress in Brasília on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June – is also quite symbolic in this regard. The rejection of the political class contrasted heavily with the nationalist tone that the protest acquired during this stage, both rhetorically and visually. The constant demonstrations of national sentiment, embodied in the widespread presence of Brazilian flags or Brazilian t-shirts, served to reinforce the media narrative (highly criticized by MPL members) that there were several types of protesters: the troublemakers (dressed in black), the partisans (with red flags), and the pacifists/patriots (carrying the national flag) (Tatagiba, 2014).

### Third stage of the June Journeys

In a third and final stage – roughly corresponding to the last nine days of June – the number of people on the streets decreased quite significantly, even though it continued to be much higher than anyone would ever have expected before the start of the June Journeys. The distinctive feature of this stage was, besides the declining numbers of people, the fragmentation of the protest in terms of its targets, which were now quite more specific. This is the case of the mobilizations (1) against the PEC 37 – a project of constitutional amendment that would limit the powers of public prosecutors, specifically regarding the diversion of funds – overturned by Congress on June 25<sup>th</sup>; (2) against the legislative project “cura gay” (gay cure) – allowing psychologists to “treat” homosexuality – also vetoed; (3) denouncing political figures who were accused of corruption, such as the president of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, or the governor of Rio, Sérgio Cabral; (4) as well as the continuous protests against excessive spending with the World Cup taking place in the various cities where the Confederations Cup was being played. Moreover, the protests against the increase in public transport fares continued in several cities where they had not been revoked yet.

In total, as a result of the wave of mobilizations, more than one hundred Brazilian cities saw their public transport fares reduced, a major victory for the MPL and for the June Journeys in general. Although the President of Brazil was criticized for taking too long to react to the events, Rousseff handled them with political ability. Playing with the frame “the giant woke up,” she stated on June 18<sup>th</sup> “Brazil woke up stronger today. [...] The magnitude of the protests attests to the energy of our democracy, to the strength of the voices in the streets”; “Our government is listening to the voices of change. We are committed and engaged with social transformation. [...] People want more and so do we” (Mendes, 2013). In a more elaborate and longer speech, on June 21<sup>st</sup>, she promised to take advantage of the strength of the protests to produce more changes, proposing the elaboration of a National Plan of Urban Mobility and promising to make use of oil royalties to fund education. Significantly, the Brazilian Senate approved, on June 26<sup>th</sup>, a bill that increased the punishment for the crime of corruption, which is now considered a “heinous crime” (Neri, 2013). On June 24<sup>th</sup>, after meeting with state governors and the mayors of major cities, Dilma proposed five “national pacts” – (1) on fiscal responsibility, (2) political reform, (3) health, (4) transport and (5) education (Ladeira, 2013). One of the most significant was perhaps the call for a plebiscite on political reform, which intended to restructure the electoral system as well as the rules for party campaign financing; Congress, however, has continuously obstructed any significant

changes in this regard. Advances were produced mostly in the transport and education fields – with the apparent increase in public funds directed to both of them – and in the health sector, with the creation of the program “More Doctors,” increasing the number of health professionals and redirecting them to peripheral and rural areas.

### **Profile of the protesters**

When it comes to the profile of the protesters, surveys clearly show that young, educated people were overrepresented. As this is the typical profile of most activists of the MPL, it is hardly surprising that this was the case at the beginning of the June Journeys. However, once mobilization expanded, and even though the heterogeneity of the demonstrators increased, this was still the dominant profile: on June 20<sup>th</sup>, about 63 percent of protesters were less than 30 years old, 52 percent were students, and 43 percent had completed a university degree (only 8 percent had not finished high school, while the remaining 49 percent had either completed it or were enrolled in university).<sup>5</sup> The extent of educated people's participation becomes even more evident when considering that, in 2010, only 8 percent of the Brazilian population had a university degree (Singer, 2013: 28).

Another characteristic that is frequently mentioned with a mix of astonishment and irony is the predominantly middle-class composition of the contenders, which raised doubts as to whether they even made use of public transport. An analysis of their family income suggests, nonetheless, a more complex picture: 15 percent have a low income (up to two minimum wages); 30 percent have a family income between two and five minimum wages; 26 percent get between five and ten minimum wages; and 23 percent are above ten minimum wages.<sup>6</sup> Although there is indeed a predominance of the middle class (equally balanced between lower-middle and upper-middle class), the presence of the extremes is not marginal, a phenomenon especially significant when considering that in Brazil protests tend to be class-specific. Singer (2013: 32) goes so far as to talk about an “intersection of classes,” although admitting that the sub-proletariat is virtually absent from the protests. Indeed, if one considers that, in 2010, 65 percent of Brazilians had an income of up to two minimum wages and only 9.2 percent were above five minimum wages (UOL, 2012), the overrepresentation of the middle and upper classes appears to be massive. There is, however, a

5 IBOPE – Infographic. [www.ibope.com.br/pt-br/conhecimento/Infograficos/PublishingImages/infografico\\_manifestantes4.jpg](http://www.ibope.com.br/pt-br/conhecimento/Infograficos/PublishingImages/infografico_manifestantes4.jpg).

6 The minimum wage in Brazil is now fixed at R\$724, the equivalent of €246.

world apart between the working-class families occupying the lower edge of the middle-class spectrum and the traditional bourgeoisie on the other end. Similarly to the left-right cleavage, the variety of demands appears to run roughly along the class cleavage – according to Ann Mische, those who have recently edged into the lower end of the middle class “are still feeling the strain of precarious infrastructure and ragged public services, as well as general insecurity and mounting urban violence. They want more effective state administration of services such as transportation, health care and education” – quite the opposite of the high bourgeoisie, who complained mostly about “high taxes, corruption, and swollen government spending. This sector wants less state, not more state” (Mische, 2013).

### 3.4 The Free Fare Movement (MPL)

Even though the June protests went quite beyond the control of the MPL in their second stage, it is fairly safe to say that Brazil would not have “woken up” if it were not for this movement. Even though it has officially existed since 2005, during June 2013 it gained enormous notoriety. While some of its members were utterly astounded by the result of their actions, others insisted that it was the product of the great amount of work they had done over the years. Indeed, an aspect that was constantly mentioned by members of the MPL was the importance, on the one hand, of the “grassroots” work they had done in schools and neighborhoods (in which they present and problematize the issue of transportation and insert it in wider debates connecting capitalism, urbanization, and social rights) and, on the other hand, the many initiatives of collaboration with other social movements dealing with issues such as housing, access to healthcare, or workers’ rights. The articulation with such movements together with its “grassroots work” seems to account for a large part of the MPL’s initial mobilizing capacity in the first days of June. In the words of an MPL activist, “in our first act in June, a lot of faces were known to us, from the innumerable schools, occupations and other initiatives of the movement, which were not a matter of dissemination on Facebook but rather of face-to-face contact” (Interview BR4).

Founded in a plenary session of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, the movement remains faithful to the principle that “another world is possible.” In particular, it fights for transportation that is, in their own words, “truly public,” i.e., that attends to the needs of the population and not to the profit of those who manage it. With an evidently anti-capitalist tone,

the MPL situates itself among the ensemble of urban social movements that fight against the urban exclusion of the poor. It campaigns for a “life without turnstiles” because these are considered to be a discriminatory physical barrier between those who can pay to circulate in the city and those who cannot (MPL, 2013a). Putting into evidence that the price of public transportation is prohibitive for the poorest layers of society, perpetuating old patterns of social exclusion, the MPL strives for a change in the general perception of what public transport should be – a right and not a merchandise – and which purpose it should serve – mobility for everyone. As its members constantly emphasize, free public transport is a right that enables other rights since it is needed to access other public services such as hospitals or schools. In this sense, the “zero fare” (*Tarifa Zero*) goal is not an end in itself but a means to ensure mobility and, ultimately, to return the urban space to the people who cannot make full use of it.<sup>7</sup>

The MPL's critique of the public transport system comes at a time of explosive automobile sales in Brazil, encouraged by the wider availability of credit and tax breaks to the domestic automobile industry (Saad-Filho and Morais, 2014: 241). This has led to major traffic gridlocks in large cities, which were not accompanied by any significant investment in collective transportation, increasingly in the hands of private initiative. MPL's critique is therefore not only a matter of having a free and better public transport but also a plea for a more efficient system of circulation and mobility. This is a particularly pressing need in a city like São Paulo, where traffic jams rank among the worst in the world.

In terms of its own structure, the MPL is guided by four basic principles: (1) *autonomy*, meaning that it is self-managed and does not accept external financing; (2) *independence* from political parties, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and other institutions; (3) *horizontality* in the sense that it is a leaderless movement in which decisions are taken collectively; and (4) *non-partisanship* (different from anti-partisanship), meaning that parties are not allowed to participate in the MPL, while its individual members (as individuals and not as representatives of the parties) are.<sup>8</sup> The various MPL local collectives, spread over several Brazilian cities, are also independent among themselves (provided that they respect their charter of principles). According to the movement, the decentralized and horizontal manner in which it is structured is a way to rehearse a new type of organization for public transport, the city, and the whole of society

7 “Tarifa Zero.” Retrieved from MPL's website <http://saopaulo.mpl.org.br/tarifa-zero/>.

8 “Carta de princípios.” <http://saopaulo.mpl.org.br/apresentacao/carta-de-principios/>.

(MPL, 2013b). Its project is therefore clearly inspired by libertarian socialist ideals and so are its methods: the MPL privileges “direct action,” i.e., to make politics by taking to the streets rather than using institutionalized settings. The city is not only seen as a goal, but it is also used as a weapon of disruption: knowing that the blockage of a street is enough to compromise its whole circulation, the MPL takes special advantage of this tactic, usually burning tires and turnstiles so as to halt traffic.

Knowing that the “zero fare” is an ambitious goal, the MPL also sets short-term priorities – such as the revocation of fare increases – while at the same time gaining enough visibility to promote its long-term goal. As one member put it, while a few years ago everyone would say they were insane, nowadays the idea of free public transport is out there, being debated in the media and civil society (*Roda Viva*, 2013): “The viability of the ‘zero fare’ was never as discussed as today; there is a proposal for a constitutional amendment that includes transport as a social right and there’s more and more groups and movements fighting to improve this sector” (Interview BR8). The fact that the MPL chooses to focus solely on the transport issue, and not on the many other ways through which social exclusion is perpetuated, is perhaps part of the tactic to be a “concrete utopian.” This is an opinion apparently shared by the renowned philosopher Vladimir Safatle, who states that “instead of presenting general proposals such as the end of capitalism, the MPL opts to touch upon one specific symptom that shows the irrationality of the entire system” (Weiner, 2014b). After all, free public transport would mean much more than that. MPL activists know better than anyone else that to achieve a “zero fare” would be to successfully subvert the current mercantile system and to privilege a different set of values, opening the way for the extension of similar demands to other public services.

### 3.5 A tentative explanation of the giant’s awakening

#### The spark that started the fire

A detailed overview of the June Journeys shows that the tactics of the MPL, followed by excessive police repression, were the key precipitating events that transformed what appears as a large dose of latent discontentment into one of the biggest waves of protest Brazil has ever experienced. One aspect that everyone seems to agree upon (interviewees and analysts alike) is that the fare increase and related protests were only the straw that broke the camel’s back. In other words, the various reasons for people’s discontentment were mostly not new. The levels of disruptiveness reached during the first



demonstrations and the images of disproportionate repression – hardly ever seen in the main streets of São Paulo – ignited and added to people's sense of dissatisfaction. The next demonstrations (scheduled ahead by the MPL) provided a window of opportunity for hundreds of thousands to show their solidarity with the movement and publicly display their dissatisfaction too. In other words, while many of the grievances were not new, the actions of the MPL provided the masses with an appropriate setting to publicly express them, showing that the streets are a privileged space for voicing. Scheduling the next protest for the 17<sup>th</sup> of June – four days after the events of June 13<sup>th</sup> – was strategic in giving people and social and traditional media the time to prepare for the next demonstration. Police violence was key in increasing the salience of people's grievances and convincing hundreds of thousands to join a movement that suddenly was not all about violence but a victim of violence. In this regard, the composition of the people affected by violence and the space in which it took place significantly contributed to produce the shock waves that reverberated through Brazil's society. In addition, the development of “digitally enabled action networks” contributed to expand the basis of participation way beyond the initial MPL network, enabling the involvement of many who had never participated in protests before and who benefited from great freedom in the choice of targets and issues. The feeling that it was finally time for people to come to the streets and show political elites that the masses are “awake” and dissatisfied might do the rest in explaining the continuous growth of the protests during their second stage.

In addition to this, there are two temporal events in June 2013 that might have made a difference in attracting people to the streets. The first was the beginning of the Confederations Cup, opening the cycle of mega-sporting events in Brazil. In fact, the first game of the Cup was played only two days after the brutal events of June 13<sup>th</sup> and, even though on a smaller scale than the latter, the use of flash bombs and tear gas also injured dozens of people who protested outside the stadium against World Cup expenditures. This might have contributed to increase the sentiment of popular anger that would explode from the 17<sup>th</sup> onwards. Moreover, and even though there were already civil society groups doing an important job in monitoring public spending and denouncing abuses in World Cup-related works, the outset of the mega-events gave these issues a new visibility. As one famous Brazilian journalist points out, the magnitude of the stadiums that were being built and inaugurated at the time caused a big impression on people (Weiner, 2014a).

The second event that is impossible to miss when it comes to the *timing* of the Brazilian June Journeys is the fact that they started only a few days



after the onset of the Taksim Gezi Park protests in Turkey. Although I do not intend to establish a direct causal link between the two – it is fair to say that the MPL would have protested against the fare increase anyway – it is possible that the uprising in Turkey has encouraged and strengthened mobilization in Brazil or, using academic jargon, it might have resonated. This is the opinion of the political scientist Pedro Arruda, who asserted that “the Arab Spring and the events in Turkey stimulated the imaginary of young people” (Sobrinho and Peixoto, 2013). Banners stating “Turkey is here” or “Brazil will become another Turkey” could indeed be spotted during the protests. The MPL itself writes that these revolts provided a source of inspiration for its fight, which is visible in one of its chants: “if even Mubarak fell, there won’t be a fare that won’t fall” (MPL, 2013b).

This, in my opinion, is a more accurate story than any account social movement theories could back up. When looking at the conditions of the political environment at the time, they all seem contrary to the predictions of the political opportunity structure model since there were not any significant changes in institutional openness, elite divisions, or availability of allies. If anything, the political system was seen as closed and, rather than seeking allies, the protesters tried to distance themselves from traditional means of representation. The one dimension of the political process model that has unquestionably played a role in the June Journeys is the one referring to the expansion or contraction of opportunities as a result of changes in the repressive apparatus of the state. But even here, the literature is not entirely clear when it comes to the effects of repression on mobilization since there are contradictory empirical examples (the so-called “repression/protest” paradox). Brazil’s case, however, clearly belongs to the category in which large-scale and indiscriminate repression ended up backfiring, which is only natural when looking at its context. In a democratic state in which the masses are aware that further repression will only damage the image of the police and the government, people did not fear expressing their outrage.

As for the resource mobilization theoretical approach, the Brazilian case adds to the list of examples providing evidence that traditional mobilizing resources – such as money, activists, or organization – need no longer play a central role, and what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) termed “connective action” is replacing traditional forms of collective action. Social media – with all their advantages in terms of organization, personalization, inclusiveness, and flexibility – proved to be a powerful mobilizing resource, particularly when the protests transitioned from the first to the second stage. The initial capacity of mobilization of the MPL is already astounding given that it is a resource-poor organization, with no more than a few dozen activists.

Moreover, as Roman (2013: 17) has pointed out, it is remarkable that “Brazil has unions and social movements of impressive strength in both organization and membership size whose efforts at mass mobilization have never managed to reach such a scale.”

Last but not least, in terms of social movement theory, Roman (2013) argues that the use of universalistic frames (compatible with conditions of weak political polarization) was crucial for the growth of the movement. While it is hard to deny that the catch-all appeal of the anti-politics or anti-corruption frames might have contributed to attract such large numbers, it is also hard to argue for a causal effect. Looking attentively at the events, the extension of the range of demands comes together with the increase in the number of protesters, rather than preceding it. In addition, none of the issues in vogue was particularly new; demonstrations on corruption issues, the use of public money, or the quality of public services are not exactly a novelty in Brazil's protest scene. In other words, there were previous instances in which those same frames were used and yet did not metamorphose into a mass movement.

### **Why was the prairie ready to burn?**

All that has been mentioned so far tells us only about the *timing* of mobilization, i.e., about the reasons why Brazilian's latent discontentment had suddenly and so powerfully come to the surface in June 2013. It tells us little, however, about where all the discontentment came from. In other words, and to paraphrase a famous analogy, even though a spark can start a fire, it cannot explain it; the explanation must lie in the conditions in which the spark found the prairie. Why, then, was the prairie ready to burn?

A review of the already quite burgeoning literature on the issue points to one deeper explanation, based on a perceived gap between the state and society – i.e., a disconnection between political structures and the people they allegedly represent, anchored on the commonly held idea that political parties are more concerned with looking after themselves than with society as a whole (Nogueira, 2013; Nobre, 2013; Saad-Filho and Moraes, 2014). Marcelo Nobre (2013), a philosopher and professor at the State University of Campinas, sees the protests as a revolt for the opening of channels between society and the political system, which he describes as having become more and more blind to popular demands over the years. For Werneck Vianna, a Brazilian political scientist, the practice of “coalition presidentialism” is to be blamed – the constant give-and-take among parties, with the constitution of alliances regardless of ideological background, deprives them from legitimacy and depletes representation;

in addition, social movements were coopted and are mostly absent from the streets, leaving people without channels of expression (as cited in Silva, 2013). The idea of a representation crisis is far from new in political science and Brazil, despite having a president with surprising levels of popularity (prior to the protests), does not escape this rule. Trust in the Congress and in political parties is generally very low (Datafolha, 2012). The fact that 89 percent of the protesters say they do not feel represented by parties is illustrative in this regard.

The sociologist Marco Aurélio Nogueira (2013) agrees that the protests revealed people's exhaustion concerning the way politics is exercised and adds that they reflect not only a failure in representation but also several shortcomings in governmental policies, which did not manage to produce the expected changes in the delivery of public goods. This goes in the direction of the previously mentioned argument that improvements in people's income were not accompanied by a similar development in public services and infrastructure, which continue to be underdeveloped in a country that claims to be developing extraordinarily fast. This is sometimes framed as the "rising expectations" problem, i.e., as a country does better in economic and social terms, people's expectations grow faster than the state capacity to satisfy them, particularly in a context of economic slowdown that "has created the impression that the cycle of prosperity which started with Lula has become exhausted" (Saad-Filho and Morais, 2014: 240). This argument is not new in the social movement literature and can be traced back to Tocqueville's analysis of the French Revolution, the strongholds of which were precisely those regions with the greatest improvements in living standards (Gurney and Tierney, 1982). For John Burdick, rising incomes and higher expectations are intimately linked via a substantial tax burden. In other words, as people's incomes increase, so does the considerable tax burden and therefore the sense of rightful entitlement to better public services (Burdick, 2013). While I do not wish to go as far as to say that protesters rationally weighed expectations against their personal or the country's economic situation, frustrated expectations about what political institutions provide are very much what the idea of a political representation crisis is all about.

### 3.6 Conclusion

One of the most commonly heard catchphrases at the height of the June Journeys was, "it is not only for \$20." Indeed, it was not. The wave of mobilizations that swept the entire country resulted not only in the reduction of

public transport fares but also in the denunciation of countless other issues, pressing public authorities to quickly react to the voices of the streets. Catching them by surprise, the June events reminded the political class of the mobilizing power of the people in a way that had not happened in Brazil since 1992, imposing a new power relationship between state and society.

Protests against the fare increase – strategically organized in the heart of São Paulo during consecutive days – and the disproportionate response of the police provoked a significant change in media coverage and led to increasing calls for people to join the protests and to help “change Brazil.” Social media networks were key in spreading such calls and took over the role of MPL as the main mobilizing resource. Whereas the poor quality of public services and the mismanagement of public resources are far from novelties in Brazil, the organization of such protests and the increase in the number of calls to join them granted an invariable opportunity for many to (re)discover the potential of the streets.

While some show disappointment with the little concrete changes that the June Journeys have produced and with the rapidly declining number of people on the streets right after the events, others are unanimous when it comes to its most important legacy: Brazilians “woke up” and recovered the capacity to get outraged and involved in politics. Long-standing activists are unanimous in highlighting that the culture of social mobilization has gained a new impetus, both in numbers and in form – as it is more common and accepted to occupy central places in the city and to organize autonomously from unions or parties. Indeed, June did not end in June. Instead, it signaled the beginning of a new cycle of contention in Brazil. It not only propelled a series of specific protests in its aftermath – such as the mobilizations of the Homeless Workers Movement or the strikes of waste collectors, road transport operators, and others, giving them more visibility in the media and in politics. It is also fairly safe to say that the mass protests of 2015 – asking for the resignation of Dilma Rousseff and protesting against the corruption scandals that, once again, engulfed her party – would hardly have happened had Brazilians not rediscovered the power of the streets in June 2013.

All of this is symptomatic of an undergoing change in the Brazilian social movement scene, no longer dominated by the leftist project built up by the PT but disputed by new actors that have no faith in the latter and individuals who, since June 2013, see the streets as an effective source of public pressure. Despite the PT having won the 2014 presidential elections (by a very small margin), Brazil had not witnessed such an aggressive and polarized electoral campaign since 1989, with the theme of “change” at its very center. Similarly,

Brazil has experienced unprecedented levels of polarization at the societal level since 2013. These reached extraordinary dimensions when, on top of the political crisis provoked by the Petrobras scandal, Brazil fell into a deep economic recession in 2015, with Rousseff reaching rock-bottom levels of popularity. In sum, June not only transformed the 2013 autumn/winter into one of the hottest months of Brazil's history, but has also contributed to warming up its social and political scene ever since.

### List of interviews

BR1	Photojournalist – coverage of the protests. September 19, 2014
BR2	No affiliation – regular participation in the protests. October 6, 2014
BR3	Movimento Passe Livre. October 6, 2014
BR4	Movimento Passe Livre. November 13, 2014
BR5	Scholar, specialist in participatory democracy. November 14, 2014
BR6	Scholar, specialist in media, deliberation and participation. November 15, 2014
BR7	No affiliation – regular participation in the protests. November 26, 2014
BR8	Movimento Passe Livre. November 26, 2014
BR9	Fórum de Lutas Contra o Aumento da Passagem. November 27, 2014
BR10	Fórum de Lutas Contra o Aumento da Passagem. November 27, 2014
BR11	No affiliation – regular participation in the protests. November 28, 2014
BR12	União da Juventude Comunista. December 17, 2014
BR13	No affiliation – regular participation in the protests. January 25, 2015

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## 4 Making sense of “La Salida”

Challenging left-wing control in Venezuela<sup>1</sup>

*Juan Masullo*

### Abstract

In the first half of 2014, Venezuela went through one of the most contentious periods in its recent history, a disruptive event only comparable with the 1989 Caracazo and the 2002 Coup. After several electoral setbacks, one flank of an increasingly divided opposition took to the streets, under the banner of *La Salida* (which means both “the exit” and “the solution”), to call on left-wing President Nicolás Maduro to resign. What began as a peaceful protest in early February quickly turned violent: 3,306 protestors were detained, 973 injured, and 42 killed in the short period between February and June. However, despite a huge number of newspaper articles, op-eds, and blogs dealing with various aspects of this wave, little scholarly work has analyzed it. This chapter therefore aims to provide a balanced descriptive account of these events and to offer some initial analyses to make sense of them. The chapter deals with some of the elemental questions that students of contentious politics typically pose and uses some of its conceptual tools in order to improve the understanding of *La Salida*. To do so, it builds on a large amount of primary and secondary material published in newspapers and blogs, data collected by different organizations, and personal interviews with activists and scholars.

**Keywords:** La Salida, Maduro, Venezuela, 2014 protest, MUD, López

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Donatella della Porta, Rebecca Hanson, and Sidney Tarrow for comments on earlier versions of this chapter and to all my interviewees and gatekeepers for their time and the valuable information they provided.

## 4.1 Introduction

### The context

*Cuando el 19 de abril Nicolás Maduro juraba como el primer presidente chavista de la historia, se abría en Venezuela una nueva etapa.*

Mariano Fraschini, 2014, *Le Monde*

The date of March 5, 2013, is one that Venezuelans are unlikely to ever forget. On this day, after 14 years in power, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías died of cancer in a military hospital in Caracas. A month after his death, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, presidential elections were held to fill Chávez's empty seat. Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's long-serving foreign minister who had assumed the interim presidency since his death, ran as his hand-picked successor.<sup>2</sup> In the closest presidential elections Venezuelans had seen since the late 1960s, Maduro was elected president of the Bolivarian Republic: only a 1.59 percentage point margin (234,935 votes) gave him a victory over a strong opponent, Henrique Capriles Radonski, the representative of the more moderate line of the umbrella opposition group, the Table for Democratic Unity (MUD).<sup>3</sup>

It was not the first time that Capriles had lost a presidential election: on October 7, 2012, he had lost against Chávez. While on that occasion Capriles promptly conceded defeat to Chávez and acknowledged the electoral outcome, in 2013 he and his campaign team refused to accept the electronic vote tally and demanded that the electoral authority open all the boxes and count the paper ballots one by one. Inviting his supporters to protest, Capriles tweeted right after the results become public: "Until every vote is counted, Venezuela has an illegitimate president and we denounce that to the world." Although he called the demonstration off shortly thereafter due to security concerns and instead invited people to nightly *cacerolazos*,<sup>4</sup>

2 Maduro, a former bus driver and union activist, rose through the ranks of Chavismo. He was elected to the National Assembly in 2000, became its speaker in 2005, and was appointed foreign minister in 2006. He held that post until Chávez named him vice president. When Chávez died, he became the interim president.

3 Official data from the National Electoral Council (CNE) [www.cne.gov.ve/web/sala\\_prensa/noticia\\_detallada.php?id=3165](http://www.cne.gov.ve/web/sala_prensa/noticia_detallada.php?id=3165). This difference, according to the Carter Center, was even smaller: 1.49 percentage points and 224,268 votes (The Carter Center, 2014).

4 *Cacerolazo* is a form of popular protest that consists in banging pots and pans in order to call the attention of others. It has been widely practiced not only in Venezuela, but also in several Latin American countries, Argentina being a remarkable example.

several protestors in various cities took to the streets. The demonstrations became violent and, according to the authorities, more than seventy people were arrested and nine died (see Ore, 2013). However, although these events are interesting in their own right, they simply provide the background to the protest wave examined in detail in this chapter: *La Salida*.

This new cycle began almost a year later, in early February 2014, when a new wave of protest erupted in the country. It was again an anti-government (anti-Maduro) protest, but this time it was carefully organized and led by two political figures representing the hard line of the MUD, Leopoldo López and Maria Corina Machado, and it was set up without Capriles's consent. The event immediately preceding and triggering this wave was, once again, an electoral setback for the MUD: in December 2013, Maduro's party won the municipal elections, and this time the margin was considerably larger than that of the presidential elections held in April. These results, which were portrayed as a plebiscite on Maduro by the opposition, sent a blunt message to the opposition: they showed that Maduro indeed had considerable support among the electorate and gave legitimacy to the April presidential elections, which had never been recognized by Capriles.<sup>5</sup>

This situation fed already existing divisions within the MUD. The Capriles line not only ended up accepting the December defeat, but also, in January, began to coordinate joint strategies in the area of security with the Maduro government. The two politicians even shook hands – something unexpected and unprecedented. However, while Capriles showed himself willing to accept Maduro's victory and to cooperate with him in some domains, López – a hardliner – was determined not to wait until the next elections to beat Maduro. As noted by Alejandro Velasco, Professor of History at New York University and a Venezuela specialist, "while the electoral lapse served as an incentive to moderation among some [Capriles's line], it also catalyzed the frustration of radical sectors already primed to distrust both the government and the moderate opposition [López's line]" (Velasco, 2014b). This deepened division was clearly reflected in the fact that Capriles never gave his assent to the February demonstrations and did not support López in *La Salida*.

5 By June 2013, a full audit had already revealed 99.98 percent consistency between the electronic results produced by the voting machines and the paper receipts produced by the same machines. Moreover, in September a final audit implemented by the CNE had confirmed that there were no voting incidents that could have affected the electoral outcome. The fingerprint audit identified 10,726 votes that were potentially duplicitous, a fraction that could have not altered the election results (see the electoral report by The Carter Center, 2014).



### The 2014 cycle

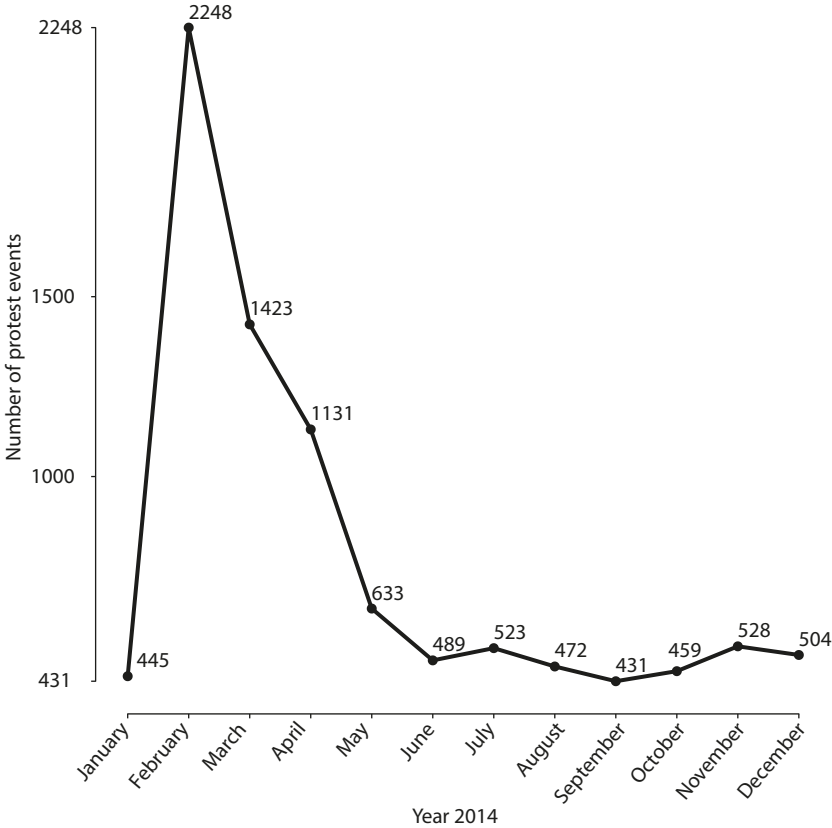
Venezuelans are far from being strangers to contentious politics. However, when it comes to protest, the year of 2014 had no precedents in the country's recent history. As Velasco (2015) noted, the events of 2014 are remarkable even against a history of over fifteen years of coups, counter-coups, devastating strikes, media wars, and street demonstrations and protests characterized by the deep divisions between Chávez's supporters and opponents. This assertion is backed by hard data. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS), a center monitoring protest events throughout the country on a daily basis, recorded 9,286 protests in 2014 (an average of 26 protest events per day). This represents a 111 percent increase relative to the previous year. If these data are disaggregated further, it can be observed that the bulk of these events took place during the first part of the year, the period in which *La Salida* unfolded, and particularly in the months of February and March: 6,369 events were recorded for the first semester of 2014 (an average of 35 protest events per day) (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Moreover, in terms of repression and violence, this cycle was equally atypical. Bearing in mind Venezuela's recent history, the levels of violence observed in the streets are only comparable to the Caracazo that took place in 1989 and to the 2002 Coup. David Smilde, professor of social relations at Tulane University and a Venezuela expert, reported from Caracas in March, while the events were still unfolding, that there had not been a single day in the past month and a half without a protest. He described the situation as "the biggest conflict, the biggest sort of convulsion in Venezuela for about 10 years."<sup>6</sup>

Everything started in the most unexpected place in Venezuela: Margarita Island. On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, a small group of opposition demonstrators protested against the Maduro government and its links to Cuba in front of the 5-star Hotel Venetur, where the Cuban baseball team was staying to play the "Serie del Caribe" (El Nacional, 2014). Although their demonstration seemed to be quite contained, the government detained seven of the demonstrators, claiming that they had attacked some players.<sup>7</sup> Two days later, students from the Experimental University in San Cristobal, in the western border state of Táchira, began protesting against the sexual assault of a female classmate. The protest was repressed, and several students were detained. In response, students from other universities around the country, starting in Merida – the largest student center in Western Venezuela – took to the

6 Interview in Worldview (WBEZ).

7 Two members of the opposition party *Voluntad Popular*, led by Leopoldo López, were among the detained.

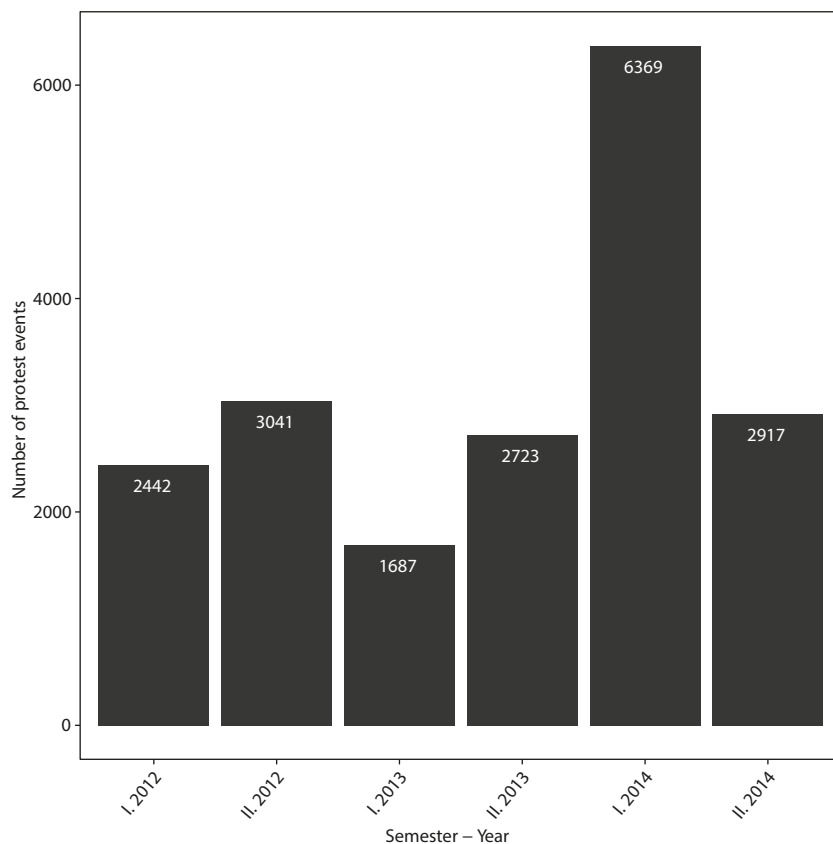
Figure 4.1 Protest events per month, 2014



Source: OVCS data, processed by author

streets to call for the release of all of these detainees. These protests were also repressed and further detentions were made.

López and Machado took advantage of this momentum. They capitalized on the wave of protest – set in motion by the student movement – and called for new demonstrations under the banner of “*La Salida*” (which in Spanish means both “exit” and “solution”). The opposition asked for nothing less than Maduro’s resignation. The mobilizing efforts of López-Machado, plus the anger generated by the violent response of the government to the previous protest events, helped the wave grow bigger and spread all over the country. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, Venezuela’s National Youth Day, the protest wave reached its peak. Thousands of Maduro’s opponents met in Plaza Venezuela, in downtown Caracas, to call for the release of all the detainees and to express their open and radical rejection of the government. At the same

**Figure 4.2 Protest events per semester, 2012-2014**

Source: OVCS data, processed by author

time, in another eighteen cities people took to the streets. The slogans were explicitly anti-government: “And we don’t feel like having a dictatorship like that of Cuba” (*Y no nos da la gana, una dictadura igualita a la cubana*) and “It will fall, it will fall, this government will fall” (*Y va a caer, y va a caer, este gobierno va a caer*). What started as a peaceful protest ended in vandalism and violence. The death toll surpassed 40, and thousands were arrested.

These events raise many questions about contentious politics in Venezuela. However, despite a huge number of newspaper articles, op-eds, and blogs dealing with different aspects of this wave, little scholarly work has been done to answer these questions to date. My aim in this chapter is therefore to provide a balanced account of these events and to offer some initial analyses to make sense of this complex contentious event. The chapter deals

with some of the elemental questions that students of contentious politics typically pose and uses some of its conceptual tools in order to improve the understanding of what has been one of the most disruptive political events to hit Venezuela. To do so, I build on a large amount of primary and secondary material published in newspapers and blogs, data collected by various organizations, and personal interviews with activists and scholars.

Like other chapters in this volume, this chapter deals with contentious politics in times of crisis. However, it has the particularity of dealing with collective reactions to the advancement of a socialist project that developed during the so-called neoliberal era in Latin America, while the focus of the other chapters is mostly on protest behavior against features of late neoliberalism. Building on Kerbo (1982), della Porta notes in the introduction to this volume that protest that develops in times of crisis (as compared to protest in times of abundance) is triggered more by threats than by opportunities. This is what we actually observed in Venezuela: an important sector of society mobilizing against a socialist regime that they see as threatening, a political project from which they feel excluded and under which they feel their "everyday life is challenged."

The structure of the chapter is defined by the three main questions it addresses. In the next section, *Why did people take to the streets?*, I explore the main grievances that the media cited as driving people into the streets and argue that as the events unfolded there was a shift from social and economic claims that affect the bulk of Venezuelan society, to claims for political and civic liberties that affect a more restricted subgroup of the population. In the third section, *Who took to the streets?*, I advance some ideas to solve the puzzle of why those who are likely to be most affected by the current social and economic crisis in Venezuela were precisely those who mobilized the least. In the fourth section, *Why did violence erupt within an otherwise peaceful wave of protest?*, I focus on trying to understand Maduro's repressive response, while making clear that violence did not result only from a desperate government obsessed with maintaining its hold on power no matter the cost, but also from the various actors involved and claimed victims from different sides.

## 4.2 Why did people take to the streets?

Multiple grievances seem to have been at the base of the 2014 mobilizations in Venezuela. Among a heterogeneous and sometimes very wide list of grievances, insecurity, mainly in the cities, and declining economic performance

– reflected mostly in high levels of inflation and a shortage of first necessity items – can be identified as the most salient. However, these grievances spurred some initial demonstrations that amounted to a protest ultimately focused on the lack of legitimacy of Maduro's government and aiming, as the *La Salida* slogan indicated, at nothing less than making him resign. With this shift in focus, I suggest that two important transformations took place: (i) what began as a student protest where the main protagonist was the student movement became a wider middle-class protest organized by the radical sector of the MUD, led by López and Machado; (ii) what began as a protest demanding that the government take measures to improve security became a protest over civil and political rights *against* the government. As we will see in the next section, it is arguable that this shift had an important impact on the social composition of those who participated in the protests.

### The main grievances *before* the shift

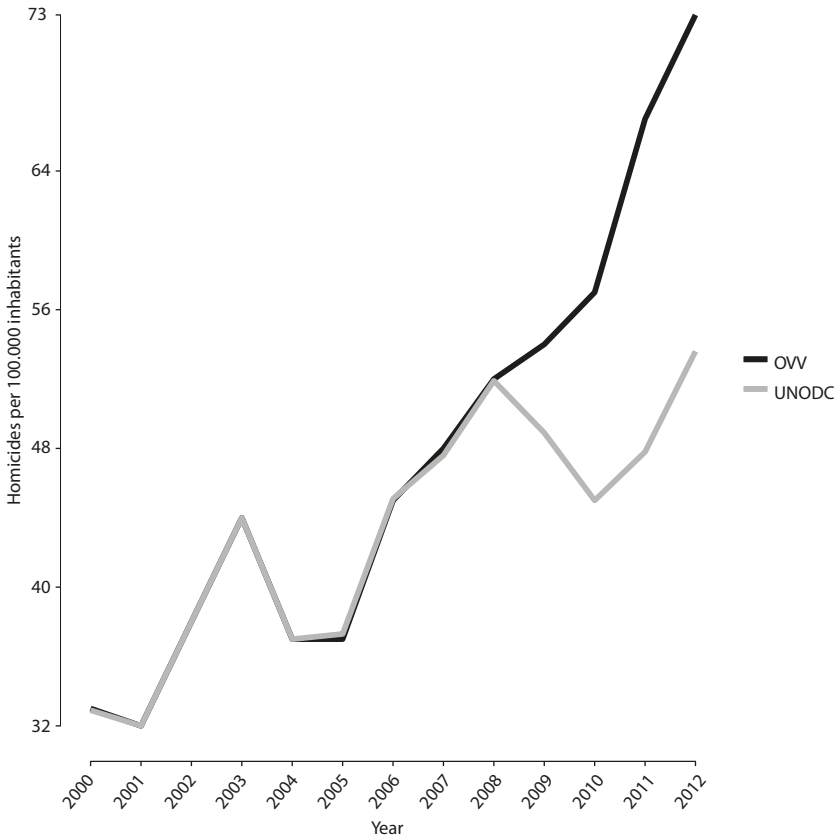
#### *Insecurity*

The recognition of an urgent need to address the country's acute security problem is one of the few issues on which the government and the opposition had agreed. Following the highly mediatized murder in January 2014 of ex-Miss Venezuela Mónica Spear and her husband while driving back into Caracas after their December holiday, Maduro and Capriles agreed to work together to fight insecurity. The opposition leader openly said, "Let's put aside the differences we have in politics and unite as one force to win the fight against violence" (cited in Vargas, 2014).<sup>8</sup>

The insecurity problem clearly goes far beyond the more visible case of Spear. Although it is not easy to come by reliable statistics, data from both national and international institutions show that, to take one indicator, homicide levels are comparably high and have been increasing recently (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4). A 2013 UNODC global study on homicide shows that Venezuela is the only country in South America with a consistently increasing homicide rate since the mid-1990s (UNODC 2014, 33). According to this institution's data, the year before the protests erupted, Venezuela ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> most dangerous country in the world. The Venezuelan Violence Observatory (OVV), a Caracas-based NGO made up of researchers from seven universities in the country, estimated that the country closed

8 It was on this occasion that Maduro and Capriles shook hands, fueling the divide that already existed within the opposition and pushing López and Machado to call on people to take to the streets.

**Figure 4.3 Homicide rate, 2000-2012**

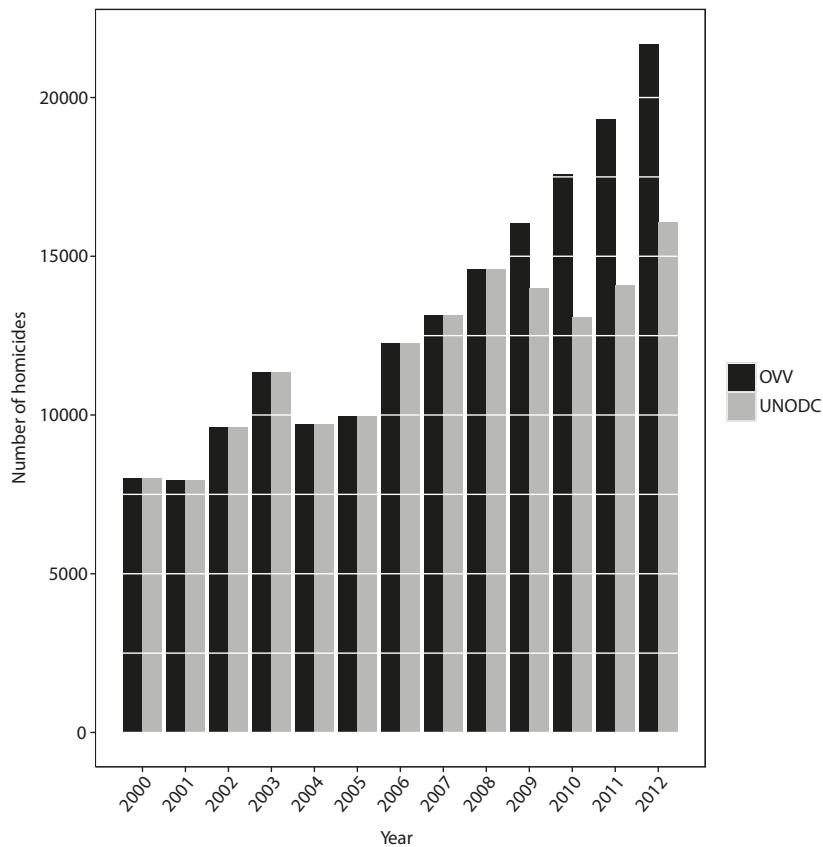


Source: OVV and UNODC data, processed by author

the year 2013 with almost 25,000 killings and a murder rate of 79 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Although this violence is mostly concentrated in big cities, in 2013 the increase was steeper in small and medium-size cities (OVV, 2013). Along with these alarmingly high levels of violence, impunity is also worrying: according to Martinez (2014), only 8 percent of the homicides are solved in the country, and many are not even investigated.

This situation, as would be expected, translates into deep feelings of poor personal security. According to Gallup survey data, during the year before the protest events, Venezuelans reported the lowest levels of personal security in the world. In their *Law and Order Index*, which is built on survey responses to item questions of confidence in local police, feelings of personal safety, and self-reported incidence of theft, Venezuela scored 41 (on a

**Figure 4.4** Total homicides, 2000-2012



Source: OVV and UNODC data, processed by author

o to 100 scale, where 100 represents the highest level of personal security).<sup>9</sup> Only 19 percent of Venezuelan adults felt safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they lived, only 26 percent expressed confidence in the police, and 22 percent reported that money had been stolen from them or another household member in the last twelve months.

Not surprisingly, then, security was a central issue at stake in one of the first events that gave rise to the cycle of protest under analysis. Students

9 Just to have a point of reference, Colombia, a country facing a civil war, scored 60 and Mexico, a country facing acute drug-related violence and where the sense of insecurity has been substantially increasing in the last years, scored 59. The score by World Region for Europe in the same year was 77.

protesting in Táchira over a case of sexual harassment against a female colleague framed the incident as an indicator of the generally poor level of personal security. Although to the best of my knowledge there are no on-site surveys to document the salience of insecurity as a driver to participation among protestors, several narratives, images, and interviews with demonstrators reveal that insecurity, at least at the very beginning of the cycle (in fact, before *La Salida* was formally launched), was one of the main issues protestors voiced. However, as the protests broke out only a short while after Maduro took office, there is little evidence as to whether the security situation worsened after his election (compare to the time when Chávez was in office).<sup>10</sup>

### *Rampant inflation and severe shortages*

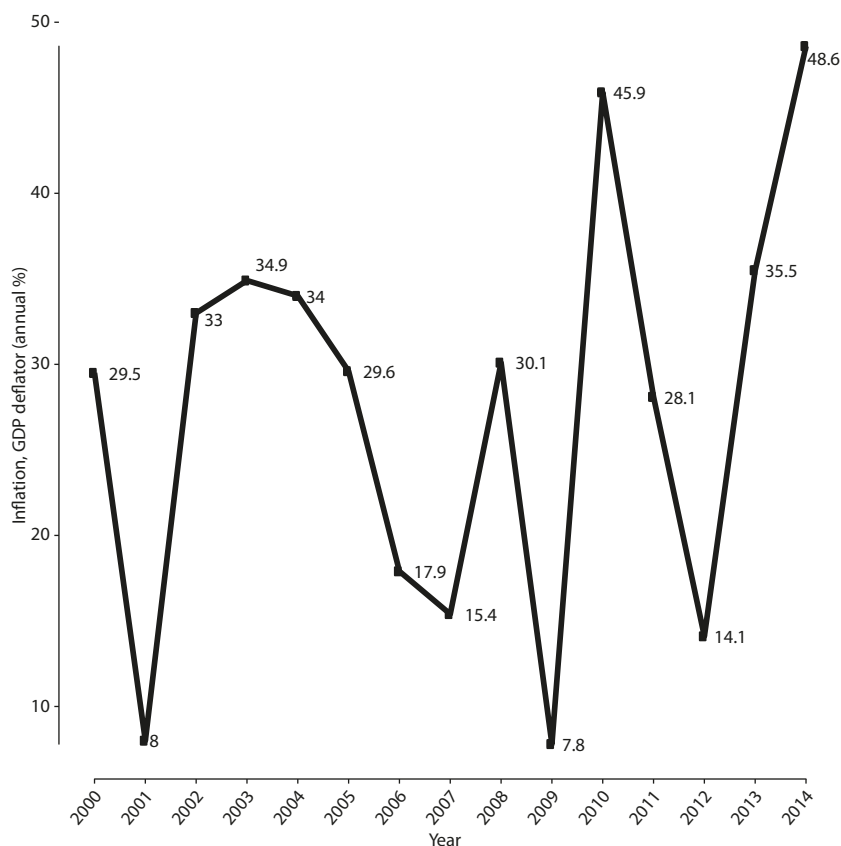
The opposition, as well as many of what Velasco (2014b) calls the "middle-of-the-road *chavistas*" (i.e. people whose support for the government is based more on performance than on ideology), have long and openly complained about the country's economic performance. The central issues in this regard have been rampant inflation and shortages of staple goods. According to both World Bank and Trading Economics measures, with inflation numbers close to 50 in the year when the protests began, Venezuela stood as the country with the world's highest level of inflation, followed by Sudan, with 29.9. This number is not only alarmingly high in itself, but represents a sharp increase compared to 2012, when inflation stood around 14, and the highest peak reached in the last decade (see Figure 4.5).

In addition to soaring consumer prices, Venezuelans have been experiencing constant shortages of staple goods. In an attempt to slow inflation, the government has set prices for many goods, and this has led to even higher levels of scarcity. In today's Venezuela, those who are obliged to purchase goods at controlled prices (mostly the popular sectors) have to wait in long lines in supermarkets several times a week (to buy one product a day), always provided, of course, that the desired goods are available (Smilde, 2015).

In a country that earned 800bn USD in oil revenues in the twelve years after 2000, it is hard to understand this economic situation. This paradox has contributed in no small way to encouraging protestors to take to the streets and call for change. The words of opposition leader Capriles capture well the outrage poor economic performance generates among many Venezuelans:

10 A survey conducted by Datanalisis in March 2014, which was shared confidentially by one of my interviewees, shows a considerable decline in insecurity since Maduro took office.



**Figure 4.5 Inflation, 2000-2014**

Source: World Bank data, processed by author

“You don’t have soap to wash. A country with the biggest bonanza in history and today we have the highest inflation in the world and shortages everywhere” (cited in Usborne, 2015).

While opposition leaders claim that economic problems show the limits and consequences of the state-led economic model pioneered by Chávez, Maduro describes the soaring inflation as the result of an “economic war” led by the opposition and supported by ideological adversaries in Washington. As in the case of insecurity, it is hard to tell whether the situation has worsened during Maduro’s initial months in office. However, the demonstrators in the events leading to the 12F (12 February) and the *La Salida* protestors made reference to poor economic performance as a central grievance and a reason legitimizing their call for Maduro to resign.

## The *shift* towards civic and political liberties and Maduro's legitimacy

*While most citizens remain upset with food shortages and inflation rates, many of the opposition protestors have focused instead on civil liberties.*

(Gill, 2014: 3)

Rone (in this volume) shows us how the contentious events in 2013 in Bulgaria that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Borisov shifted from poorer people's concerns to what the author refers to as issues of the "young, beautiful, and successful." Although the starting point in Venezuela was the student movement, while in Bulgaria it was the point of arrival, both cycles experienced a shift from a set of grievances that concerned the popular sectors to one that was the concern, mainly, of the middle classes.

As researchers from the OVCS put it in their annual report, "In 2014 we registered a protest wave that began in February with young university students demanding security and rejecting the high levels of criminality and insecurity in the universities. In the subsequent weeks the demands expanded to other actors and other rights such as food security, *political participation*, right to life, *personal freedoms* and *freedom of expression*" (OVCS, 2015; italics added by the author). As the contentious events unfolded, with increased government repression and tighter media control, the initial concerns merged into a more general discourse *against* the Maduro government, questioning its legitimacy rather than demanding appropriate responses to economic or security problems. This is not to say that the López-Machado agenda was at odds with that of the student movement. More than conflicting interests, there is an important overlap between these two groups;<sup>11</sup> in fact, demographically speaking, the student movement is heavily dominated by middle- and upper-class people. However, while the student movement initially highlighted issues of citizen security, this and other claims related to economic performance were overshadowed by the *La Salida* discourse.

This shift from the more concrete social and economic issues that aggravated Venezuelans to a more general and perhaps diffuse anti-government demonstration resulted from, to a large extent, the workings of the López-Machado opposition wing. In this reframing, the demonstrations became

11 See "Mérida Manifesto" released on March 2014 by the Junta Patriótica Estudiantil y Popular (JPEP). In this document the emphasis on individual liberties over issues of social or economic equality becomes evident. Straightforwardly, the document closes with three blunt words: "Liberty or Nothing."

mostly about civil and political liberties, with two issues at the forefront: the right to protest, and freedom of the press. The former, resulting from the repressive measures that the government took since the very first manifestations in western Venezuela, played a central role in the escalation from scattered and small protests in some cities to an almost nationwide demonstration. For many, these initial detentions made manifest that in Venezuela, people's right to voice and demand for change in the streets is highly restricted.

The latter issue, freedom of the press, has been a central issue in Venezuelan politics for many years, at least since Chávez took office in 1999. While in power, Chávez established an overt battle against the private media – a strong enemy of his government – a struggle that, in his view, was a necessary part of the Revolution. Although the situation has been misrepresented and overemphasized in several international media outlets, it is a fact that Chávez maintained tight control of several newspapers and TV and radio stations. However, during Maduro's initial months, things worsened even more. As Munoz (in Smilde et al., 2014) put it in an event called "Venezuela after Chávez" held at Brown University, while "Chávez largely played a cat and mouse game with media without killing them off, he never impeded freedom of press as his successors have done." Not only has Maduro's administration sold off important media outlets for opposition voices to groups sympathetic to the government, such as Globovision and Cadena, it has also stimulated self-censorship through threats coming from the *Consejo Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones*.<sup>12</sup>

These restrictions to the freedom of the press were made apparent during the 2014 protest cycle, something that in turn fueled the events further. Not only during *La Salida* were groups of journalists seen protesting over their situation (e.g. the fact that there was no paper on which to print their newspapers), but the government also placed serious obstacles in the way of the media to stop them from broadcasting these events. Due to censorship and/or self-censorship, no local media covered the demonstrations (or at least the violence involved) during the initial weeks. While CNN and Colombia's NTN24 covered the evolution of the events for a while, these outlets were eventually taken off the air and their journalists expelled from the country (Martinez, 2014; Munoz in Smilde et al., 2014).

To be sure, 12F put Maduro's legitimacy seriously into question. However, it is worth noting that by the time the demonstrations took off, Maduro had considerable support within the governing coalition, and large numbers of

12 Although regularly and openly attacked, these outlets functioned during Chávez's times.

Venezuelans stood by him. As mentioned above, only two months before the peak of the cycle, his party was the clear winner in the municipal elections of December 2013 – with a substantially wider margin than in the presidential elections that had taken him to power eight months before. In light of this, the overshadowing of social and economic issues, and the centrality of Maduro's legitimacy in the *La Salida* discourse, are likely to have prevented the demonstrations from growing bigger and becoming more diverse in terms of the profile of the participants. Many Venezuelans, especially from the popular sectors (see next section) and in line with their historical tendencies in terms of political behavior (Velasco, 2010; 2015) were not persuaded to mobilize against a government that had just ratified its power democratically and in campaigns in which their major concerns were losing predominance.

#### 4.3 Who took to the streets?

There are many misleading portrayals of those who protested in Venezuela during the first semester of 2014. Perhaps the government itself was the main contributor to these misrepresentations, but the opposition certainly played its part too. Similar to the way in which the PT in Brazil tended to consider protestors as right-wing (see Mendes, in this volume), President Maduro rushed to characterize people protesting as "fascists" who wanted to kill him, and to describe what was going on as a coup d'état harnessed by a minority (La Prensa, 2014). At the same time, the opposition depicted these protests as representing the will of the Venezuelan people at large, a view broadly disseminated by the international media.

Both depictions are misleading. 12F was neither a demonstration orchestrated by a "fascist minority," nor an "encompassing protest" (Shalev, 2014) or "cross-class movement" (Velasco, 2015). At the onset of the 12F cycle, we observed mainly university students taking to the streets and developing a protest agenda against insecurity and repression. As the events unfolded leading to 12F, we observed the most radical sectors of the MUD, led by López-Machado, tapping into the student movement, capitalizing on these manifestations of discontent and putting forward a protest agenda to make Maduro resign.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no on-site protest surveys to help us identify more accurately the profile of the average protestor. However, qualitative evidence suggests that the social base of the contentious events remained largely, although not exclusively, confined to middle-class sectors

identified with the opposition. While not direct evidence of who participated, the spatial distribution of the protests in Caracas is telling in terms of class participation in the events. Given the areas of the Venezuelan capital where the protests concentrated, it is safe to say that the profile of the people was upper and middle class: for example, barricades were heavily relegated to upper-class parts of the city (Interview VZ4). Moreover, this seems not to be the case for Caracas alone, but for the country as a whole: protests took place in the 15 or 20 most affluent municipalities of Venezuela.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, the fact that there were no protests in *barrios* or in less affluent municipalities does not necessarily mean that popular sectors did not participate. However, area specialists and analysts claim that, beyond the geographical distribution of the events, the protests in themselves did not attract the popular sectors of the country. Based on her research on (and from) the *barrios*, Rebecca Hanson (2014b), a Venezuela specialist from the University of Georgia, wrote, “For people [...] on this side of the town [barrios], these protests have little to do with resolving their problems, and many believe that they will only make things worse.” In the same vein, Mariano Frascini (2014: 12) stated: “The neighborhoods where the popular sectors live were not seduced by the opposition protests and, despite a difficult socioeconomic context, the Chavista masses were still loyal to the government.”

### **Why did people from the popular sectors largely stay out of the protests?**

Conditions were ripe for a cross-class mass movement to challenge a government showing major signs of weakness (see Velasco, 2015). If we consider the grievances protestors initially voiced and the media widely advertised – extreme inflation rates, shortages in necessary goods, and rampant insecurity – the fact that the poorer sectors of the Venezuelan

13 Interview with David Smilde in CCTC-America, July 2, 2013. Note, however, that Uzcátegui (2014) contradicts this view and argues that this middle-class bias is peculiar to Caracas, since many popular sectors joined the protests in other states. In addition, López and Watts (2014) claim that the poor neighborhoods did mobilize, citing the example of Petare in western Caracas. However, despite the suggestive title (“Venezuela’s poor join protests as turmoil grips Chávez’s revolution”) and a quote from a resident of Petare, the article does not present any further evidence of this. A report by Bajak (2014), showing how members of the student movement took the “risk” of visiting poor neighborhoods to persuade residents to join the protest via canvassing methods, reveals that the movement was aware of this disconnection and the lack of participation by people from these neighborhoods. For example, student leader Alfredo Graffe of Simon Bolívar University said in an interview that the movement held more than a dozen informational meetings in working-class districts from late February.

society stayed out and kept their *barrios* clean and quiet is puzzling. In fact, activists from the movement do not understand why this happened and regret it: "It was frustrating to see that despite the economic situation more people from the barrios did not join," recognized one of my interviewees (Interview VZ3). Although the country's social and economic crisis is likely to affect (although to different degrees) every Venezuelan regardless of how wealthy they are, it is likely to hit the poor especially hard (Neuman, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Then, why is that the poorer sectors, including thousands of disenchanting and disaffected Chavistas, did not take to the streets?

Answering this question is not an easy task. This is particularly so if we consider that, unlike what some analysts have suggested (see Rodrigues in Smilde et al., 2014), popular sectors in Venezuela are all but averse to protesting. While Venezuelans have long protested and demonstrated, since 1999 the street has become a key site of political struggle (Velasco, 2014a). The OVCS data clearly show that contentious politics was far from dormant during the years before the 2014 wave: over 5,000 and 4,000 protests were registered in 2012 and 2013 respectively (OVCS, 2012; 2013). *Barrio* residents are no exception: they have protested massively. This sector, perhaps more than any other in Venezuelan society, has shown that they are willing to voice their grievances as many times as they deem it necessary. However, they tend to do so differently from what we observed in the 2014 cycle: they do not usually protest *against* the government, but rather demand responses on specific/concrete issues *before* the government (Interview VZ4).

Thus, the absence of these sectors in the 2014 protests can hardly be explained by their rejection of protest as a means to challenge demands, let alone by the blind loyalty of the poorer sectors to a government that has given them so much. These sectors have fought for a long time to get what they got and continue to fight to preserve it (Interview VZ4).

Building on available analysis, I propose two reasons that might help us solve this puzzle:<sup>15</sup>

14 For example, Smilde (2015) explains how a shortage of staple goods is likely to affect the poor more than the better off: "in contemporary Venezuela you can get a good variety of food if you have enough money, either by purchasing non-standard goods whose prices are not controlled, or by purchasing basic goods on the black market. But if you are poor, you are highly dependent on purchasing basic goods at their controlled prices. Obtaining them, if they are available at all, requires waiting in lines during multiple supermarket visits per week: today chicken, tomorrow laundry soap, the next day milk."

15 One alternative explanation that has been put forward mainly by the opposition is that people from the popular sectors did not mobilize out of fear of the violence coming from the *colectivos* that, allegedly, are in charge of suppressing dissent in Chavista circles (see Bajak, 2014;

- 1 *Despite pressing economic and social conditions affecting all sectors of society, concerns that were not within the interest of the popular sectors dominated the protests.*

It is one thing to mobilize for social and economic rights; it is another to mobilize in the name of civil and political liberties, such as freedom of protest (connected to the issue of repression) and freedom of speech (highlighting issues of censorship and self-censorship). Although inflation and insecurity were the backdrop of the protests, and the main driving force (especially the latter) of the initial demonstrations in the western state of Táchira, for 12F the opposition put the emphasis on civil and political liberties and framed the demonstration as one questioning the legitimacy of the Maduro government.

Although civic and political rights are certainly important and legitimate reasons to take to the streets, these issues are less likely to mobilize popular sectors in Venezuela. While in 2013 most of the protest events focused on issues related to labor, insecurity, shortages, and education and only 6 percent on “political rights” (OVCS, 2013), in 2014 political demonstrations (specifically *against* the Maduro government) constituted the bulk of the events (4,833, or 52 percent of the total) (see Table 4.1). These issues were further away from the interests of the popular sectors and proved less appealing as a mobilizing force. In the words of María Pilar García-Guadilla, Professor in the Department of Urban Planning at the Universidad Simón Bolívar (Caracas, Venezuela), “popular sectors did not feel represented in either pro- or anti-Maduro agendas [...] [they] had nothing to gain since the claims that were finally brought to the fore were not scarcity, insecurity, and high inflation.”<sup>16</sup> One student and activist seems clear about this limitation in the framing of the events: “it did not capitalize on the economic situation, something what would have allowed to do something stronger” (Interview VZ3).

By highlighting civil and political concerns over broader social and economic ones in the launching of *La Salida*, opposition leaders showed once again that they do not know how to connect their interests with those of the middle classes (Interview VZ4). In fact, as Smilde noted, it is hard to identify any effort from the opposition to bridge the gap between the middle and upper classes on the one side, and the popular sector on the other.<sup>17</sup>

Corrales, 2014). This hypothesis was also mentioned in Interview VZ3. The role of the *colectivos* during this cycle will be discussed in the section dealing with the eruption of violence.

16 Interview by Alejandro Velasco (2014a).

17 Interview in CCTC-America, July 2, 2013.

**Table 4.1 Breakdown of the central claims in 2014 protest events**

Central Claim	Number of events	Percentage
Against government	4,833	52%
Labor rights	1,414	15%
Housing and basic services	1,365	15%
Security	971	11%
Scarcity	481	5%
Education	221	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,285</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: OVCS

- 2 *It is one thing to urge the government to respond and demand changes, another very different thing to call on it to resign.*

Many Venezuelans from the popular sectors are indeed unhappy with the country's state of affairs and especially with how things have unfolded during the Maduro era. In fact, they have protested demanding the government to take measures on several occasions. However, asking the government to resign is something totally different. Popular sectors in Venezuela tend to respect democratically elected governments and conceive attempts to oust them via non-institutional means as illegitimate and anti-democratic (Velasco in Smilde et al., 2014). Research on the interactions between protest and electoral politics in Venezuela shows that, since the fall of Venezuela's last dictatorship in 1958, movements seeking to overthrow elected governments via non-institutional politics (including guerrilla movements) have failed to capture popular support (Velasco, 2010).<sup>18</sup> Shortly after Maduro was elected and his party received electoral support, the *La Salida* demonstrations clearly dismissed the vote as a primary locus of popular expression, making popular sectors less likely to join.

Without ignoring the problems the country is facing, popular sectors are on average better off today than before Chávez came to power, and therefore most of them support Chavismo politically.<sup>19</sup> This is especially important in

<sup>18</sup> Note that this holds even for the case of Hugo Chávez in the early 1990s, when he failed to gain popular support in a coup seeking to oust an elected government that was highly unpopular in the *barrios*. Even during the 1989 Caracazo events, *barrio* residents massively took to the streets not to seek the overthrow of the government but to manifest strong opposition to neoliberal reforms.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, in Caracas, residents of the *barrios* now enjoy improved government-run water, electrical, communication (including landlines and Internet), and transport (including a lowcost cable car to go up and down the hills) services (Neuman, 2014). This reality opens room for a “dependence hypothesis,” namely that people from the *barrios* do not protest against



a country where political affiliation seems to be the central variable shaping political behavior.<sup>20</sup> For many, being Chavista is more about a political ideology in which they find refuge than about loyalty based on (economic) performance (Fraschini, 2014: 13). Moreover, among “middle-of-the-road Chavistas” (Velasco, 2014b) many do not hold the government accountable for the most pressing problems the country is facing (e.g. crime).<sup>21</sup> With this state of affairs, it becomes apparent that people politically affiliated with Chavismo are not likely to join a protest *against* the government that has the main objective of making the president resign.

*La Salida*’s framing (and aim) was perhaps successful from the point of view of capturing the attention of the media, but weak in terms of mobilizing more people.<sup>22</sup> Setting Maduro’s ouster as the central objective of the demonstrations was too ambitious and lacked a shared and inclusive vision (Gonzalez, 2015). It was not clear whether and which other more short- and mid-term objectives, perhaps more concrete, accompanied the overarching objective of pushing Maduro to resign. As a student activist put it, the framing “created confusion about the objectives of the movement, they were not clearly presented, in case they actually existed” (Interview VZ3). Another interviewee, involved in the organization of 12F, felt that *La Salida*’s logic was widely misunderstood: “many people did not understand it well and leaders did little to explain it well. It was presented as a ‘vote vs. street’ thing, while in reality it implied a series of coordinated steps leading to the exit of Maduro” (Interview VZ2).<sup>23</sup> In sum, the framing of the protest as *La*

the government not (only) because they are grateful, but also because they might feel that their well-being depends on the government, as it is the state which provides most of the economic goods and services in those areas. As Bajak (2014) suggests, the poor sectors in Venezuela are more worried about losing their pensions, subsidies, and basic services in the scenario of the opposition seizing power.

20 In fact, in Hanson’s preliminary findings of a study using survey data, political affiliation is the only variable that yields statistically significant results in shaping political behavior. This work is still unpublished. These preliminary findings were shared during a personal conversation.

21 This assertion also seems to find statistical support in Hanson’s preliminary findings.

22 Note that *La Salida* was not appealing only to the popular sectors, it also created further divisions with the MUD. One of my interviewees closely linked to the organizers told me that in a meeting they held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February to organize and call for the 12F, many members of the MUD decided to step back as they felt that it was largely a “Lopez and Machado thing” and they “did not buy into *La Salida* discourse. In fact, there were important political actors, such as Antonio Ledezma – mayor of Caracas from 2008–2015 – who were aware of the potential limitations of this and tried to change it and keep the MUD united on this” (Interview VZ2).

23 See Annex 1 for a flyer that gives an account of the “coordinated steps” my interviewee refers to. This is material produced by the movement and shared with me by an interviewee.

*Salida* lacked the capacity to unify people, something that has been found as central for a successful campaign (Ackerman and Merriman, 2014).

The emphasis on civil and political liberties and the harsh anti-government discourse of the opposition did not resonate with popular sectors. The absence of the popular sectors in the streets, however, should not be seen as a sign of unanimous support for the government or of a passive attitude towards it. It is important to highlight that the fact that 12F was mostly middle class does not imply that it was small in numbers. One key achievement of the "Bolivarian Revolution" has been to lift many out of poverty (according to World Bank data, the percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines dropped from 48.7 in 1999 to 25.4 in 2012) and to expand the Venezuelan middle class. Therefore, stating that the protest cycle was largely a middle-class phenomenon is not to say that it was "a protest of the rich minority," as the government implied. The class transformation that the country has gone through in the last years problematizes in important ways the association poor = Chavista, rich = opposition (Interview VZ1). As a matter of fact, the protests seemed to have had wide support: in a survey carried out by the Venezuelan Institute for Data Analysis (IVAD) in late March 2014, 71.4 percent of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the student movement and, when asked whether they agreed with the opposition continuing to organize marches and protests, 55.3 percent of the respondents answered "yes."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the protests were limited not in the sense of attracting only a minority of the Venezuelans, but in the sense of remaining circumscribed to the middle and upper sectors of society and, thus, failing to incorporate an importantly aggrieved sector. All in all, one can still argue that the fact that the protest wave was not backed by the popular sectors is likely to have contributed to the campaign's failure in achieving its main objective: to unseat Maduro.

#### 4.4 Why did violence erupt in an otherwise peaceful protest?

One of the features making this cycle of protest unprecedented in an otherwise highly active and contentious society was, in fact, protest-related violence. According to data presented by the Public Ministry, 3,306

24 With the information available, it is hard to judge whether there might be any bias in the results. However, the survey had national coverage, involved 1,200 respondents, and had a sample error between 1.03 and 2.37 percent. A summary of the results can be accessed here: [www.scribd.com/doc/216528368/IVAD-Nacional-2014-Abril-Resumen-pdf](http://www.scribd.com/doc/216528368/IVAD-Nacional-2014-Abril-Resumen-pdf).

protestors were detained, 973 injured, and 42 killed in the short period between February and June. While the government was blamed for having privileged harsh repression as a way of policing the manifestations, the opposition was accused of having incited protestors to turn to violence.<sup>25</sup> Although the protests were initially peaceful and the main performances were nonviolent, including demonstrations, sit-ins, and hunger strikes (Gonzalez, 2015), violence quickly erupted and took the stage. Being at the core of the media, violence rapidly overshadowed this peaceful scenario. While the protests were unfolding in Venezuela, images of the country falling into chaos and of the harsh street violence were witnessed by the world almost in real time via, mostly, social media. A homemade YouTube video called “What’s going on in Venezuela in a nutshell,”<sup>26</sup> full of images from an Instagram page (*Venezuela Lucha*) and devoted almost exclusively to documenting this violence, soon became very popular.<sup>27</sup>

Although these images let the world know about the violence that was taking place in the country, it did little to clarify and explain where this violence was coming from and who was being affected. Indeed, it gave a largely one-sided version of the events, portraying the government as the sole perpetrator and the pacifist protestors as the victims. In this regard, David Smilde (2014b) wrote: “The ongoing unrest in Venezuela has been portrayed abroad as a conflict between Venezuelan citizens and an increasingly desperate government that has resorted to massive human rights abuses to maintain its hold on power. That depiction both oversimplifies and distorts the issues at play.” In this section I aim to provide some preliminary analyses of the government’s violent response to help overcome this oversimplification and to correct for this distortion.

To be sure, the 2014 cycle of protest made apparent how violent and out of control contentious politics can get in Venezuela. For many people, it made manifest the authoritarian character of Venezuelan democracy in its attempt to repress dissent (see della Porta, in this volume). In fact, it was government repression that actually made the initial small-scale protests

25 In fact, Leopoldo López, one main of the organizers of *La Salida* and the National Coordinator of the opposition political party *Voluntad Popular*, has been in prison since February 2014 on charges including incitement to riot and violence during the 12F mass demonstration. The López case has kept both the opposition on the streets (both in Venezuela and beyond its borders) and Venezuela in the pages of international newspapers until the time of drafting this chapter. López has now been described in some international media outlets as “Latin America’s most prominent political prisoner.”

26 The video can be accessed here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF56cPgauDc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF56cPgauDc).

27 Link to the Instagram page: <http://websta.me/n/venezuelalucha>.

in the state of Táchira progressively grow bigger. As the government started to detain peaceful and lawful protestors, more people took to the streets demanding their release. Initially, only fellow students protested over the way in which the government responded, calling for the release of their companions. As time went by, mothers of students joined the protests in solidarity. The government reaction was to repress even more strongly and to detain more individuals. Similarly to what we observed in Brazil's 2013 contentious events, protests escalated when the mainly peaceful forms of direct action were met with repression by the state forces (see Mendes, in this volume). In fact, it was repression that set the stage for the 12F and subsequent protest, giving rise to what became one of the central claims of *La Salida*: opposition against the restriction of democratic spaces in Venezuela, as people became increasingly concerned about the opportunities for political freedom in Venezuelan society.

The government's repressive response is puzzling. Previous experiences of street demonstrations in Venezuela provide good grounds to believe that Chávez would not have responded like Maduro did. If they are so similar ideologically, how is that Maduro responded in a way that Chávez would hardly have done? Why did Maduro make use of harsh repression when he himself saw how successful Chávez was in dealing with protest without use of violence? One possible response to these questions is that Maduro did not really want things to unfold as they did and that, rather than aiming for a repressive response, he was simply incapable of controlling the security apparatuses (Interview VZ1). There might be some truth to this, especially if we see the protests as an opportunity for Maduro to show that his administration is tough on crime and takes security seriously. However, the reforms he had undertaken since he took office cast some doubt on this hypothesis, which implies some passivity on his part. If one looks at Maduro's recent reforms in the security sector and the role played by the main actors who have taken up the task of policing protests during this cycle, the National Bolivarian Police (PNB) and the National Guard, it hard to believe that he passively allowed things to happen.

Maduro rolled back a decisive process of national reform of the police set in motion by Chávez back in 2008, when he created the PNB in order to curb heavy-handed police tactics, limit its use of coercion and, in this way, overcome the widespread negative image of the police as "uniformed criminals."<sup>28</sup> While Chávez's reform had a clear civilian character and

28 As a result of this reform, every PNB officer is trained at the National Police University in human rights and the progressive use of force, and other bodies were created in parallel to

promoted a non-repressive model of citizen security, Maduro moved in the direction of increasing the involvement of the National Guard (the military) in policing matters and deploying it in popular sectors of Caracas (Hanson, 2013).<sup>29</sup> In the words of Zubillaga and Antillano (2013), two local university professors, while the Chávez government invested significant resources in non-repressive and alternative security policies, “renewed emphasis on militarized approaches like the *Plan Patria Segura* [set in motion by Maduro in 2013] is undermining what gains have been made.”

Although PNB officers are trained (and have the legal mandate) to control demonstrations, even when they turn violent, the National Guard was the protagonist in policing the 2014 cycle of protest. It is unclear whether Maduro explicitly ordered the National Guard to take action during the 2014 protest. However, the provision was already in place months before this with the implementation of the *Plan Patria Segura*, which put the military in the streets to combat crime along with the PNB. Back in May of 2013, Maduro was explicit about this when he stated: “This is a special plan to protect the people of Venezuela; our militia, army, and National Guard will be on the streets.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, as Hanson (2014c) found by interviewing PBN officers, the PBN considered the Guard to be the right actor to police these events. As the demonstrations became overtly violent, they felt too restricted and too weak to face them, and thus supported the Guard’s actions. This situation was reinforced by the fact that many Venezuelans see the National Guard as more capable of and effective in dealing with criminal activity and public disruption than is the PBN. “To many residents, weary of being terrorized by armed gangs,” says Ritter (2013), “seeing troops on the streets is a welcome projection of government power.”

The fact that it was the National Guard and not the PNB that mainly controlled the protests helps explain, at least in part, the outbreak of repression and violence coming from the state. While the PNB are trained to

monitor the PNB and receive denunciations in cases of abuse (See Hanson, 2014c; Hanson and Smilde, 2013).

29 Maduro’s new direction took shape in 2013 with the Plan Patria Segura (Secure Homeland Plan), in which crime is portrayed as an issue of “war.” As a result, the Minister of Interior and Justice, together with other key positions in the Venezuelan government, are held by military officers. This plan has been described as “an indictment of militarized citizen security plan” (Zubillaga and Antillano, 2013). See also Hanson, 2013; Hanson and Smilde, 2013.

30 For an official release, see “Plan de seguridad con efectivos de la FANB” in the Venezuelan New Agency (AVN) website. [www.avn.info.ve/contenido/plan-seguridad-efectivos-fanb-comenzar%C3%A1-pr%C3%B3ximo-lunes](http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/plan-seguridad-efectivos-fanb-comenzar%C3%A1-pr%C3%B3ximo-lunes).

restrict their use of violence, as mentioned above, and, when it is needed, to use it in a differential and progressive way, the National Guard has scant training in this regard, and their acts are not regulated by any other body or oversight mechanisms (Hanson, 2014c). Thus, the militarization of protest policing in the Maduro times is a central element to understanding why violence erupted in this cycle in a way that we did not see in the Chávez era and that we would hardly expect from him. More convincing than the "incapacity-passivity hypothesis" is one explanation that, bearing in mind Maduro's active role in the reforms, takes into account the fact that he does not have the same support among the military (and the government) that Chávez had and thus left the National Guard more space and made some reforms look friendlier (Interviews VZ1 and VZ4). The reforms that Maduro rolled back are clearly reforms that went against the interests of the military and that perhaps only someone like Chávez could sustain.

### What about the *colectivos*?

There is a third actor to take into account when looking at the violence that erupted in the 2014 cycle: the *colectivos*. Long before the Chávez era, in poor neighborhoods in Caracas and especially in the western *barrios* (later spreading to other cities in the country), residents organized into armed groups to fill a security void left by the liberal state, and to protect their communities from drug trafficking and state-sanctioned violence.<sup>31</sup> Although the *colectivos*' view on the state (which was their enemy when they first emerged) changed substantially during the Chávez era, the relationship has always been highly contentious and full of contradictions. Although the *colectivos* became perhaps Chávez's most radical support base and pledged their loyalty to him, they have maintained autonomy from the state (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 3-6).<sup>32</sup> In spite of this complexity in their relationship, it has been easily assumed that the *colectivos* are pro-government armed groups always ready to defend any Chavista government, a belief that stems from their active defense of Chávez in the 2002 coup and their self-promotion as defenders of the Revolution. Thus, they have been portrayed as one of the main instigators of anti-opposition and anti-protestor violence during this latter cycle. In fact, as Smilde pointed out in an interview, the

31 Note that the *colectivos* have several functions that go beyond policing and security provision, such as promoting social and cultural events in neighborhoods. The *colectivos* point to their bookshops, study groups, summer camps for children, and coffee mornings for pensioners as genuine services to their communities.

32 To explore these tensions further, see Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, chap. 3.

*colectivos* were blamed for every act of violence committed by any non-uniformed person and/or by anyone riding a motorcycle.<sup>33</sup>

The opposition, the international media,<sup>34</sup> and human rights organizations (e.g. Human Rights Watch) have all supported the view that during the protests the *colectivos* made extensive use of violence to defend Maduro's government and operated in coordination and collaboration with the PNB and the National Guard. López himself described the *colectivos* as "paramilitary groups armed by the government and protected by officials in uniform" (Wallis, 2014). Although *colectivo* members openly declared that they were "not part of this game that they [the opposition] are playing to create a coup" (Wallis, 2014), there is qualitative evidence that the *colectivos* played their part in policing and dispersing the protests. Not only did PNB officers affirm the *colectivos*' role in policing the protests in some areas of Caracas (Hanson, 2014a), but several *barrio* residents mentioned that they were directly or indirectly discouraged by the *colectivos* from taking part in the events. More concretely, they played at least two roles: trying to dissolve the so-called *guarimbas*,<sup>35</sup> and attempting to deter *barrio* residents from participating in the demonstrations.

However, it is definitely misleading to infer from this that they were a central instigator of violence – or even worse, the main perpetrators of violence – and that they acted in coordination and cooperation with the government. *Colectivos* did try to instill fear in some *barrios* and probably discouraged some people from taking part in the demonstrations. It is true that they have a lot of power in some areas of the city, but it is an exaggeration to state that they control the entire *barrios* (Interview VZ4). Given their limited power, the repression of the *colectivos* could explain only a very small portion of the violence we observed in the cycle, as well as the fact that people from the *barrios* did not show up at the events. The opposition, especially the López and Machado wing, tends to overemphasize both the power of the *colectivos* and their links to the government.

33 Interview in Latin Pulse by Rick Rockwell, March 4, 2014 (online) <https://soundcloud.com/latinpulse/venezuela-protest-movement-memorializing-chavez-lp2282014>.

34 See, for example, *The Huffington Post*, 2014 and *Medium*, 2014.

35 In the effort to spread the protest throughout the city and expand beyond the main squares and the centers, protestors installed *guarimbas*, i.e. road blocks/barricades, in and around mostly middle-class residential neighborhoods in order to disrupt daily lives. This performance, which was condemned even by the mainstream opposition, proved to be deadly to all sides. Not only did people die by accidentally crashing into them or from the wires strung at the level of bike riders' heads (targeting the *colectivos* that mobilize on motorcycles), but people were shot while trying to remove them. For more on the *guarimbas*, see León, 2014; Silva and Rangel, 2014.



Analyzing the outbreak of violence from the perspective of governmental reforms, state actors, and alleged pro-government actors does not assume, in any way, that violence came only from the side of the government. Although evidence on who did what to whom is not definitive in any sense (there is debate even on the total number of deaths), it is clear that violence came from both sides (of the struggle as well as of the political spectrum) and claimed deaths from several sectors, including opposition activists, government supporters, members of the security forces, and bystanders. Even a well-known *colectivo* leader was killed; in fact, he was the first fatal victim: during the first day of the protest, Juan "Juancho" Montoya was shot dead. According to the Washington Office of Latin America's blog "Venezuelan Politics and Human Rights," of the 35 deaths they had recorded by the end of April, three were directly attributable to security forces, six to accidents caused by/in barricades, four to accidents occurring during the course of the protest, and 22 to unidentified gunmen. From the 22 cases for which the perpetrator was not identified, seven were opposition activists, four were government supporters, seven were members of the security forces, and four were non-participants (Smilde, 2014a).<sup>36</sup>

Finally, to close this section, it is worth noting that state-sanctioned violence did not go fully unnoticed. In fact, Maduro took actions in order to punish officials from his government, including high-level ones, and openly recognized that "there was a group of officers from the Sebin [Venezuela's intelligence agency, *Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional*] that did not comply with the orders." In addition to the seventeen officials who were arrested and charged for the excessive use of force during the first days of the events, Manuel Beltran, the Director of Sebin (Various Venezuelan HR Experts, 2014) was also taken into custody and removed from his post.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Getting things right about political events in Venezuela is particularly challenging. Not only is it difficult to get reliable data, but the high level of polarization that has characterized politics in the country during the last

36 The Americas Blog of the Center for Economic Policy Research also keeps track of the deaths. By March 24 they had recorded 37 and provide concrete identification of each victim and source for the event. See Johnston, 2014. For a spatial distribution of the deaths recorded by April 11, see the interactive map *El Universal*: "Fallecidos durante las manifestaciones," [www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/protestas-en-venezuela/140411/fallecidos-durante-las-manifestaciones](http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/protestas-en-venezuela/140411/fallecidos-durante-las-manifestaciones).



years makes it hard to assess the reliability of what is found in the media, both national and international. By considering a diverse array of sources and giving voice directly to actors involved in the cycle, I hope this chapter accomplished its objective: to provide a balanced account of the contentious events that shook Venezuela in the first half of 2014 and to provide some preliminary analyses that will, hopefully, stimulate scholarly work on the topic.

To be sure, the chapter did not cover all aspects relevant to the protest cycle in consideration. Central issues, such as the role of *colectivos*, the use of social media, or the role of outsiders and international actors, were only mentioned in passing, and clearly played an important enough role to deserve an individual section in this chapter. However, it made an effort to provide preliminary answers to some of the main questions that students of social movements commonly ask in order to make sense of complex contentious events. I hope this will be a springboard for future research that develops new theoretical insights, more clearly testable prepositions, and a more systematic empirical treatment to the event. This is to be considered only a first, although important, step.

### List of interviews

VZ1	August 27, 2015
VZ2	September 15, 2015
VZ3	September 18, 2015
VA4	October 9, 2015

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## 5 The Marikana Massacre and Labor Protest in South Africa

*Francis O'Connor*

### Abstract

South Africa's large trade union movement, particularly the COSATU federation, played a decisive role in the overthrow of apartheid in 1994. COSATU consequently became a constituent member of the governing Triple Alliance dominated by the ANC, but notwithstanding some early achievements, it has become gradually marginalized by its former allies and detached from its radical origins and grassroots members. This steady decline has led to fragmentation, disengagement of union activists, and the return of autonomous workers' committees. The state reaction to grassroots protest has been characterized by efforts at cooptation and repression. State violence against trade unionists culminated in the massacre of striking platinum miners at Marikana in 2012, a decisive turning point in declining state legitimacy. This chapter traces this slow decline of the ANC and COSATU's legitimacy, situates the massacre in the broader context of labor and social movement contention, and details the processes of worker mobilization in the immediate lead-up to the killings.

**Keywords:** Labor activism, COSATU, ANC, state violence, Social Movement Unionism

### 5.1 Introduction

*All that is left is a slight re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag and down at the bottom a shapeless, writhing mess still mired in the Dark Ages.*

(Fanon, 2004: 96)

Criticism of the transition to democracy in South Africa has been muted. The manifest failings of post-1994 South Africa – ranging from one-party domination, widespread corruption, endemic violence, and the ever growing poverty gap – have tended to be downplayed. The popular narrative holds that South Africa is a success, albeit an imperfect one, but a rare example of a functioning democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is an economic

powerhouse; a BRICS country; it hosted Africa's first major international sporting event in 2010, and it is the home of Mandela. Unlike other African states, South Africa's struggle against apartheid was actively supported by many in the West, generating an emotional investment in the country's ongoing success. Amidst the multiple failings of Africa's post-colonial states, South Africa serves as a positive example of the continent's potential. The international community's romanticized vision of the country was severely shaken by events on August 16, 2012. The South African state decided to take a stand against domestic unrest in the shape of labor protest and incessant social movement campaigning by gunning down 34 striking platinum miners at Marikana. The massacre was redolent of those conducted by the apartheid regime in Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976. The calculated brutality of the massacre unveiled the ever authoritarian nature of the South African state, leading to a widespread interrogation of the previously lauded ANC (African National Congress) regime.

Contemporary South Africa closely resembles what Crouch has described as a post-democracy: a society "that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell" (in Carrigan, 2013). Crouch's (2004) three defining characteristics of post-democracy – coordinated collusion by a limited circle of businessmen and politicians; extensive clientelism; and cooptation of civil society – all apply to the ANC government. Accordingly, the South African case shares many of the structural characteristics with the other states analyzed in this volume. Its political environment closely resembles that identified by Roberts (2015) in Latin America, wherein center left or parties with strong links to organized labor impose neoliberal economic policies resulting in the opening of a space to their left which can be occupied by populist parties (for example the Economic Freedom Fighters, EFF); strong protest movements such as the labor mobilization under analysis here; or broader service delivery protests (see Desai, 2002). However, in contradistinction to other cases covered in this book, the Marikana protest and the antecedent labor struggles could not be defined as middle class. Generally speaking, protest in South Africa is mostly organized by the poor and the proletariat against the rich and the political class that protects it, thus taking the shape of movements of crisis rather than of affluence (Kerbo, 1982). Yet, in this case, although the platinum miners of Marikana were undoubtedly exploited and worked in atrocious conditions, it would be wrong to characterize their actions as a response to a particular crisis. In light of the success of protests at other platinum mines and confident of the strength of their position given their centrality to the extraction process and strong

horizontal solidarity, the Marikana rock drill operators generated an opportunity to protest rather than responding to external political openings. Indeed, as reflective of della Porta's emphasis on temporalities in capitalism (2015), the Marikana case was not triggered by a short-term issue as in Brazil, nor a middle-term crisis-growth dynamic as in Bosnia, but was rather the result of a longer-term crisis of legitimacy. The drawn-out nature of the consolidation of dissatisfaction is a result of the ANC's cooptation of the majority of potential avenues of dissent, its ongoing legitimacy due to the ANC's revolutionary heritage, and occasional if effective utilization of repression (see Trejo, 2014).

The South African case is remarkable, because unlike other countries where neoliberal economic dictates have been imposed on their population by governments with little popular legitimacy, the ANC enjoyed and still enjoys, to a significant extent, huge popular support due to its role in the struggle against apartheid. This has resulted in a mass cognitive disjuncture between how people believe the ANC to be, with reference to its 1955 Freedom Charter, and to how it actually conducts politics; the gap between the abstract and the concrete or rhetoric and practice. This tension is also reflected in the ANC's self-identification. As former ANC Minister Kader Asmal explained, when the party was writing the ANC constitution there was a debate: "if we call ourselves a political party, it means that we are an elite-driven structure; if we say we are a national liberation movement, it means we are a movement for and led by the masses. The latter proposal won, with a nuance: "We are a national liberation movement involved in electoral politics" (in Darracq, 2008a: 438). And although the party model has resolutely displaced the movement, the emotional legacy with which the ANC bound itself to the masses has limited the emergence of any serious political alternatives. Yet, notwithstanding its popular legitimacy, the country's enormous mineral wealth, the absence of serious rivals to power, and its mass party infrastructure, the ANC chose to resort to violence and massacre to shore up its power. This chapter will detail the transition from reliance on the carrot of patronage and cooptation to the use of outright repression as a means to maintain the stability of the ANC's hold over South African society.

The first section will address the late phase of the anti-apartheid struggle and analyze how trade unions and movements became imbricated in the ANC's power structures. The second section will elaborate on the emergence of independent labor organizations and the immediate context of the Marikana massacre. It will conclude with a discussion of the aftermath of the killings and how it has affected the ANC's grip over South African society.

The chapter draws on the extensive Farlam Commission constituted by the South African government to establish the facts surrounding the massacre. It also makes ample reference to the book co-authored by the academic Peter Alexander, which is based on numerous interviews with survivors of the massacre who were present throughout the days of violence (Alexander et al., 2013). It is also based on numerous long-form investigative reports by journalists, academics, and activists (Tolsi and Botes, 2015; Sacks, 2012; Marinovich, 2012b; Chinguno, 2013). It is further supplemented by the many secondary sources of both an academic and political nature which have analyzed the Marikana protest and massacre and contextualized them in the troubled waters of contemporary South Africa.

## 5.2 Protest in the late-apartheid period

After the conclusion of the Rivonia trial in 1964, the majority of the ANC's leaders were imprisoned or forced into exile (Wood, 2000: 130). The ANC's active presence inside the borders of the country was limited to the periodic and generally unsuccessful incursions of its armed wing Spear of the Nation/*Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), which engaged in a campaign of sabotage and acts of armed propaganda (see O'Brien, 2003). However, the apartheid regime was violently contested by an array of social movements or "civics," as they were known, in the townships, which came together in 1983 to form the United Democratic Front (UDF). And beginning from the early 1970s, extensive labor militancy rendered the broader trade union movement a formidable opponent to the regime.

In the early 1970s there was an upsurge in workers' mobilization in the Durban area, with over 100,000 workers engaging in strike actions in 1973 alone (Hickel, 2012: 664). The campaign was bolstered by communal solidarity among the mostly Zulu workers and was also supported by their traditional tribal authorities. Importantly in terms of the participatory democratic union culture that was to emerge in the years that ensued, the striking workers' horizontal democratic practices "made repression and co-optation difficult by refusing to nominate leaders or negotiating teams" (Wood, 2000: 143). The protests resulted in notable gains for the workers and the establishment of the Wiehahn Commission, which proposed the recognition of black unions as a means of coopting and controlling them in 1979 (2000: 137). Early union militancy tended to be Workerist in character, meaning "they prized class-based, shop floor concerns over the broader goal of nationalist anti-colonial struggle" (Hickel, 2012: 671). Workerist unions

joined to form the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979. They also “placed participatory democracy at the workplace as a means of building their power base at the top of their agenda” (Maree, 1998: 30). However, unionism was not limited to those with a Workerist perspective, and other federations adopted a form of social movement unionism<sup>1</sup> that was “based on the view that political liberation and economic liberation were inseparable, and that the working class had to assert its leadership within the liberation movement” (Buhlungu, 2005: 707). There was massive growth in union membership across all the unions between 1979 and 1983 (Wood, 2000: 137), rendering organized labor a key site of opposition to apartheid. But given the growing political tumult led by the “civics,” political unionism became the more dominant approach within the labor unionism. This transformation to an overtly anti-apartheid repertoire was evidenced by FOSATU’s participation in a two-day stay away in the Transvaal organized by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in 1984. As FOSATU leader Thami Mali explained, it was “the first time in South African history that trade unions and militant organizations have acted in such dramatic concert” (in Middleton, 2003). In 1985 a new trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), was established which incorporated some Workerist principles along with a strong commitment to fight apartheid at the national level (Masiya, 2014: 447). The advent of COSATU “considerably changed the style of working-class politics, heralding a new dispensation of unionism with overt ties to the nationalist movement” (Hickel, 2012: 673).

The spectrum of party-movement opposition to apartheid was extensive and often characterized by conflictual relations between them, notably in the Western Cape where there were recurrent tensions between the mostly Zulu Inkhata Freedom Party and the ANC. The South African Communist Party (SACP) had long been a close ally to the ANC, and indeed, it was declared illegal in 1950 even before the ANC was outlawed (Thomas, 2012). The SACP was also a co-founder of the MK in 1961 (see Landau, 2012). The other large political grouping was the Pan African Congress of Azania (PAC), which was a breakaway from the ANC because of its support for an exclusively Africanist political orientation. The PAC was banned at the same time as the ANC, and both parties’ organizational capacity was dramatically reduced by the imprisonment of their leaders and the exile of their leading cadres.

Political resistance to apartheid was somewhat fragmented until the Soweto uprising against the imposition of Afrikaans as the language of

1 This type of unionism has been categorized as political unionism, radical political unionism, and new social unionism (Vogiatzoglou, 2015; see Von Holdt, 2002).

instruction in 1976 imbued the struggle with new momentum. That uprising was headed mostly by students influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement and was thus instigated by neither the ANC nor the PAC. The late seventies were characterized by growing political foment, but again, it was fragmented and organized by civics at the local level. Protest usually targeted the local black authorities that governed the townships at the behest of the apartheid government. It usually consisted of "campaigns against rent hikes or poor housing [and] spilt over into anger against those individuals who were perceived as assisting in the administration of apartheid" (Jack and Cherry, 2013). These disparate threads gained more coherence with the foundation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 to protest against the government's proposed new constitution. It united civics, church groups, student associations, and workers, totaling 600 organizations and over two million people (van Kessel, 2000: 17). In response to a call by the ANC in 1985 to render the townships ungovernable, mass protests led to enormous public disorder and the declaration of martial law in over 155 townships, which forced the government into negotiations (Wood, 2000: 139). Importantly, the ANC could only call on other associations, albeit associated with them but not commanded by them, to physically confront the government. The success of the UDF led to the stabilization of an ethos of "people's power, self-government, and participatory democracy" (Darracq, 2008b: 592), an ethos that continues, to a certain extent, to inform popular protest in the post-apartheid era.

Accordingly, after a long and often violent struggle, apartheid was brought down by the strength of unions and the movements on the ground, in conjunction with the ANC. The 1994 election was a massive success for the ANC: it obtained over 60 percent of the vote in an election which boasted the remarkable turnout of 86 percent<sup>2</sup> (Johnson and Schlemmer, 1996). In preparation for the 1994 elections, the Triple Alliance was formed between the ANC, SACP, and COSATU. Although many left-wing political parties have organic relationships with the labor movement across the world, the Tripartite Alliance is notable because it permits COSATU to actually nominate a number of candidates on the ANC party list (Dibben, Wood, and Mellahi, 2012: 497). COSATU had enjoyed huge growth, from 462,000 members in 1985 to 1,317,000 members in 1994; it was a formidable force (Maree, 1998), which ensured that it heavily influenced the ANC's economic

2 The National Party of de Klerk was second, with 20.4 percent of the vote, and the Inkhata Freedom Party third with around 10.5 percent. Data available at <http://electionresources.org/za/provinces.php?election=1994>.



policies in the early years. The ANC 1994 election manifesto adopted the COSATU-designed Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which promised housing, services, health, and social welfare for the country's people (Maree, 1998: 31). The ANC also initially fulfilled radical promises after taking power; it implemented the 1995 Labour Relations Act and pro-union legislation which provided for "economic democracy at the workplace" and was popularly viewed as having adjusted "the balance of forces, reflecting the greater influence of organized labor in the new post-apartheid order" (Baskin and Satgar, 1995: 46-47). It also established the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), which allowed union participation in macroeconomic policymaking.<sup>3</sup>

However, the ANC's commitment to social justice and redistribution shifted from the level of policy implementation to empty rhetoric with the adoption of a new macroeconomic policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution Plan (GEAR), in 1996. GEAR "aimed at achieving sustainable long-term economic growth, based on fiscal and monetary discipline as well as the reduction of government debt" (Maree, 1998: 49). Roundly praised by the IMF and not unsurprisingly criticized by COSATU and the SACP, it adhered to the well-known neoliberal dictates of wage restraint for workers, easing of labor regulations, strict fiscal targets, and widespread privatization of state assets (Bassett and Clarke, 2008). The plan was popularly attributed to the efforts of Thabo Mbeki, who subsequently served as President of South Africa after Mandela. It has been argued that such reforms were needed to reassure the white business community and international investors (Ndlovu, 2014: 256). They however put a severe strain on the Tripartite Alliance, as exemplified by Mandela's description of how it operated: "There are matters where we will agree. The second category is matters where we disagree among us, but compromise. The third category is where there is no agreement at all and the government will go on with its policy" (in Buhlungu, 2005: 710).

Once the ANC was voted into government, its reliance on the unions and the movements ended. They had served as the bulwark of its mobilization in organizational terms and of course served as a key electoral demographic of support. The ANC became a mass party with hundreds of thousands of members distributed across a well-organized network of 2700 party branches (Darracq, 2008b: 593), taking on the features of both a patronage and a socialization structure. As Darracq explains, "when a branch member or a relative dies, members collect money to pay for the funeral. During

3 It is worth mentioning that the SACP also took credit for the leftist policies implemented by the ANC in the period immediately after 1994 (Thomas, 2012: 113).



branch meetings, members circulate job advertisements" and meals are provided during meetings, which is a significant incentive for its often impoverished militants (2008b: 599-600). In light of such an extensive grassroots network, the ANC rid itself of its dependence of the unions, which was needed to compensate for its limited presence within South Africa for the duration of apartheid. The cohesive relationship between the ANC and COSATU began to deteriorate as soon the country's nascent democratic system became consolidated. As Buhlungu detailed, "the advent of liberal democracy implied a redefinition of the roles of the two allies and exposed the limits of trade union action in the political arena" (2005: 708). As early as 1996, an internal COSATU report lamented that its newfound position of exclusion from the decision-making process had begun to lead to a demobilization of its activists (in Buhlungu, 2005: 710).

In an address to the COSATU Special National Congress in 1993, Mandela exhorted trade unionists:

You must be vigilant! How many times has a labour movement supported a liberation movement, only to find itself betrayed on the day of liberation? There are many examples of this in Africa. If the ANC does not deliver the goods you must do to it what you did to the apartheid regime (in NUMSA, 2013).

However, through the Triple Alliance, COSATU was itself ensconced in the corridors of power, and this radically altered the capacity of the labor movement to confront the governing establishment. The age-old problem of union leaders becoming detached from their roots and identifying more with the holders of power than with the workers they purportedly represented had begun to insidiously weaken and atrophy the labor movement. This tendency was already noted in the nineteenth century when Sidney and Beatrice Webb, in regard to union leaders, prophesied that:

Whilst the points at issue no longer affect his own earnings or conditions of employment, any dispute between his members and their employers increase his work and add to his worry. The former vivid sense of privations [...] gradually fades from his mind and he begins more and more to regard complaints as perverse and unreasonable (in Allen, 2000: 104).

As part of the RDP, the ANC made a commitment to addressing the absence of black businessmen in a scheme known as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). In practice this has amounted "to the transfer of shares, which have

been acquired disproportionately by a small number of prominent, politically connected black figures" (Tangri and Southall, 2008: 701). A significant number of the beneficiaries of this program have come from the trade union movement. The transformation of trade unionists into businessmen also reaches down to more modest local levels, with hundreds of regional and local activists transforming into small business owners (Buhlungu, 2005: 711). This has led to a decisive depoliticization of the movement with many shop stewards joining their respective unions as an instrumental means to enhance their above-ground career prospects (Hartford, 2015). In the past, shop stewards were specifically targeted as dangerous instigators; now they are viewed as a recruitment pool for future managers. As one disgruntled union member lamented, "with all the perks they receive, shop stewards are like nobles in the old class structure. Members are just peasants" (in Buhlungu and Bezuidenhout, 2008: 273-274). Notwithstanding the South African trade unions' tradition of internal democracy dating to the 1970s, these developments have led to a crisis of representation within the labor movement (Webster and Buhlungu, 2004: 235). Additionally, the labor movement has made little progress in mobilizing workers in the informal economy or in addressing issues of rural poverty (2004). Unions have also become synonymous with corruption. Nowhere are the perverse consequences of COSATU's alliance with the ANC more evident than in the establishment by unions of "union investment companies" (2004: 238). As was convincingly argued in a different context of trade union cooptation, such an institutional arrangement results in "union bureaucracy [becoming] institutionalised in a top-down partnership milieu rather than alternative, bottom-up mobilisation strategies" (McDonough and Dundon, 2010: 544) – thereby undermining both their legitimacy and their efficacy. In less than a decade, COSATU had diminished from being arguably the principal actor in defeating apartheid, to little more than a futile counterweight to the ANC's neoliberalism; it was surpassed by the emergence of a wave of subaltern social movements in the early 2000s.

### 5.3 Dissent and protest in the ANC era

The contradictions engrained in the transition which brought the ANC to power – whereby "insurgents would accept political inclusion at the cost of economic moderation (principally a commitment to economic liberalism), while economic elites gained constitutional protection of the status quo distribution of wealth in return for accepting electoral and other forms of

democratic competition as the terrain on which they would henceforth pursue their interests" (Wood, 2000: 6) – were readily apparent. It was inevitable that this compromise of political participation at the price of socio-economic justice could not endure perpetually. This leads one to question why the unions – purported representatives of the working classes – have continued to support this situation of ever greatingening inequality for so long. The incentive structure at the individual level as outlined above was open only to a relatively select few of the movement, but the masses repeatedly endorsed the ongoing institutional arrangement by voting for the ANC. Internal COSATU surveys confirmed that in the 1994 election, 75 percent of its workers voted for the ANC; in 2004 the level had only marginally dropped to 73 percent (Beresford, 2009: 395). There are two explanations for this continuity: one rooted in identity and the other more strategic in nature.

Firstly, there was a large overlap in membership between union militants and the ANC, a form of complementary dual identity. This overlap is further bolstered by emotional commitments, reciprocal bonds, and interpersonal loyalties in the bonds of comradeship (Buhlungu and Psoulis, 1999: 127). Secondly, the ANC successfully presented a dichotomous identity: on the one hand rigidly enforcing the GEAR program and, on the other, harking back to its revolutionary heritage, presenting itself as radically opposed to neoliberalism. In a 2004 document, the ANC fiercely condemned the Washington Consensus and argued for state intervention along with "detailed planning and implementation of comprehensive development programs, fully accepting the concept of a developmental state" (in Hart, 2008: 685). While it also cut water supplies and services to the poor and presided over a decline in the income of the poorest 20 percent of the population since apartheid (Alexander, 2010: 32). Instead of acknowledging that the ANC had undergone radical change, COSATU generally preferred to focus on what remained of the "Left" in it. Accordingly, COSATU support for Zuma was central to his displacement of the overtly neoliberal Thabo Mbeki in 2007 (Bassett and Clarke, 2008). The ANC generated a transcendental form of loyalty – meaning that as an entity in itself, it is above reproach and that its failings can be attributed to its local functionaries. Accordingly, much of the service delivery protests of the 2000s were actually directed at ANC officials but not at the organization as a whole (Naidoo, 2015: 440).

The other main reason COSATU continued to support the ANC was that there were no alternatives, although that has changed since the establishment of the EFF as the first split to the ANC's left (Nieftagodien, 2015: 448). Its lukewarm endorsement of the ANC for the 2004 election baldly stated that "based on their own actions and statements, both in and out of government,

none of the current opposition parties are capable of matching or improving this ANC record" (COSATU, 2004). Although COSATU's influence was ever diminishing within the alliance, it still had some voice and ongoing faith in some of the more left-wing factions within the ANC. COSATU accordingly adopted a strategy of combining its influence within the alliance and of mobilizing the masses to directly pressure the government. It had certain limited successes and arguably halted the ANC swinging completely to the right (Bassett and Clarke, 2008: 796). COSATU strategically tried to combine a carrot and stick approach, but its declining militancy at the grassroots level and its fragmentation into multiple weak unions (Buhlungu, 2005: 712) had enfeebled it to such an extent as to no longer serve as a deterrent for government. As documented at a more general level, in corporatist states unions become little more than lobby groups and are thus dependent on access to government in order to obtain rewards for their constituency (see Culpepper and Regan, 2014). Accordingly, COSATU remained loyal to the ANC because of the legacy of the shared struggle against apartheid and because it felt that rupturing its link to the government would result in isolation and deprive it of its dwindling influence. In the long term, however, this cautious approach has radically undermined COSATU and delegitimized it in the eyes of the workers it claims to represent.

#### 5.4 Marikana protests

The specific case study in this chapter can be considered as a concrete microcosm of broader processes, as outlined by della Porta in the introductory chapter, whereby neoliberal economic dogma and practices hollow out political rights. Trejo (2014) has outlined that autocratic governments utilize a carrot and stick approach to discipline independent opposition movements by offering selective incentives and cooptation and the use of coercion if the former fails. In the case of South African labor movements, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the material advantages and opportunities it conceded to certain of its leaders are the carrot. The Marikana protests highlight the exact turning point when the limits of state patronage become apparent and it makes recourse to repression. The protests at Marikana are illustrative examples of the government's abandonment of its commitment to workers and, in more general terms, its left-wing roots; the distance between the NUM<sup>4</sup> and its grassroots members;

4 NUM is an affiliate union within the COSATU federation.

a reappropriation of the self-organized participatory practices of labor in the 1970s and 1980s; state violence and the fragmentation of the trade union movement encapsulated by the at times violent rivalry between the NUM and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). Although disillusionment had been growing with the trade union leadership for more than a decade, it only escalated to capture public attention in 2012 at Marikana. The massacre of dozens of protestors is worthy of attention itself, but the killings at Marikana should be considered the tangible manifestation of the usurpation of the political rights to strike and to protest by the urge to protect a broader socio-economic system.

South Africa is the world's largest exporter of platinum; the richest deposits lie in the Bushveld complex in the north of the country roughly between the cities of Rustenburg and Pretoria. Platinum mining has surpassed gold as South Africa's most profitable mineral extraction sector. Between 1994 and 2009, platinum output increased by 67 percent, and platinum extraction also now employs more workers than gold mining (Capps, 2012: 64). The platinum sector has also proved relatively impervious to mechanization. The most efficient way to extract it is through hand held machines operated by Rock Drill Operators (RDOs). As a result, unlike other mining sectors such as agricultural work, where mechanization has radically diminished the necessity of a large workforce, platinum extraction remains labor intensive. This has resulted in the "continued presence of and need for large numbers of mineworkers, reminiscent of the late 19th century, mass based proletariat of early industrial capitalism" (Stewart, 2013: 51). This dependence on labor has ensured that workers in the platinum sector have substantial bargaining power (Chinguno, 2013: 7). The Marikana mine is operated by Lonmin Plc, which began extraction in 1971.

Although the formal apartheid pass laws were abolished, their legacy of internal labor migration remains central to the mining industry. As part of its objective of racial separation, the apartheid regime sought to confine black Africans into so-called homelands or Bantustans. This resulted in labor shortages, which the government addressed by permitting circular migration wherein males would temporarily relocate for months at a time to areas of industry before returning to their places of origin where their families remained. In the mining areas they were housed in large compounds or hostels, and their movements back and forth to their homes were tightly controlled. The system was a "cornerstone of the landscape of colonial and apartheid South and southern Africa" and "one of the most extreme examples of spatial engineering in human history" (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2011: 238).

The NUM,<sup>5</sup> established in 1982, played a key role in the anti-apartheid struggle. As one of the most influential unions within COSATU, it had an important role in the ANC. One of its founder members, Cyril Ramaphosa, became the ANC's first general secretary after it returned from exile in 1991. As of 2006, it was also the country's largest individual union. Aside from its role in national politics, it brought about radical and tangible progress for its workers and, due to the heterogeneous ethnic mix of workers in the mining sector, was respected for the manner in which it avoided internal ethnic strife (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2011). Notwithstanding its vaunted heritage, it was vulnerable to the structural and cultural changes within trade unionism as outlined above. Its upper echelons became subsumed into big business and national politics; its officials became direct employees of the companies for whom they worked and became detached from the workers they purported to represent. As with trade unionism on the international level, NUM has struggled to mobilize the sub-contracted workers who had become an ever larger component of the mining workforce (2011: 276). In a sense, its capacity to militate on behalf of the workers was undermined by the successes of the trade union movement, which resulted in the disbanding of the apartheid labor migration system. The NUM in particular, because of the mining sector's reliance on migrant workers, used the constrained spaces of the workers' residential compounds as its organizational foundation (Buhlungu, Daniel, and Southall, 2007: 247; Chinguno, 2013: 10). As workers began to move to nearby informal settlements, the NUM was confronted with an altered spatial environment to which it has struggled to adapt. And finally, workers' solidarity was qualitatively easier to generate when it overlapped with the racial divide. The BEE and upward worker mobility have ensured that many of the enforcers of workplace grievances are themselves black. This has triggered an ulterior fragmentation between ethnic groups, with persistent accusations of ethnic favoritism regarding access to jobs (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu, 2011: 283).

The workers' grievances preceding the massacre related to workplace issues associated with pay, recruitment practices, and safety, along with discontent regarding the unfulfilled commitments by Lonmin in its Social and Labour Plan (SLP). The principal demand of the Marikana strikers was an increase in wages to R12,500 a month, a significant increase from the average wages of R5,000 – but, as one striker explained, they made an exaggeratedly high demand as a negotiating tactic, and they had been in fact

5 For an account of the early NUM, see Moodie 2013; 2010.

willing to settle for around R8,900 (Alexander et al., 2013: 16). The strikers' additional concerns centered on their general working conditions including:

[...] danger, with risks intensified by pressure to work in hazardous locations; the arduous character of work, which often, because of production targets, included shifts lasting 12 hours or more; doubled-up bodies endlessly shaken by heavy drills; artificial air full of dust and chemicals; high levels of sickness, including TB; and managers (often white) who were disrespectful and adversarial (Alexander, 2013: 607).

Other grievances were directed specifically at the actions of NUM officials. There was wide dissatisfaction with corruption in the allocation of company housing with which NUM was tasked (Chinguno, 2013: 11). The NUM was also engaged in blatant corruption in the recruitment of workers. As one interviewed mineworker at Marikana explained, jobs become available only after the requisite NUM members had received a bribe (Alexander et al., 2013: 68). As Chinguno observes, the NUM's role in recruitment "reflects how management has appropriated the union as its human resource functionary" (2013: 20).

Additionally, the living conditions in the adjacent settlements were a cause of much anger. All mining companies are legally obliged to provide an SLP, which generally covers the companies' contribution to the local economy, health and education services, and the housing of its workers and their families. These are rarely fulfilled, as was the case with Lonmin (Davis, 2015). The situation is particularly complex because the majority of Lonmin's workers are still migrants: 83 percent in 2010 (Alexander, 2013: 61). They come from the impoverished Eastern Cape, Lesotho, and Swaziland; but unlike when they resided in the all-male compounds, they tend to take a "second" local family resident in adjacent settlements, putting a further strain on their limited resources (Chinguno, 2013: 9). This ensured that the conflict seeped beyond the limits of the factory, moving beyond a mere labor issue to one incorporating facets of service delivery protest. Living conditions in these settlements of thousands of people are dismal. In the settlements of Nkankeng and Big House, where Marikana miners live: "homes are rudimentary shacks made from corrugated scrap metal, wood and cardboard." There is no electricity, and "water is sourced from one of the public taps placed sporadically around the community" (Tolsi and Botes, 2015) – thereby highlighting Lonmin's total disregard for its SLP obligations.

The Marikana strike was not the first in the cycle of protest in the platinum sector. In January 2012, a wildcat strike was organized by rock drill



operators at Impala, another nearby mine. There was therefore a degree of proximal and direct diffusion of tactics and framing (Soule, 2004: 296) between Impala and Lonmin. Labor relations in South Africa are characterized by the prevalence of recognition agreements at the individual workplace level. It is a form of union majoritarianism “whereby the majority union bargains on behalf of all as is regarded as the sole representative of employee views” (Hartford, 2015). This was introduced “to promote big unions’ hegemony, minimise union pluralism and create stable industrial relations” (Chinguno, 2013: 19). However, when the representative union abandons the interests of its workers, this essentially deprives workers of any alternative legal institutional means to express their grievances. Accordingly, the Impala protest was led by an improvised strike committee. It was led by the RDOs, who enjoy a form of elite status in the workers’ hierarchy (Stewart, 2013: 42). Their respected status is derived from their continuous exposure to danger, and it has been described as “the most dangerous job in the business. They [the RDOs] regard themselves as men amongst men” (Marinovich, 2012a). They are almost always migrant workers and are usually MaSotho from Lesotho (2012a). As a result, they are double bound by ties of ethnic solidarity and the shared perils of the rock face. This is important because government’s capacity for cooptation and repression are limited in the cases of “horizontal decentralized organizations where multiple local leaders are more accountable to densely organized local networks” (Trejo, 2014: 46). Although it circumvented legal collective bargaining procedures, the Impala strike led to a significant pay raise for the miners. Given the proximity of Impala and Marikana and the shared ethnic and linguistic background of many of the RDOs, who mixed socially and often lived with one another, news of the Impala victory spread quickly to Marikana (Chinguno, 2013: 22), convincing the workers there to take action into their own hands outside of the usual union protocols.

### **5.5 First Phase of strike action (August 9-11): NUM Violence against Striking Workers**

Although there had been some informal meetings among RDOs from different mining shafts, the first big assembly with all of Lonmin’s RDOs occurred on August 9 at the Wonderkop Stadium. A number of key decisions were then taken and a leadership committee elected from amongst the workers. The leaders were selected because of “their historical leadership in recreational spaces, the community and the workplace” (Alexander et



al., 2013: 12). An interviewed mineworker explained that in light of some of the disorder that had marred the Impala campaign, the elected committee were chosen because of their perceived capacity to “control people” (2013: 17). The workers proposed a pay raise of R12,500 and resolved to exclude the NUM from the campaign – despite the fact that it was the recognized union at Lonmin (Chinguno, 2013: 23). The majority of workers were NUM members, with only a sprinkling of AMCU members (Sacks, 2012); but in light of its aforementioned failings and the success of the Impala campaign, which took place outside of formal bargaining structures, it was consciously decided to proceed without the NUM. A decision was taken to march the following morning, August 10, directly to Lonmin’s senior management office. The workers marched en masse to the office, where management refused to meet with them and demanded that any issues be resolved through the formal NUM-mediated channels. In light of the rapid diffusion of this wildcat strike approach from Impala to Marikana, Lonmin executives sought to re-establish a precedent and not engage with non-NUM workers collectives. An internal Lonmin memo, which came to light during the Farlam enquiry by its Vice President Barnard Mokwena on Thursday the 9<sup>th</sup>, warned officials at Marikana not to engage with workers “outside of the collective bargaining structure” and proposed “that instead of talking, the company should sack the strikers and call in the police to deal with them” (in Davies, 2015).

On the morning of August 11, the workers marched to the NUM office to declare their intention to proceed without them. As soon as the workers, who were unarmed with the exception of traditional *knobkerrie* sticks, were within 150 meters of the NUM offices, NUM branch officials wearing the red shirts of the union opened fire on their union comrades. There are discrepancies in the number of casualties, with Chinguno (2013) suggesting that two workers were injured but widely believed to have been killed, others suggesting that two miners were injured and subsequently died (Alexander et al., 2013: 17), and still other suggesting that two RDOs and NUM members were killed (Sacks, 2012). In any case, it is clear that the first violence was carried out by the NUM and was directed against its own members. As a direct result of the killings, the strikers immediately armed themselves in order to protect themselves from further attacks (Sacks, 2012).

At this point it is worth addressing the argument that the dispute in Marikana can be reduced to a struggle between the incumbent union, the NUM, and a newcomer, the AMCU, trying to usurp the former’s dominant position within Lonmin’s mines. This simplistic but mistaken characterization of the conflict as an inter-union rivalry has gained significant credence

given its airing at the Farlam Commission (Evans, 2014) and has even been adopted by accounts sympathetic to the strikers (Malala, 2012). The strikers were overwhelmingly NUM members, and the “protest was really a case of NUM members rebelling against their own leadership, *not* a case of inter-union rivalry” (Sacks, 2012). The AMCU was founded in 1999 as a breakaway from the NUM, following internal disciplinary measures taken against the current AMCU general secretary Joseph Mathunjwa. It is importantly not part of COSATU and thus not embedded in the government structures of patronage and control. It defines itself as apolitical and non-communist (in Masiya, 2014: 456), focusing its efforts on workplace issues reflecting a turn away from the social movement unionism of the established trade unions. The confusion regarding the AMCU’s organizational role arises from the fact that in the wake of the Impala strike, the workers moved en masse from NUM to AMCU and because AMCU had gained a small foothold in the Karee shaft of Lonmin in 2011 (Chinguno, 2013: 17). Its presence prior to the strike at Marikana, albeit growing, was minute. In the wake of the massacre, it has displaced the NUM as the largest union across all of Lonmin’s Platinum mines (Sabela, 2013).

Additionally, the AMCU has been accused of using violent tactics as a means to consolidate its expansion (Chinguno, 2013: 18), and the in the wake of the Marikana killings there has been an ongoing low intensity war between the two unions (Polgreen, 2013). Violence is however a common feature of union struggles in South Africa: a COSATU survey of its members found that more than half viewed violence as necessary in strikes (COSATU, 2012). This openness to violence needs to be contextualized in its legitimized deployment during the anti-apartheid struggle. Accordingly, violence remains an acceptable “repertoire of practices when [popular] frustration and anger become too much” (Von Holdt and Kirsten, 2011: 27). In summary, as Hartford (2015) asserted, “there is no clear evidence of AMCU or any third party planning and initiating the unprocedural industrial action. In fact the key characteristic of the action is that it is driven by workers for workers and against their union advice and without any union endorsement or support.” Efforts to muddy the waters and attribute organizational agency to other actors – be they the AMCU, Malema’s EFF, or traditional religious healers’ *sangomas*<sup>6</sup> – serve only to detract from the fundamental issue at hand, which is the disintegration of the ANC-COSATU-SACP’s edifice of

6 South African police reports argued that the protective *muti* – a form of ritual blessing – the *sangoma* had offered the strikers had emboldened them to such an extent that they had become fearless, leading them to engage in violence (Farlam, 2015: 106). Interestingly, the strikers had

clientelism which has resulted in the state having to deploy violence against those who were once its most strident supporters.

## 5.6 Second Phase (August 11-13): Expansion of Strike & Further Violence

Following the attack by the NUM, the strikers regrouped at an exposed rocky outcrop known as a *koppie*, close to the informal Nkankeng settlement where many of the strikers resided. The workers were joined by a number of men from the locality, thus escalating from a strictly labor struggle to a local one with some of the characteristics of service provision protests elsewhere in South Africa. However, importantly at this point, they were armed with machetes, spears, and knives (Chinguno, 2013: 25). On Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup>, a group of around 60 strikers, the leaders of whom had received a special *muti*, marched back to the NUM offices to remonstrate with the union over the killings. They were confronted with NUM security, which had barricaded the route to the office. The subsequent events are not entirely clear: it seems the security officials deployed plastic bullets but the strikers did not retreat, and in the clashes two security officials were killed – one hacked to death with machetes and the other burned alive in his truck (Alexander et al., 2013: 19; Chinguno, 2013: 25). On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, the conflict had clearly escalated beyond a simple pay dispute to an all-out strike involving not only the RDOs but all of the Lonmin workforce and the communities in which they lived. Rumors spread of work continuing at the Karee, Number three shaft, and a flying picket was dispatched on foot from the *koppie* to halt production. Upon arrival, they were informed that work had stopped but advised for their own safety to take a more circuitous route back to the *koppie* across the countryside. Following the route suggested by the mine officials, the strikers were confronted by an armed contingent of police, who demanded they surrender their weapons. The strikers declined to do so but proposed that once they were back to the relative safety of the *koppie*, they would then hand them over. They then proceeded to break through the weakest part of the police line blocking their way, clashes ensued, and three of the picketing strikers and two policemen were killed (Chinguno, 2013: 25; Alexander et al., 2013: 20; Marinovich, 2012b).

engaged the *sangoma* who had been involved in the Impala strike, some of the success of which was attributed to his *muti*.

### 5.7 Third Phase (August 14-15): Failed De-Escalation Efforts

The 15<sup>th</sup> was characterized by frenetic efforts to de-escalate the standoff. The NUM President Senzeni Zokwana was escorted to the *koppie* in an armored police vehicle, which he refused to leave in order to address the strikers. A worker present explained that Zokwana “indicated that he was not [t]here to negotiate but to tell us to go back to work” (in Chinguno, 2013: 26). That the president of a union was too fearful of his own members to address them in person highlights the gap which had crystallized between the NUM and its grassroots. As Sacks explained after the killings, “almost everyone [that he encountered] felt more hatred towards NUM than they did towards Lonmin, the police or even the Zuma administration” (Sacks, 2012). The AMCU president, Joseph Mathunjwa, addressed the strikers in person and pleaded with them to go back to work. He was received rather more warmly, but his advice was declined, as was a similar plea from Bishop Seoka, President of the South African Council of Churches. Mathunjwa returned to make one final futile appeal before the police began to encircle the *koppie* with barbed wire in preparation for the massacre that was to ensue.

The fact that the strikers were occupying an isolated rocky outcrop and posed no immediate threat or interference to anyone leads one to question the timing and extent of the police reaction. Why was the decision taken to massacre a group of striking workers rather than persevere with negotiations? The Farlam Commission exposed the central role played by the current Deputy President of the ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa, in lobbying for a police crackdown. Ramaphosa was a massive beneficiary of the BEE; his company Shanduka owns 9.1 percent of the Lonmin's shares, and he was a non-executive board member (Alexander et al., 2013: 92; Bruce, 2015). He acted as an informal conduit between Lonmin, the police, and the government throughout the period of the conflict. On August 15, the Minister for Mineral Resources, Susan Shabangu, had declared on the radio that the conflict was a wage dispute and urged management and the unions to resolve it between themselves. On the same day, in an email to Albert Jamieson, the Chief Commercial Officer of Lonmin, Ramaphosa assured him that he would explain to Shabangu that “the terrible events that have unfolded cannot be described as a labor dispute. They are plainly dastardly criminal and must be characterized as such. In line with this characterization there needs to be concomitant action to address this situation” (in Farlam, 2015: 423). He subsequently stated that Shabangu promised to convince the cabinet, the President, and the Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa “to act in a more pointed way” (in Farlam, 2015: 424).

The confirmation of this evidence at the Farlam Commission highlights the intertwinement of capital and government, where a mining company can rather straightforwardly inveigle the government to act on its behalf. The fact that it involved Ramaphosa, a central figure with significant revolutionary capital and popular admiration, is indicative of the decline of the contemporary ANC. As Adam Habib, a professor of political science at Johannesburg University, explained: "This is the general secretary of the NUM 25 years ago and architect of the South African constitution. It's a symbolic example of the degeneration of a cadre and civil activist and how he has become entrapped by his newfound wealth. It resonates so powerfully because it's typical of many in the ANC" (in Smith, 2012). It would be mistaken to over-emphasize the individual behavior of Ramaphosa in this instance. The imbrication of capital and politics is endemic in South Africa. The violence meted out to the workers was not simply to protect Ramaphosa's interests or even those in the mining sector, but rather to protect a wider system of patronage and corruption that had been potentially imperiled by the example of the Marikana's strikers. If their action were to prove successful, it could have undermined the entire labor system in South Africa upon which the country's economy was based. The Farlam Commission did not result in any condemnations for any of the actors, be they police or politicians, in its findings. Indeed, its impartiality has been brought into question by lawyers acting on behalf of the victims and by Amnesty International (2014). Therefore, the direct chain of command that led to the decision to open fire on the strikers is unlikely to ever be established; but the balance of probabilities suggests that the state's reaction was a strategic action designed to crush protest from below and act as a disincentive to other similar initiatives.

## 5.8 Fourth Phase – The massacre (August 16)

A decision was taken the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> at an "Extraordinary" meeting of the National Police Management Forum (NPMF) "to disperse, disarm and arrest the strikers" and that "if the strikers did not voluntarily disarm, then it would be done forcibly" (Amnesty International, 2015: 5). The Farlam Commission was, however, only presented with an evidently doctored set of minutes from that meeting, rendering them useless in determining the decisions undertaken at it (Farlam, 2015: 204). The disarming process was to be conducted by a number of heavily armed Special Paramilitary units rather than the expected public order units (Alexander, 2013: 608). On the morning

of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the police began to unfurl barbed wire to enclose the strikers on the *koppie*. Fearing being surrounded by the wire, many strikers began to run toward a gap in the tightening encirclement, at which point the police opened fire. As a mineworker present explained: “People were not killed because they were fighting, they were killed while they were running, we were not fighting, we were shot while running and we went through the hole and that is why we were shot. We did not want to be closed in with a wire like we were cows” (in Alexander et al., 2013: 50). It was established by the Farlam Commission that sixteen strikers were killed at this location (Farlam, 2015: 393). Many present on the first *koppie* fled in the opposite direction to a second hillock, which was labeled as the killing *koppie*. Here, over a twelve-minute period, around fourteen more workers were killed.<sup>7</sup> The overall death toll was 34 deaths and 78 injuries (Marinovich, 2012b).<sup>8</sup> At the second site, four of the dead had bullet wounds in the head or neck and eleven were shot in the back (Tolsi and Botes, 2015), suggesting a degree of precision in the targeting of the victims. Furthermore, it was revealed in the Farlam Commission that the police had anticipated the killings by ordering four hearses which could contain four corpses each (Farlam, 2015: 194). Yet, the police had not bothered to provide for any aid facilities for the wounded which would have inevitably occurred in such a confrontation, and it even diverted medical teams away from the wounded in the aftermath of the massacre (Amnesty International, 2015: 8).

The disproportionate deployment of police force was evident in the fact that in the course of the killings, only one single shot originated from the strikers, while the police fired more than 600 live rounds of ammunition from military grade weapons and made limited recourse to non-fatal weapons such as plastic bullets or tear gas (Amnesty International, 2015: 7). The Farlam Commission confirmed that the strikers were in possession of “spears, *assegais*<sup>9</sup> and *pangas*” (Farlam, 2015: 191) and at most a few handguns, of which only one was fired. The official police press release – which declared that at the second site of the massacre it was confronted by a “militant group stormed towards the police firing shots and wielding dangerous weapons” and that the “police retreated systematically and were forced to utilize maximum force to defend themselves” (SACP, 2012) – has been proven a blatant lie by forensic examination of the site and the findings

7 The discrepancy between the overall death toll of 34 and the identified locations of 30 deaths can be attributed to some deaths occurring later in hospital or having been moved elsewhere while injured.

8 The names of all the casualties of the period are listed in Alexander et al. (2013: 98).

9 A type of light spear.

of the Farlam Commission. While the weaponry in their possession could have been dangerous, as indeed it had proven to be in the days prior to the massacre, it certainly did not pose a threat given that the strikers had deliberately secluded themselves on a *koppie* away from any potential targets of violence. As Alexander argues, “disarming could have been achieved with relatively few casualties had it been undertaken once workers reached their hostels, shacks and houses, and, in practice, this is what happened during the weeks following the massacre” (Alexander et al., 2013: 88) – thus further reinforcing the argument that the decision taken to assault the *koppie* with overwhelming force was rooted in a political rather than a policing decision.

## 5.9 Aftermath

Remarkably, the mass violence and the killings of many of the strikers' leaders did not discourage the miners of Marikana. The strike persisted, and by September 7, attendance at work was down to only 2 percent, forcing Lonmin to negotiate with the strikers outside of the formal channels of the NUM (Alexander et al., 2013: 97). The final agreement granted a pay rise to R11,000, which was close to the workers' initial demand of R12,500 (Patel, 2012). It triggered a series of copycat strikes across the mining sector between August and October 2012, which further spread beyond the mining sector upon the mobilization of impoverished farm workers in the Western Cape (Naidoo, 2015: 442). Similar self-organized strikes continued throughout 2013 (Alexander, 2013: 610). The symbolism of the massacre was acknowledged by multiple community-led protests whereby new settlements were named or established ones renamed “Marikana” (Sacks, 2014).

Therefore, the struggle at Marikana resulted in two outcomes: it revived more horizontal and radical practices of mobilization from the period of the anti-apartheid struggle, and it undermined the ANC's popular legitimacy. In December 2013, NUMSA, one of South Africa's largest unions, voted in an extraordinary congress to leave COSATU (Morken, 2013), while unions within COSATU consistently lost members to independent unions or self-organized workers' committees. In the platinum mining sector, AMCU is now the largest union in Impala and Amplats, with 70 percent of the workers at Lonmin (Sabela, 2013). In terms of party politics, the Malema-led EFF has captured much of the disillusionment of former ANC supporters. It was the only party to have offered strong support to the strikers at Marikana (De Wet, 2012), and in the 2014 election it became the country's third largest party by winning over one million votes (Nieftagodien, 2015: 447).



It would be wrong to describe Marikana as the dawn of a new form of politics in South Africa. Even the very people who led the autonomous workers' collectives at Marikana have returned to mainstream labor union formats. A 2014 AMCU-led strike at Lonmin led to the achievement of the R12, 500 demand for which much blood had been spilled (Simelane, Lekgowa, and Nicolson, 2014). And while the AMCU tends to be more democratic than the NUM, it is heavily influenced by the leadership of its President, Joseph Mathunjwa. He has, in turn, proven very intolerant of autonomous workers' collectives as evidenced when he crushed Lonmin Workers' Council in Marikana, which had hoped to engage in a more social movement form of unionism (Sinwell and Mbatha, 2013). Concerns around the nature of the EFF are even more pronounced. Its leader Julius Malema is almost a caricature of a charismatic leader. His expounding of a combative militaristic masculinity and the consolidation of a worrying personality cult has rendered the EFF a vehicle primarily for the realization of Malema's vainglorious personal objectives rather than for the poor on whose behalf he claims to struggle. This is before even considering his behavior as leader of the ANC's Youth League, where he was an ardent Zuma supporter, openly corrupt, and generally ambivalent to the protests of South Africa's poor throughout the 2000s (Nieftagodien, 2015). Although South Africa remains beset by protest, some of it beyond the previously extensive reach of the ANC, much of it remains within the parameters of logic rooted in access to patronage rather than systematic transformation of the system. Contrary to the romanticized longings of certain academics, many of "even the most militant movements in the country [...] do not necessarily challenge the state per se, but rather seek to gain a piece of the pie on offer" (Sinwell, 2011: 62; see also Mdlalose, 2014). Therefore, the mineworkers of Marikana have at the micro level obtained their demands for higher wages and a changed union representation at Lonmin – indeed, they inspired workers and citizens to mobilize against the government throughout the country – but it is as yet impossible to say if such grassroots mobilization can prevail against the lure and power of the ANC's all-encompassing embrace.

## 5.10 Conclusion

It has been argued that the Marikana massacre is a "seismic shift" or a "watershed moment" (in Alexander, 2013: 605). In the short term, it inspired analogous mobilizations across a variety of sectors and actors. It has fundamentally undermined the union pillar of the Tripartite Alliance by tragically



exposing the extent of the gap between its grassroots workers and the COSATU union elites. It has been correctly argued that “for the first time one can say without any sense of exaggeration that the ANC, South African Communist Party, Cosatu alliance, insofar as it exists, has no ideological coherence or significance and provides little political leadership and direction. It may exist as a name but it no longer captures the moral fervor that led millions to place their hopes in them” (Sutner, 2013). In short, Marikana has unveiled the tensions inherent to the ANC and its allies organizing and benefiting from a neoliberal style economy, all the while presenting themselves as champions of social justice to their voters. Marikana is the bloody confirmation of South Africa's transition from a flawed participatory democracy oriented to some degree of popular redistribution to the hollowed out shell of Crouch's post-democracy.

Although the protests of Marikana's mineworkers serve as a reminder of the resilience of the marginalized, in the longer term it would be foolhardy to suggest that they have resulted in a lasting reconfiguration of South African political culture. As the quotation from Fanon at the beginning of this chapter suggests, there is a wearisome inevitability to transitions from colonial-like authoritarianism to more open democratic systems. South Africa exchanged the despised flag of apartheid for that of the “rainbow nation.” But freedom as defined by Mandela himself, “to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others,” has not been achieved and seems even less likely in the foreseeable future (Mandela, 2013). In light of similar democratic trajectories elsewhere, it seems rather more likely that as the government's legitimacy wanes due to its structural inability or unwillingness to share its resources beyond a small coterie of elites, it is likely to make more frequent recourse to the forms of violence witnessed on the *koppies* of Marikana.

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## 6 Left in translation

### The curious absence of austerity frames in the 2013 Bulgarian protests<sup>1</sup>

*Julia Rone*

#### Abstract

This chapter offers an analysis of the political and economic developments that led to the 2013 Bulgarian protests and of the different framings of grievances and identities that were put forward by the protesters and their opponents. The frames provided by activists, politicians, and journalists, among others, have been highly relational, contested, and often shifting over time, but one thing is certain: the austerity frame did not gain any prominence during the Bulgarian 2013 protests. Hence my main question is: why did protesters focus exclusively on oligarchy and corruption but did not address austerity or more redistributive social questions? Or to put it differently: why was leftist thought left out in the various narratives of the Bulgarian 2013 protests? Frames are not some disembodied entities floating in space but are elaborated and put forward by political subjects. Thus, the absence of austerity frames can be explained by the absence of strong leftist subjects alternative to the Bulgarian Socialist Party, which long ago started pursuing right-wing policies. Several reasons for this weakness of the left can be pointed out: the involvement of former communist elites in preying on the state that compromised them politically; the dominance of neoliberal think tanks since the beginning of the 1990s; the unprecedented entanglement of media, business, and politics, which makes it difficult for new voices to emerge. If an emphasis on austerity and a more left-wing political perspective are to gain popularity, left-wing political projects should work on the ground and reach out to people in order to counter more traditional nationalist or anti-communist narratives.

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**Keywords:** austerity, 2013 Bulgarian protests, framing, neoliberalism, entanglement of media, business and politics, post-socialist left

## 6.1 Introduction

“The boulevard is closed because of the protests. We can’t pass by the National Assembly.” That was the first thing the taxi driver told me on my way home from the airport. It was the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2013, days after the beginning of the mass mobilizations that started as protests against high electricity bills and evolved into an anti-government movement. Two days later, the cabinet of Prime Minister Boiko Borisov resigned and a turbulent year of political reshuffling, social mobilizations, and widespread enthusiasm followed. Three years later, Bulgaria is ruled by a government led once again by Prime Minister Borisov. The protest cycle has closed, citizen anger and energy have faded away, and young citizens in their most active political age increasingly emigrate, choosing “exit” instead of “voice” as they perceive protesting as a dead end, a closed street that hasn’t led anywhere.

In this chapter, I combine a careful empirical account of the 2013 protests with an attempt to bring capitalism and political economy back into the study of social movements. Following della Porta’s research on social movements in times of austerity (2015), I consider the temporal and spatial dimensions of capitalist development across the globe, situating the Bulgarian protests in the shadow of two major events: the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and Bulgaria’s accession to the EU in 2007. I analyze the complex processes that led to an eruption of civic anger, taking into account firstly, the recent transformation of capitalism related to the shift from social protection towards increased market liberalization and cuts in public spending; secondly, the important distinction between hegemonic power and dependent economies in the world system; and finally, the insights from the literature on varieties of capitalism, and more specifically, the varieties of capitalism within the common neoliberal wave (della Porta, 2015: 8–9).

The political project of integration of the Central and Eastern European periphery into the EU as a regional hegemon came with the major task of transposing EU rules and managing the interdependence of economies at very different stages of their development (Bruszt, 2015). But once Bulgaria transposed all the thousands of pages of EU rules and entered the single market, the EU’s ability to sanction local politicians diminished considerably. Meanwhile, the effects of the financial crisis became more and more acute and the increased role of the state in distributing EU funds in

conditions of economic stagnation led to an unprecedented entanglement between media, business, and politics. It was in this context that the 2013 Bulgarian protests erupted. And while a political economy analysis allows us to understand better the processes that led to many of the grievances Bulgarians felt in 2013, social movement studies teach us that grievances do not automatically lead to a process of mobilization but are mediated by complex relational processes of politicization and framing (Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Zald, 1996).

Thus, the second part of the chapter explores chronologically the main events in the three consecutive waves of protest in Bulgaria in 2013 and the ways in which protesters framed their grievances and different and conflicting identities. In this part of the analysis I draw extensively on framing theory that was developed in the context of social movement research by Benford and Snow. The authors emphasize that “social movements are not viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Rather, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents, actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (2000: 613). Snow and Benford perceive framing as active and processual, and often also highly contentious. The products of framing activity are “collective action frames.” There are three main types of frames: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames, which are the results of collectively negotiated meaning. Diagnostic frames identify the problems and assign blame, prognostic frames suggest solutions and desired future change, and motivational frames mobilize and call for action.

I find particularly useful the authors’ effort to elaborate the connections between framing and collective identity constructions. Hunt, Benford, and Snow introduce the concept of “identity fields” in order to account for the avowal and imputation of identity to three different clusters of actors: protagonists, antagonists, and audience (1994). They refer to these categories of identities as “identity fields” because “the identities within each category overlap and hang together, and because the categories are elastic and expand and contract across time” (1994: 185). The authors associate the antagonist field with diagnostic and prognostic framing, as these types of framing provide a description of the situation, point at an enemy, and prescribe a recipe of what is to be done. On the other hand, the protagonist field is instead associated with motivational framing as it entails the construction of identities and motivations that serve as an impetus for collective action.

The strong attention to the protagonists' identity during all three waves of the 2013 Bulgarian protests can also be interpreted through the threefold analytical schema proposed by Mary Bernstein: identity for empowerment, identity deployment, and identity as goal (2008). In my analysis I will focus exclusively on "identity deployment," which means "expressing identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories and practices of individuals become subject to debate" (Bernstein, 2008: 281). Once a group enters a debate deploying its identity as a strategy, it invites an "identity contest" and makes its very identity subject to debate. As I will show, this is precisely what happened with the Bulgarian summer protesters, for example, who presented themselves as the young and the beautiful, forcing them to constantly discuss and defend this identity.

One of the main things I note in the process of analysis is the curious absence of an austerity frame in any of the three waves of protest. In the third and last section of the chapter, I try to explain why protesters did not put forward such a frame, and why there was no prominent left-wing self-identification in the 2013 Bulgarian protests – which, after all, were protests in times of austerity. Or to formulate it differently and with reference to my title, the main question I pose in this chapter is: why was leftist critique left out in the various framings offered by the 2013 Bulgarian protests?

In order to address the main question I pose, I have analyzed multiple primary sources: I have coded more than 150 news articles from both left- and right-wing newspapers from the period of the protests, as well as fifteen texts produced by protesters themselves (manifestos, lists of demands, blog posts). In addition, I have interviewed five of the protest organizers, two experts in energy development, one journalist, and one sociologist. I have also read thoroughly the editorials and analytical articles selected in the volume *#The Protest: Analyses and Positions in the Bulgarian Press, Summer 2013* (Vajsova and Smilov, 2013) and the first available academic articles on the protests by Bulgarian sociologists and social movement scholars – many of whom engaged in participant observation of the 2013 mobilizations (Ganev, 2014; Gueorguieva, 2016; Nikolova, Tsoneva, and Medarov, 2014). Finally, I have explored the secondary literature on varieties of capitalism and the backsliding of democracy in Eastern Europe (Bruszt, 2015; Greskovits, 2015; Greskovits and Bohle, 2012). The current chapter does not aim to test hypotheses but, instead, to offer exploratory research that takes place at the intersection of political economy and social movement studies. In the next three sections of the chapter I try to shed light on some of the causes for the grievances faced by Bulgarian protesters, the particular

ways these grievances were framed, and why some framings turned out to be impossible in the Bulgarian context.

## 6.2 Left in translation: the political and economic context of Bulgarian protests

There can hardly be a better beginning for an analysis of the protests that shook up the Bulgarian political system in 2013 than the events of 1989, which laid the foundations of the democratic regime in the country after more than 40 years of state socialism. The 2013 protests questioned profoundly the quality of democracy that the 1989 events brought about. It has been acknowledged that the transition to democracy in Bulgaria happened not as a result of violence, protest, and mass mobilization, but rather as an elite coup carried out by members of the Bulgarian Communist Party, who tried to save some of their power as the Soviet Bloc was falling apart (Rossi, 2012). The peaceful nature of the transition allowed former members of the Communist Party to asset-strip state firms for a long period of about seven years before mass privatization followed (Doncheva, 2014).

During the transition period, the communist party *nomenklatura* transformed its political power into economic power (Tchalakov, Bundzhulov, and Hristov, 2008). The former communist functionaries deliberately weakened the state and subverted the infrastructures of governance in order to maximize their informal advantages under the new political conditions. The causes of state malfunctioning in the first decade of transition have more to do with the deliberate actions (or lack thereof) of key economic actors, aimed at subverting the infrastructure of governance, than with the usual suspect: neoliberal ideology (Ganev, 2007). The 1990s in Bulgaria were marked by well-intended reforms that halted as soon as they started and created an unstable environment for both local business and foreign investors. Only towards the end of the decade, after the major economic crisis during Zhan Videnov's government and the unprecedentedly big protests that took it down, did Bulgarian politicians embrace neoliberal ideology and achieve a cross-party consensus around its main tenets (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012).

The process of accession to the EU finalized in 2007 helped increase state capacity in Bulgaria but at the same time led to a further entrenchment of neoliberal logic in the programs of the well-established parties of the country, both to the left and to the right of the political spectrum. The Chief Negotiator of the Republic of Bulgaria with the EU, Meglena Kuneva,

was commonly referred to in the press as the “Yes Woman” (Burgis and Parker, 2009) for her response to every demand coming from Brussels. In his insightful analysis of EU integration and the backsliding of democracy in the Central and East European countries, László Bruszt observes that the EU put much effort into managing the interdependence between the two parts of Europe because the core EU member states could not easily externalize the potential political and economic costs of the eventual negative consequences of norm transfer. In addition, once becoming members, the CEE countries could not be denied access to EU development funds and the EU-15 wanted to keep the costs of enlargement under control – especially considering that the southern member states made clear that they would support eastern enlargement only if they could keep their shares of the development funds (Bruszt, 2015: 7). Thus, the EU invested many resources into safely bringing the new member states into the single European market. However, the focus of EU strategies was on detecting and alleviating potential negative externalities and not on achieving positive externalities such as the capacity to improve the position in the European markets or creating conditions of broad based distribution of economic gains (2015: 9).

Focusing on the case of Bulgaria, this neglect of development goals and redistributive issues on the part of the EU was not problematized by Bulgarian politicians in power (regardless of party affiliation) for several reasons. First, politically, there was no other option than to push for joining the EU, even at the price of accepting multiple unfavorable conditions; and second, questions of social redistribution and inequality were less salient in Bulgaria during the early 2000s: a period of influx of foreign investments, booming household credits, and steady economic growth after the turbulent and insecure 1990s (Economic Research Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2014). Somehow, the belief persisted that once the country entered the EU, everything would be better, the economy would flourish, and corruption and clientelism would be constrained (Bulgaria in the EU, 2008). But the reality turned out to be different.

In the post-accession period, the EU had far fewer mechanisms to influence the politics of the country and constrain undemocratic tendencies. Venelin Ganev describes the prevalent form of elite misconduct observed in Eastern Europe as “post-accession hooliganism”:

Once the era of EU carrots and sticks was over – that is, after accession – politicians no longer felt bound by the formal and informal constraints to which they had adhered while endeavoring to “rejoin Europe.” In other words, these politicians behaved just like soccer hooligans, who by day



do just what they need to in order to earn a paycheck and stay out of jail, but then behave completely differently at the match (Ganev, 2014: 38).

The situation would have been less unfortunate if the financial crisis had not hit soon after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, making developmental problems and conflicts over distribution particularly acute, precisely when the attention of the EU as the regional hegemon was distracted by the rampant crisis in its southern peripheries. As László Bruszt observes, domestic political entrepreneurs in CEE exploited this situation by blaming the EU for the development problems of their countries and cemented their political basis by relying on nationalistic policies (2015: 4).

Indeed, two consecutive Bulgarian cabinets – the triple coalition of BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party), DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms), and NDSV (National Movement for Stability and Progress) (2005-2009), and later the cabinet of Boiko Borisov's party GERB (2009-2013) – diligently implemented neoliberal economic policies. It was the triple coalition led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party that accepted the ideologically right-wing flat-rate tax in the country. Throughout the mandate of the triple coalition, the government maintained budget surpluses under the guidance of the technocrat finance minister Plamen Oresharski, a former vice minister of finance in Ivan Kostov's right-wing cabinet at the end of the 1990s. Borisov's successor center-right government followed the line of maintaining strict fiscal discipline. Bulgarian finance minister Simeon Djankov, former chief economist of the Finance and Private Sector Vice-Presidency of the World Bank, famously compared the budget of the country to a pizza, which might be smaller and meatless because of the crisis but was real and well-appointed.<sup>2</sup> Financial stability was firmly maintained in exchange for more sovereign debt. Djankov was so dedicated to pursuing austerity policies that during a meeting of the Council of Ministers he even proposed an amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (CRB), outlining his idea for a "Bulgarian Pact for Financial Stability" that would be stricter than the German one: "The three main elements of the Pact were: (1) limit of 3% for the budgetary deficit; (2) the State's redistribution role to be maximum 37%; and (3) a requirement of 2/3 majority at the National Assembly for any future increase of taxes. The Prime Minister, in the concluding remarks of the meeting, expressed his strong support for the initiative of the Finance Minister" (Vatsov, 2015: 27). After long debates and procedural uncertainties,

2 "Bulgaria MPs discuss Djankov's 'Pizza' State Budget 2010." [www.novinite.com/articles/110061/Bulgaria+MPs+Discuss+Djankov's+Pizza+State+Budget+2010/](http://www.novinite.com/articles/110061/Bulgaria+MPs+Discuss+Djankov's+Pizza+State+Budget+2010/).



the amendments to the constitution were not adopted; but the very proposal is indicative of the economic views of Borisov's cabinet.

The Borisov administration's response to the recession with an austerity package amounted to a gross mishandling of the crisis: "Not only was the austerity program unnecessary painful, but it also missed its target. The package trapped the economy in a largely self-inflicted vicious circle of economic downswing and a swelling fiscal imbalance" (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012: 252). The austerity regimes in East and Central Europe, while praised as ultimately financially responsible, proved highly irresponsible towards the populations of the countries where they were imposed. The Economic Research Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2014: 60) noted in their report on 2013 that maintaining fiscal stability prevented the unfolding of populist scenarios of uncontrolled government spending but ultimately failed to stimulate economic growth.

What is more, the state became more and more centralized and the government increasingly intervened in economic policy without any visible benefits for the economy or society in general. Of course, some would discover a contradiction here, invoking the famous myth that the essence of neoliberalism goes against state intervention; but as numerous authors such as Nicholas Hildyard (1998), David Harvey (2005), and recently Mirowski and Plehwe (2009) aptly demonstrate, the ascent of neoliberalism has not meant so much the retreat of the state (even though neoliberals claim this in their public statements), as the remaking of the state in order to impose an all-pervasive logic of marketization and to bypass democracy. In Bulgaria, neoliberal economic policies curbing public spending went hand in hand with a gradual backsliding of democracy and the development of clientelistic structures, explicitly defined as "circles of firms" by DPS leader Ahmed Dogan in a leaked video from the 2009 election campaign (Dogan, 2009) in which he claimed that he "rationed the portions" and redistributed the money from the EU funds in the country. Dogan's statement provoked wide public outrage, and while the extent of his power at that time cannot be determined with certainty, it is undisputed that the state's increasing role in the redistribution of EU funds facilitated widespread practices of corruption. The outrage at Dogan's claims was one of the reasons for the crushing 2009 defeat of the parties from the triple coalition and the victory of Boiko Borisov's center-right party GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria).

But as already mentioned, the advent of GERB did not bring substantial change in political or economic terms. The former bodyguard Prime Minister Boiko Borisov and his yuppie finance minister Simeon Djankov were

nothing but the two faces of the same process of democratic backsliding. In June 2013, the technocrat Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski appointed Delyan Peevski – a media mogul and DPS member whose rise to power was marked by numerous corruption allegations – as head of the National Security Agency DANS (Stier, 2016). The technocrat Oresharski and the shady “entrepreneur” Peevski in a sense repeated the logic of the Djankov-Borisov duo. Governments changed, protests erupted and faded away, but the same logic of power resurfaced again and again: prestigious technocrats legitimized local politicians and businessmen’s struggles for influence in a situation of expanding clientelistic networks.

Bulgaria has become a good example of the way really existing democracies in times of neoliberalism have entered into a post-democracy stage (Crouch, 2004), characterized by the implementation of a mix of the following mechanisms:

- *Coordinated collusion.* A small, oligopolistic class of politicians-business people is formed through the political protection of small circles of individuals who, thanks to political protection, are able to exploit the enrichment potential of financial capitalism.
- *Organized clientelism.* Having lost the capacity to create collective identities, parties build their electoral support through individual/corporate integration in patronage networks.
- *Participatory cooptation.* Some selective form of participation of citizens as individuals is used in the attempt to contrast the decrease in political trust (della Porta, Introduction to the current volume).

While for some the financial crisis meant austerity, for others it meant new opportunities (Vasilev, 2011). For a number of years, the oligarchs Tsvetan Vasilev and Delyan Peevski participated in weaving a conglomerate of media, political, and business power, at the heart of which was Vasilev’s Corporate Commercial Bank, which hosted the money of most state enterprises and used it to finance different deals, including buying crucial media outlets. The media and the influence upon the judiciary system were used as weapons against any opponents but also provided comfort for those in power. Those in power, on the other hand, provided public bids for the circles of firms around the group and secured for the Corporate Commercial Bank a privileged access to financing (Peev, 2014). The system seemed infallible for a long time until it broke down due to its own centrifugal tendency.

It is important to note that the monopolization of key sectors of the Bulgarian economy did not happen due to total lack of state control; on the contrary, it happened with state support. For example, in the field of

the media, Peevski's monopoly became possible through the decisions and laws passed by several consecutive governments. Nelly Ognyanova (2014), an expert in media law, emphasizes the role of the state in facilitating what happened. Why did different governments participate in this? The answer can be found in an interview of Peevski himself, who claims that he had agreed to requests to provide a "media umbrella" for Borisov's GERB party and particular criminal bosses.<sup>3</sup> Securing "media comfort" by buying media and pressuring journalists with direct threats and indirect economic means has become crucial for both politicians and big business (Gueorguieva, 2013). Another circle of interrelated political, media, and economic agents can be discerned around Ivo Propkopiev, the owner of *Dnevnik* and *Capital*, whose connections can be traced to both the center-right party GERB and the right-wing Reformer's Block, which consolidated its ranks during the "#ДАНСwithme" protests in the summer of 2013 (Rone, 2016).

The combination of austerity policies, on the one hand, and increased monopolization of crucial sectors of the economy, on the other, has led to rising inequality in Bulgaria. Over time, the middle class has been disappearing, while those at the bottom of the pyramid are becoming more and more numerous (Tsanov, Ivanova, Panteleeva, and Bogdanov, 2013). There is widespread poverty in the country, with 60.1 percent of the population living in material deprivation (Zahariev, 2013). This process is complemented by mass emigration of young people of working age (Usheva, 2011). In the period from 1989 to 2011, the total population of Bulgaria decreased by almost 2 million people: from 9 million to 7.36 million (Population Census, 2011). According to a rather pessimistic assessment by the sociologist Ivo Hristov, there are three main inflows of money into the country: money that Bulgarian emigrants abroad send back home, Euro funds, and contraband (Interview BG9). Apart from energy development, the main economic sector in the country is in services, although it produces little added value. In addition, in the sphere of agriculture, there is a clear trend toward concentration of land and finances in the hands of a few groups, and toward a monocultural latifundium type of agriculture (Hristov, 2014).

Especially relevant for the 2013 protests that I will explore in the following paragraphs is the situation in the energy development sector, whose share of GDP and relative importance substantially increased during the crisis. The state tried to use energy development as a covert means for social policy by keeping the price of electricity artificially low (Interview BG7).

3 "Peevski: Tsvetanov wanted from me a media umbrella for crime bosses." *Dnes. Dir.bg*. <http://dnes.dir.bg/news/tzvetan-tzvetanov-deljan-peeovski-16105189>.

In addition, there has been widespread corruption in the sector, with firms draining resources through shady contracts for consultancy and repair works. This money could have been used instead for investment to improve the efficiency of plants and the distribution system (Tchalakov, Hristov, and Mitev, 2011). Another serious problem in the sector is the economic bubble of renewable energy. Under the EU 2020 program, Bulgaria committed that by 2020, 16 percent of all energy consumption in the country would be of renewable energy (Energy Strategy, 2011). The country overachieved in advance the stated aims due to the fact that multiple entrepreneurs (some of them related to politicians from all parties) took part in building plants for renewable energy, whose electricity the state operator NEK was obliged to buy at preferential prices. The oversupply of such energy and the contractual obligations to buy it have led to a stalemate situation of increasing deficits in the energy system (Interview BG8).

The problems in the energy system were precisely the trigger that started the 2013 Bulgarian protests. However, protesters' framings of the problems with energy development differed substantially from those of the experts I interviewed. To give just an example, people protested because they considered the prices of electricity too high. Experts claimed the prices were in fact artificially kept too low. Protesters demanded nationalization and the abolition of licenses of foreign power distribution companies; experts claimed that, while there were many practices of power distribution companies that could be improved, the real problems of the system were elsewhere. The more I read on the protests, the more I noted that protesters often mentioned political corruption and façade democracy but never mentioned austerity policies or distributive economic issues. In the following paragraphs, I will explore in detail the ways in which protesters framed their grievances and demands, and their own identity, before I try to account for the curious absence of austerity frames in the Bulgarian 2013 protests in the last part of this chapter.

To sum up the argument so far, the 2007-2008 financial crisis made more acute the developmental and distributive issues ignored in the process of EU accession, as part of which Bulgaria adopted a wide range of neoliberal policies and opened space for social mobilization and political contestation. The mass impoverishment of the population and the unprecedented economic inequality provoked civic anger that could no longer be contained and which erupted with full force in 2013.

### 6.3 The good, the bad, and the ugly? Framing protesters' identity and grievances in the 2013 Bulgarian protests

The protests of 2013 can be generally separated into three waves: the winter protests against high electricity bills; the summer protests against Delyan Peevski and the Plamen Oresharski cabinet, also known as the #ДАHCwithme<sup>4</sup> protests; and finally, the student occupation that took place from October 2013 until mid-January 2014. In the following pages I will briefly outline the main events connected to each wave of protest and analyze, in particular, how protesters framed their grievances, their identities, and the identities of their antagonists.

#### **“Let’s burn the monopolies”**

The protests started in late January 2013, in two big cities in southwestern Bulgaria – Blagoevgrad and Gotse Delchev – where people protested against their high electricity bills by symbolically burning them in front of the offices of CEZ, the Czech power distribution company responsible for the region.<sup>5</sup> The cities of Petrich, Sandanski, Veliko Turnovo, Plovdiv, and Sofia followed. People claimed that the procedures for calculating the bills were non-transparent and that their numerous complaints were neglected and ignored. Many of the organizers of the mobilizations had participated previously in protests against the rise in the price of combustibles. As commented by Doncho Dudev, one of the main organizers of the protests in Sofia, most had experience in previous protests and had read extensively on the topic of energy development (Interview BG1). In the year before the protests, 2012, they had toured various neighborhoods in Sofia, showing an educational film on the topic and provoking public discussions. After a protest organized in the autumn of 2012 did not attract enough public attention, the informal group of like-minded people decided to wait for the right moment, i.e., the first months of the New Year. December electricity bills are by definition higher, so people could not fail to pay attention to the billing issues. But even the organizers had not expected the demonstrations to reach such an unprecedented scale when the right moment came. People all over the country protested electricity bills that sometimes reached 100

4 The name of the protest is a play on words. The abbreviation of the State Agency for National Security in Bulgarian is ДАHC (DANS), which sounds exactly like the word “dance” as in the popular TV show “Dance with me.”

5 “The high electricity bills caused a rebellion in southwestern Bulgaria.” [http://society.actualno.com/Visokite-smetki-za-tok-vdignaha-na-bunt-Ugozapadna-Bylgarija-news\\_414574.html](http://society.actualno.com/Visokite-smetki-za-tok-vdignaha-na-bunt-Ugozapadna-Bylgarija-news_414574.html).

euros. Considering that the average monthly wage for Bulgaria was around 300 euros per month,<sup>6</sup> these costs were prohibitive.

On February 10, an hour and a half after midnight, two cars belonging to the power distribution company EVN were set on fire.<sup>7</sup> On the same day, thousands of people protested in over fifteen big Bulgarian cities under the slogan “Let’s burn the monopolies.” The protesters formulated their main demands as follows:

- nationalization of power distribution companies in Bulgaria;
- eliminating all intermediaries and transferring their functions to NEK (National Electricity Company);
- providing public access to all contracts in the sector of energy development and demanding that their signers assume responsibility for them;
- distributing the energy produced in the Nuclear Power Plant in Kozloduy only in the internal market and for the needs of the Bulgarian citizens and society;
- eliminating the obligations of NEK to purchase electricity.<sup>8</sup>

The protests reached their peak on February 17,<sup>9</sup> when hundreds of thousands of people mobilized in more than 35 cities throughout the country. Over 30,000 took to the streets in Varna alone, and were supported by the police in their protest.<sup>10</sup> Residents of Blagoevgrad blocked the international E79 highway, which caused transport chaos and a traffic jam of over 20 kilometers. People all over the country chanted slogans like “Mafia” and “Resignation,” and there were numerous posters with messages such as “Electricity + Unemployment = Genocide.”<sup>11</sup>

On February 18, Finance Minister Simeon Dyankov resigned; but this did not appease the already angry protesters, who claimed that Borisov’s government had taken no actions to address their demands. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, the day of the official commemoration of the hanging of the

6 [www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article2479.php](http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article2479.php).

7 “Two cars of EVN were burnt-down in Plovdiv.” [www.bnews.bg/article-69445](http://www.bnews.bg/article-69445).

8 “High voltage in society due to high electricity bills.” <http://btvnews.bg/gallery/bulgaria/obshtestvo/protesti-pod-nadslov-zda-zapalim-monopolite-v-15-grada-na-stranata.html>.

9 “Spring started on the 17th of February.” [http://bulgaria.actualno.com/Prolet-pukna-na-17-fevruari-news\\_415838.html](http://bulgaria.actualno.com/Prolet-pukna-na-17-fevruari-news_415838.html).

10 “The protest in Varna in photos and video.” [http://offnews.bg/news/България\\_1/Протестът-във-Варна-в-снимки-и-видео\\_159997.html](http://offnews.bg/news/България_1/Протестът-във-Варна-в-снимки-и-видео_159997.html).

11 “The poorest country in the EU rebels! Stanishev tries to surf the wave demanding resignation.” [http://society.actualno.com/Naj-bednata-strana-v-ES-vystana-Stanishev-jahna-vylnata-za-ostavka-na-pravitelstvoto-news\\_415832.html](http://society.actualno.com/Naj-bednata-strana-v-ES-vystana-Stanishev-jahna-vylnata-za-ostavka-na-pravitelstvoto-news_415832.html).

national hero Vasil Levski by officers of the Ottoman Empire, the protests in Sofia turned violent. After provocations on the part of some protesters, the police attacked them and a number of people were injured.<sup>12</sup> On the morning of February 20, the 36-year old alpinist Plamen Goranov set himself on fire in front of the municipality in Varna, demanding the resignation of the mayor.<sup>13</sup> Hours after his self-immolation, Prime Minister Boiko Borisov resigned. Even after his resignation, a wave of self-immolations followed, the number of cases from February 2013 to May 2015 reaching 30.

The winter 2013 protests in Bulgaria were protests of the “people” – those who got burnt while the former elites were playing with fire during the transition period. The most popular diagnostic frames that emerged from my coding of texts produced by protesters were “monopolies,” “corruption,” “minority rule” (protesters qualified as “minorities” both ethnic minorities and financial elites). The most popular prognostic frames were “nationalization,” “reform of the system” (I included here demands for electoral law changes, demands for curbing the number of deputies, and other suggestions for “tweaks” of the system), “Bulgaria for Bulgarians,” “citizen/expert rule,” and “no mediators” (here I included both demands to bypass political parties and demands to transfer the obligations of the power distribution companies to the National Electricity Company). The protesters called for action with motivational frames claiming that it was the task of “responsible citizens” to protect national pride. While the protesters framed their antagonists as “mafia,” “the oligarchy,” and “privileged minorities,” they defined themselves as “the people,” the “responsible citizens” who were honest and non-corrupted by previous participation in power struggles.

Later in 2013, there were attempts by some summer protesters to frame the winter protests as protests of the ugly, the poor, the ones who could not pay their bills.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, such definitions were rejected by the participants so described. As emphasized by a prominent organizer of the winter protests, Doncho Dudev, many of the leaders and participants in the winter protests were successful in their careers and were representatives of small and medium-sized businesses – so to call them “poor” and “ugly” would be highly misleading (Interview BG1). The social basis of the protests was in fact extremely diverse, consisting of workers, the unemployed, the

12 “Bloody confrontation on the day of Levski in Sofia.” [http://news.ibox.bg/material/id\\_105484605/](http://news.ibox.bg/material/id_105484605/).

13 “The Varna Jan Palach.” [www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2013/02/25/2010632\\_plamen\\_goranov\\_-\\_varnenskiiat\\_ian\\_palah/](http://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2013/02/25/2010632_plamen_goranov_-_varnenskiiat_ian_palah/).

14 “The Rebellion of the Sith,” [www.duma.bg/node/56961/](http://www.duma.bg/node/56961/).



pauperized middle class, retirees, and representatives of small and medium-sized businesses all across the country.

Even though both the ruling party at the time (GERB)<sup>15</sup> and the oppositional BSP<sup>16</sup> attempted to use the protest in their favor, the protesters managed to protect their independence and keep a separate identity. A strong differentiation from the political class was a crucial feature of the winter protests, and it was one of the reasons why some of the most active protest organizers, Doncho Dudev, Yanko Petrov, and Ioanna Ivanova, declared their refusal to provide moral legitimation to any political party and to join traditional political organizations.<sup>17</sup> The three of them fought instead to establish citizen councils that would monitor the work of the major institutions in the country and give voice to citizens' concerns.

Winter protesters who did try to establish political parties or organizations were often frowned upon as traitors. Yanaki Ganchev, who organized protests during working days in February, later formed the "Orlov Most" Movement ("Orlov Most" means literally "Eagle's Bridge" – the place where the protesters often gathered and blocked traffic). He subsequently attempted to form a party based on the "Orlov Most" network but did not receive enough support by fellow protesters, who expressed opposition to the party system itself (Interview BG2). Another of the leaders of the Sofia mobilizations, Angel Slavchev, joined the political party called "Bulgaria without Censorship" – secretly financed (as it transpired later) by the notorious banker Tsvetan Vasilev – and was accused repeatedly of betraying the identity of the protest.<sup>18</sup>

One openly leftist organization in the winter protest was the communist movement "Che Guevara," founded in the 1990s by Zhan Videnov, the left-wing Prime Minister who will be remembered for the biggest economic crisis in the 1990s, followed by massive protests. It is only in the official statement of "Che Guevara" that "capitalism" is named as a cause for the

15 Protestors: "Pelovska betrayed the protests: We did not give her the right to talk to the Prime Minister." [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/02/19/2005965\\_protestirashti\\_pelovska\\_pre-dade\\_protesta\\_ne\\_sme\\_i/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/02/19/2005965_protestirashti_pelovska_pre-dade_protesta_ne_sme_i/).

16 "Liudmila from Blagoevgrad at the Congress of BSP: Show that you are on the side of the People!" <http://novinite.bg/articles/30379/Lyudmila-ot-Blagoevgrad-na-Kongresa-na-BSP-Pokajete-che-ste-na-stranata-na-horata>.

17 "The Faces of the February Protests: We still Fight Against the Monopolies/." [http://offnews.bg/news/Протести\\_17652/Лицата-от-февруарските-протести-И-днес-се-борим-срещу-монополите\\_294905.html](http://offnews.bg/news/Протести_17652/Лицата-от-февруарските-протести-И-днес-се-борим-срещу-монополите_294905.html).

18 "Tsvetan Vasilev: I financed the 'reality show' of Barekov." <http://economic.bg/news/31699/1/1/Cvetan-Vasilev-Finansirah-rialitito-na-Barekov.html>.



protests and something to fight against.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that the winter protests targeted a center-right government, few of their leaders self-qualified as leftists, and the demands for nationalization were legitimized not as measures against capitalism, for example, but as measures for saving the Bulgarian nation, i.e., in a nationalistic key.

To sum up, I agree with the convincing analysis of Nikolova, Tsoneva, and Medarov (2014), who emphasize the internally contradictory rhetoric of the winter protests that blurred the boundaries between civil society and the nation as a warm community. They were protests of “us”: the people, the Bulgarian civil society, against “them”: the ethnic minorities and political oligarchies. At the same time, they demanded more expert governance, direct citizen participation, and less politics conceived in the classical terms of Left and Right, representation and mediation of interests. The protests seemed incapable of imagining a sustainable solution beyond the neoliberal ideology defended by the same political parties they were attacking. The winter protests did not lead to the formation of strong new political subjects, and the continuity between them and the summer protests was not evident but subject to constant negotiations and debates, both among the protesters themselves and on the pages of popular media.

### **#ДАHCwithme: the summer protests in Bulgaria**

After the parliamentary elections, on May 29 a new cabinet was formed with the mandate of the second parliamentary represented party, the BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) – in coalition with DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms), which is often considered a representative of the Turkish minority in the country, and with the support of the nationalist Ataka. After only two weeks in power, the government led by former finance minister Plamen Oresharski quickly lost public trust due to its already mentioned scandalous decision to appoint the media mogul Delyan Peevski as head of the State Agency for National Security (ДАHC) – after the law had been quickly changed several days before the appointment to make it possible. Peevski was appointed to this crucial position with the task of fighting corruption.

The public reaction was immediate and unanimous. Ivaylo Achev, chief editor of the news site Actualno.com, commented that he could hardly believe this was happening and at first thought it was a joke (Interview BG6). A protest event was created on Facebook with the playful title

19 “Address of the ‘Che Guevara’ movement to the media and the protesters.” <http://komunist-ibg.wordpress.com/2013/02/22/изявление-на-движение-че-гева-ра-до>.

#ДAHCwithme. The Facebook page received more than 80,000 “likes” in the course of the day, and in the evening thousands took to the streets of Sofia to protest Peevski’s appointment. As Ivaylo Achev said: “Those in power would always steal from us. That’s clear. But it’s all a question of measure. The protests showed the rulers that they had lost their sense of measure and proportion” (Interview BG6). Peevski resigned, but regular street protests continued every evening for several months. In what followed, Peevski’s media machine and the government tried to discredit in every possible way the protesters who used the Internet and Prokopiev’s right-wing newspapers as platforms to elaborate and defend their identity in a highly interactive and conflictual identity contest.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, *Montior* (one of the newspapers owned by Peevski) claimed that provocateurs, criminal elements, and activists paid by the center-right GERB party had conspired to destabilize the government.<sup>20</sup> As a response in the following days, articles in the right-wing *Dnevnik*, unofficially known as the newspaper of the protest, emphasized the spontaneous and peaceful nature of the mobilization. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, *Dnevnik* even published “A Guidebook for Positive Protesting”:

- 1) First of all, take care of yourself and your relatives! That’s the most important!
- 2) Participate only in the prearranged route The Largo – The National Assembly – The Eagles Bridge.
- 3) Wear colorful clothes and posters with positive messages. Do not wear hoodies or similar clothing. Smile!
- 4) Take care of the police officers and cooperate with them (they also aren’t part of the oligarchy).
- 5) If there are provocation attempts, stay at least 5 meters away from the provocateurs, make a “sanitary zone” around them. It must be made clear who they are and how many they are. The squares are big, there is space to protest indeed without provocateurs.<sup>21</sup>

The guidebook is interesting because it shows clearly how *Dnevnik* not only reported from the protests, but also scripted them and incited them. By selectively publishing particular tweets, photos, and blog posts, the

20 “GERB organized a protest in front of the Ministers’ Council.” [www.monitor.bg/article?id=388428/](http://www.monitor.bg/article?id=388428/).

21 “It is time to go to the square again: peculiarities of the protest tonight.” [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/18/2084831\\_pak\\_e\\_vreme\\_zh\\_izlizane\\_na\\_ploshtada\\_osobenosti\\_na/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/18/2084831_pak_e_vreme_zh_izlizane_na_ploshtada_osobenosti_na/).

newspaper created a story of the protests and an image of the protesters in which the participants could recognize themselves. But it was also a story that instructed participants about how to behave and locked them into particular roles.<sup>22</sup>

Many protesters commented under articles in *Dnevnik*, defending their image against accusations that they were dangerous and criminal figures:

Petar Nikolov, 23:15, 14th of June, 2013, #430

Congratulations for all who protested today! My impressions from the protesters (with only a few exceptions) are also very good. There were kids, bikers (and one protesting dog). I am glad that in Sofia there are enough people who, despite the rain and it being a Friday night, expressed an active civic position on an important question without using violence. I am also surprised by the meagre coverage of the protest on the television (And maybe I shouldn't be surprised considering the new owners of one of the television [networks] and the dependence of the national television on those in power).<sup>23</sup>

Participants insisted that theirs was a protest of “normality,” of the “beautiful, real, intelligent people.”<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on the beauty and intelligence of the protesters was highly problematized and discussed in both print and television media. In a critical commentary, “With regard to the protest: a comment by the Ugly,” Georgi Medarov and Lea Vajsova (2013) insisted that simplistic oppositions between the ugly and the beautiful, the poor and the rich put the cause of the protest at risk, and that democracy and morality were not luxuries destined for particular classes. In a similar vein, the writer Zahari Karabashliev (2013) expressed his fear of “snobization” of the protests.

I would claim that the “cheerfulness” and “beauty” of the summer protests were not only a product of the lifestyle-oriented self-entrepreneurial twist characteristic of many of *Dnevnik* publications, but also a conscious response to the false accusations and highly negative identity frames advanced by the government and Peevski's media. The “positive” framing of the protest was present both on the discursive level – on the pages of *Dnevnik*, *Capital*, and so on – and on the performative level, as it influenced the very way the

22 “Alan Shor: What is the Music of #ДАHCwithme?” [www.segabg.com/replies.php?id=225131&p=2](http://www.segabg.com/replies.php?id=225131&p=2).

23 “The Protest Against Delyan Peevski Live.” [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/14/2081879\\_nad\\_10\\_000\\_izliazoha\\_na\\_protesta\\_sreshthu\\_delian/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/14/2081879_nad_10_000_izliazoha_na_protesta_sreshthu_delian/).

24 “#ДАHCwithme на Красивите и Умните.” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BzHuOaGVtY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BzHuOaGVtY).

protests were organized and conducted: they included dancing, cultural performances, and had a notably peaceful, almost festival-like atmosphere. #ДАHCwithme was perceived as an event where one goes with friends and family to have a good time.

After Peevski's media and other media supporting the government (for example the left-wing *Duma*) failed to convince society that the protesters were hooligans and criminal elements, they came up with new accusations: the protesters were local elites paid by the political opposition and evil international organizations. To illustrate, a columnist in the *Duma* claimed that the protesters were "Sorosoids": intellectuals paid by George Soros to defend the cause of radical capitalism and change the values of the society.<sup>25</sup> The notion of "sorosoids" became an important trope in the political life of the country that has often been invoked since by nationalists in all kinds of conspiracy theories discrediting the more liberal section of Bulgarian intellectuals.

It was in reply to such allegations that protesters started framing themselves as rich enough not to need to be paid. Their financial status became a guarantee for their purely moral engagement with the cause. An eloquent synthesis of how protesters presented themselves can be found in a letter sent by a protester to the newspaper *Dnevnik*. In the letter he writes:

I rarely skip going to the protest. [...] I see myself reflected in the others thousands of times. Fathers (and mothers) in their 30s with small children who are obviously well-off. Managers and entrepreneurs, people from the same breed as me who simply won't give up! Self-assured because they have achieved something. Despite our rulers in their pig house.

I see my parents' generation. Some realize how much they have achieved and how easily they can lose it. Others know what they haven't done and come to make up for their past passivity. All of them are well-acquainted with the treacherousness of the Communist Party better than us and are here to protect us. Us and our kids. Because they love us. [...]

We are not paid, we pay.

We come up with ideas, create, produce, provide. The whole state and everyone who gets something from it, moves thanks to us. We have the right to veto and we should use it. Every month I pay over 10,000 worth of taxes. What will happen if I stop paying them until our request is taken into account? (Rashev, 2013)

25 "The Sorosoids," <http://mail.duma.bg/node/60881/>.

Rashev's letter gives a succinct portrait of the Sofia bourgeoisie who took the lead in the #ДAHCwithme protests. It is also indicative of how participating in #ДAHCwithme was often compared to participating in the anti-communist protests in the early 1990s. Paradoxically, there was almost no connection drawn between #ДAHCwithme and the temporally much closer protests from February 2013. One possible explanation could be the fact that both in the 1990s and in the summer of 2013, the protests were directed against a left-wing government (even though, as mentioned in the first section of the chapter, in the 2000s the BSP often pursued right-wing policies when they were in power). As the authors of the blog *Hystericalparrhesia* note in their article, "The tragedy of the Self Immolations became the Farce of the Middle Class," the right-wing media tried to create an imaginary heritage and biographical coherence between the #ДAHCwithme protests and the anti-communist protests from 1989 and 1997. The winter protests against the center-right party GERB remained a strange moment difficult to assimilate in the narrative; they were framed by the summer protesters as mobilizations for survival, for electricity bills, protests of the ugly and uneducated. The summer protests, on the contrary, could be positioned more easily in the already known opposition between the left and the right (*Hystericalparrhesia*, 2013).

Of course, not everyone who participated in the summer protests was right-wing. As emphasized by one of the key participants in #ДAHCwithme, Lea Vajsova, there were considerable differences among protesters (Interview BG4). There were many leftists who participated in the first days of the protests before slowly withdrawing their support and adopting a more critical stance (Tsoneva and Medarov, 2013), as well as others who stuck to the end of the protests, providing an internal pluralism in the discourses produced by the protesters. Yet, the multitude of dissenting voices and the diversity of the first days of the protests, when thousands of people spontaneously took to the streets of Sofia, were difficult to maintain (Gueorgieva, 2016). The supporters of BSP and the new left who had taken part in the protests distanced themselves from what was increasingly becoming an anti-communist protest. It was more and more difficult to contain the inherent tension in the demands of the protesters between radical system change and the change of this particular cabinet with a right-wing one. For most of the participants it was clear that a resignation of the government led by BSP would have brought about a the return of the center-right GERB in power, with a possible restructuring of the small fragmented parties that had converged into the Reformers' Block. Thus, more and more people felt that the demands for radical system change were instead a cover for overthrowing a legitimately elected government and replacing it with another.

As the protests continued, the formulation of the protagonist identity field (the right-wing bourgeoisie) became strongly dependent on the formulation of the antagonist identity field: the “bad” communists who had morphed but not changed at all since 1989. In addition, the enemies were also the Turks, represented by DPS in coalition with the left-wing party. I will quote only a few comments in order to give a general idea how the protesters framed their antagonists:

bo44ko, 21:32, 14th of June, 2013, #210

There is one salvation: on every tree in the central park we should hang one communist and one member of DPS.<sup>26</sup>

edin drug, 17:39, 15th of June, 2013, #114

Protests will take place not only until this government falls but also until there is a full lustration of the ruling parties and the passing of a law for confiscation of all national treasures appropriated by 500 communist families, now one should not lose courage and things should be completed, the people should jump and destroy this stinking bunch, the whole of Europe is watching us and was shocked by the arrogant way in which the communists took over and tried to manipulate our whole society, we are in Europe and the communists do not belong there. Considering that we are in Europe and not in the USSR, we'll fight against the crawling communism, the choice of Peevski was a step precisely in the direction of communizing the State Agency for National Security and creating a new National Security ruled by DPS, they have never left the old National Security Agency.<sup>27</sup>

The source of all evil in the state is attributed to the ongoing possession of power by the former communist elite and the oligarchs of the transition period. Instead of capitalism being seen as the enemy, the strange non-death of communism is presented to be at the root of all social evils.

BSP welcomed the self-positioning of the protesters as the successful right-wing bourgeoisie and used it subversively against the protesters' own cause. Thus, the leader of BSP underlined that a distinction should be

26 “The Protest Against Delyan Peevski Live.” [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/14/2081879\\_nad\\_10\\_000\\_izliazoha\\_na\\_protesta\\_sreshtu\\_delian/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/14/2081879_nad_10_000_izliazoha_na_protesta_sreshtu_delian/).

27 “There will be protests tonight as well despite the letter of Delyan Peevski” [www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/15/2082424\\_protesti\\_shte\\_ima\\_i\\_tazi\\_vecher\\_vupreki\\_pisimoto\\_na/?ref=miniurl#comment-114](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/06/15/2082424_protesti_shte_ima_i_tazi_vecher_vupreki_pisimoto_na/?ref=miniurl#comment-114).

made between Sofia and the provincial cities where the situation was calm. Members of BSP invoked the February protests that had led to Borisov's resignation and claimed that they wanted to solve the social and economic problems that had been pointed out then.<sup>28</sup> Accepting the identity that the protesters forged for themselves, the left-wing journalist Velislava Dureva wrote one of the most widely commented analyses of the protests: "The Rebellion of the Sith."<sup>29</sup> Here is a short excerpt from the article:

"February is not June," said a young lady, "accidentally" invited on television. "Because – the lady said (until recently she was the PR of the care-taker government) – this is a protest of the normality, of the young, beautiful, truthful, intelligent, inspired." From which it follows that those from February are ignorant losers, a mob, abnormal, ugly, and even fake! Thus, a demarcation line was drawn between June and February, the ones who had enough to eat and the hungry ones, the super successful ones and the ones destroyed by life, the elite and the masses. A narcissistic and snobbish demarcation. They are successful, the others are losers. [...] The good ones are 10,000. The others around 7,272,041 (according to the last counting of the nation) are bad material, they just don't do the job. They despise everyone who cannot pay their electricity and heating, who out of desperation sets himself on fire, hangs himself, judges himself harshly, who works from morning till dawn, who can't buy his kid shoes, or textbooks, nor can buy his mother medicines. [...] They are shiny, wonderful, moral and cheerful. And cheerfully chant "Trash," "Whores!," "Fags," "Dirty Commies," and "You are Turks." That's how they educate their children. Teach them civil society. That's how you become a citizen, they say (Dureva, 2013).

Oresharski's cabinet and its supporters readily accepted the narrative of the "smiley protests of the middle class" promoted by the right-wing newspapers *Capital* and *Dnevnik*, but claimed that young, beautiful, and well-off people from the capital were not representative of the whole nation: the government was chosen with the votes of many others who were not in such a privileged position and who counted on the social policies that the state

28 "What does Stanishev think about the protests?" *Deutsche Welle*. [www.dw.de/какво-мисли-станишев-за-протестите/a-16902538/](http://www.dw.de/какво-мисли-станишев-за-протестите/a-16902538/).

29 The title that refers to Star Wars is a clever wordplay between Bulgarian and English. The word "sith" when pronounced in Bulgarian is a homonym with "сит" which means: "one who has had enough to eat, one who is satisfied."

was planning to implement. Thus, those in power offered an alternative story whose protagonists were those Bulgarians who could not identify with the Sofia bourgeoisie. In order to support this framing they used as evidence the “counter-protests” that started on June 26 in defense of the government. However, the people who mobilized for the counter-protests were not numerous. Between 50 and 100 people participated in the first counter-protest on June 26, and there were serious suspicions that people had subsequently been driven in buses to Sofia to participate.<sup>30</sup> Thus, ultimately, the government did not receive the widespread support it claimed it had to oppose the “elitist” protest in Sofia. In this situation, the protests demanding its resignation and a restoration of morality in Bulgarian politics continued for months.

The government did not resign, and morality was not restored; but what was restored was the unity of the right-wing parties. After more than a decade spent in disarray, the parties that formed after the split of Ivan Kostov’s SDS (Union of Democratic Forces) consolidated in the Reformist Block, which became an important political player a year later, in 2014. Another important political subject born out of the summer protests was *Protestna Mrezha* (Protest Network), established on August 7, 2013 as a space for interaction and networking, with a major goal: the resignation of the Oresharski government, and with a main perspective: maintaining the energy of the protest (*Protestna Mrezha*, 2013).

Summing up the developments of the summer protests, the most common diagnostic frames were “mafia,” “corruption,” “oligarchy” (similarly to the winter protests), “lack of morality,” and, as the protests went on, frames referring to “communist heritage.” The most common prognostic frames were “resignation,” “reform of the system,” “more morality in politics,” and with time increasingly “lustration of former communist agents.” Protesters called each other to action by calling themselves “responsible citizens,” “young and beautiful,” “non-affiliated to political parties,” and increasingly over time, “anti-communist.” They framed their opponents as “mafia,” “the oligarchy,” “privileged minorities” (again similarly to the winter protesters), and as “communists.”

The framing of protesters’ identity was not static but dynamic, part of a highly contested relational process of transforming frames in response to the opponents’ reactions. Both the protesters and the government framed the protesters as the well-off Sofia bourgeoisie and non-participants in

30 “Around 50 people gathered at a counter-protest in support of the cabinet,” [http://news.ibox.bg/material/id\\_850360070](http://news.ibox.bg/material/id_850360070).



the protest as poor, socially excluded observers. But while the protesters used this framing in order to present themselves as the modern bearers of democracy and morality, the government used it to claim that instead of representing the interests of the nation, the protesters represented only their narrow class interest. In fact, the initial diversity of the protesters gradually diminished as a more coherent right-wing core was formed around Protestna Mrezha and the Reformers' Block. By the time autumn came, the protests had faded away in scale and were no longer a primary topic of discussion in society. That changed with the start of the student occupation that I discuss in the next section.

### **The university occupation**

On October 23, a group of students occupied the 272 seminar room of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to protest against a problematic decision of the Constitutional Court regarding Delyan Peevski's status as a member of parliament. The students organizing the occupation called themselves the "Early-Rising Students" (literally "The Students who Wake up Early," referring to the nineteenth-century process of "awakening" the nation through education). Most of the students were not members of the official student councils but had previous experience in citizen actions and protests. On October 25, the students declared a state of full and effective occupation of Sofia University with the following goals:

- 1 The immediate dismissal of the XLII National Assembly.
- 2 Early elections for a new parliament.
- 3 Intolerance of the social body towards the criminal lawlessness in the highest spheres of the state government.
- 4 The transformation of Bulgaria into a civilized, lawful state.
- 5 The endorsement of justice and knowledge as high public values.<sup>31</sup>

Ivaylo Dinev, a leading figure in the student occupation, explains that the goal of the occupiers was not only to attract attention from the outside but also to provoke internal discussions among the students (Interview BG5). The occupation was a good example of prefigurative politics (della Porta, 2013a). Different groups were formed with responsibility for public relations, the artistic expression of the protest, formulation of policy proposals, and so on. The occupation spread to other universities as well. One of the most

31 "Full occupation of Sofia University. The students present their demands in a declaration," [www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=2394016](http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=2394016).

crucial characteristics of the student occupation was the students' refusal to negotiate with any members of political parties or to allow them to influence their decisions. They largely succeeded in protecting their independence, but at the cost of self-encapsulation. The main diagnostic frames put forward by the students were again "mafia," "corruption," "oligarchy," "lack of morality." Unlike the summer protests, they did not put forward strong anti-communist messages. The most common among the prognostic frames were "resignation" and "more morality in politics." The students urged each other for action by reminding that they were "the future of the country," "those who don't want to emigrate." They self-identified as young, educated Bulgarians who were tired of corruption and criminality. Their antagonists were the corrupt oligarchs and the state servants who allowed lawlessness to flourish. Their audience were all those Bulgarians who preferred to close their eyes instead of rebelling against widespread corruption.

As can be expected, the government made sporadic attempts to accuse the students of being paid but, as with the summer protests, these alternative framings did not gain traction. Again similarly to the summer protests, the student occupation failed to gain widespread social support and did not lead to a radical change. Once the occupation finished in early January 2014, a period of decreasing protest activity followed. In May 2014, the results of the European elections showed clearly that there was little support for the Bulgarian Socialist Party that led the government. But more importantly, the first months of 2014 saw the "divorce" of Delyan Peevski and Tsvetan Vasilev, the two main oligarchs in the country. A major rupture between the two of them was pointed out as one of the reasons for increased tension in the Oresharski cabinet, which led to its eventual resignation<sup>32</sup> one year after the #ДАHCwithme protests had started. But the resignation came neither when the protesters demanded it nor because they were demanding it. Another, more hidden, logic led to the change in power. In November 2014, a new cabinet was formed with Prime Minister Boiko Borisov, who had resigned a year before. The protest circle closed.

In conclusion, there were three waves of protest in Bulgaria in 2013. The winter protests targeted a center-right government, while the summer ones and the student occupation addressed a center-left government. However, they still had many common demands. In essence, protesters in all three waves defined as a main problem the oligarchic capture of the state and

32 "BSP pays the political price, Vasilev – the economic one," [http://www.novini.bg/news/217563-първанов-бсп-плаща-политическата-цена-а-цветан-василев-икономическата-\(видео\).html](http://www.novini.bg/news/217563-първанов-бсп-плаща-политическата-цена-а-цветан-василев-икономическата-(видео).html).

demanded more transparency and morality in politics. Another common feature of all three waves is that they failed to address austerity policies and questions of social redistribution. Focusing extensively on corruption and criminality prevented the protesters from acknowledging that even if governments had pursued their economic and social policies without any criminal redirection of resources and merging different spheres of influence, they still had no promising long-term strategy for stimulating economic growth in the country and fighting rising inequality. In the last part of this chapter, I explore why austerity did not appear in the framings offered by any of the three waves of protest.

#### 6.4 Left in translation. Why was leftist critique left out?

Frames do not exist in some isolated ethereal reality. On the contrary, they are elaborated and shared by political subjects. The question I explore in the final section of this chapter is: why did left-wing political subjects not interfere successfully in any of the three waves of protest and put forward frames that focused on austerity and social distribution? The first, obvious answer is that the nominally left-wing party in the country, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, as already emphasized several times, had long been implementing right-wing policies that alienated its own constituency. The members of the party could not problematize austerity policies and raise their saliency as this would have meant criticizing their own policy line. But why didn't other actors on the left bring up the frame and popularize it? I claim that these actors were not many and they were not strong enough.

One of the reasons for the state of the left is, first of all, the deep implication of the descendants of the Bulgarian Communist Party in oligarchic networks of power that delegitimized it publicly. This delegitimation was further extended by a widespread narrative of the failure of the socialist project promulgated by right-wing neoliberal think tanks that monopolized public discourse and promoted a logic of unrestrained marketization. Marx became a dirty name. Textbooks in historical Marxism were often sent to the country houses together with books on (Marxist) political economy: a discipline decisively belonging to the past. The process of accession to the EU prolonged the hegemony of this *pensée unique*. Paradoxically, it was the financial crisis that, after almost 20 years, reopened the possibility of talking critically in the public sphere about capitalism and questioning the connection between capitalism and democracy.

In January 2012, the collective project “New Left Perspectives,” supported by the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation, published its manifesto. “New Left Perspectives” states that its aim is to liberate the Bulgarian left from the logic of political parties and to overcome the nostalgia of state socialism while fighting for equality in legal but also in socio-economic terms. Two months later, in March 2012, the discussion network “Solidarna Bulgaria” established its online presence with the mission to provide citizens with a space to discuss and coordinate in order to overcome the democratic deficits in the country. Throughout 2013, these two projects provided valuable insights into the dynamics of social mobilization and focused on poverty, disenfranchisement, and the general failure of the economic model that had led to the crisis, thus becoming in a sense an internal corrective for a left that had lost its voice and identity. In the beginning of 2014, the political magazine *A-specto* was founded, providing a critique of capitalism and an in-depth political analysis of both domestic and international events. Both “New Left Perspectives” and “Solidarna Bulgaria” have organized multiple events and public discussions; yet, they do not have wide social support but remain enclosed within the circles of Sofia intellectuals. If we take *Facebook* popularity as a proxy, the “New Left Perspectives” page has 71 “likes,” “Solidarna Bulgaria” 1,540; while the right-wing Reformers’ Block has 27,252 likes and the unofficial fan page of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov more than 176,000. *A-specto* magazine is more popular than the other two left-wing projects, with 8,368 likes online. One has to also bear in mind the often emphasized tension between *A-specto* and “New Left Perspectives,” since *A-specto* promotes a pro-Russian political stance, while “New Left Perspectives” takes a stance against Putin and does not equate anti-capitalism with anti-United States and pro-Russia sentiment.

“New Left Perspectives” is ultimately a radical left project that embraces experiments with new types of democracy and identity politics and questions the micro and macro foundations of power. At the same time, it is also the political project most detached from local reality and strongly devoted to academic research and political theory. The anti-party sentiment of “New Left Perspectives” of course prevents them from evolving into a political subject of the more traditional type; but the real problem is that they have not attempted to reach out to local communities and build a bottom-up collective with potential for political action of a non-traditional type. Thus, they have remained rather self-enclosed: providing valid and highly insightful critique of social mobilizations but failing to inspire mobilizations themselves. “Solidarna Bulgaria” tackles issues of education, ecology, healthcare, labor policies, international trade agreements, and other topics

from a critical perspective, aiming to provide both alternative information and a space for discussion. However, it has not yet managed to achieve wide social influence. Finally, *A-specto* is a media and not a political project, and despite its importance in a media environment completely dominated by Peevski's media, it has neither the pretension nor the legitimacy to organize people.

None of the rising stars on the left side of the Bulgarian political spectrum that I have described so far has managed to take advantage of the slow disintegration of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and attract some of its supporters or gather new supporters. The Socialist Party had already lost its identity by implementing a series of right-wing policies in the 2000s. But after 2013's protests and the rearrangement of oligarchic circles in 2014, it also started losing its local support and entered a process of calm chaos and splintering into smaller parties (such as "ABV", or "Movement 21"). The collapse of the traditional left opened opportunities that have still not been grasped by formations of the new left.

The quick disintegration of the old left, completely unable to reinvent itself, and the arrested development of the new left are among the main reasons why austerity framing could not gain prominence during any of the three waves of protest and people remained enclosed in discourses inherited from the past.

## 6.5 Conclusion

What I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that it is not enough to study the ways in which protesters frame their grievances and identities; it is also necessary to explore the absence of frames that had every reason to gain popularity but did not. Working at the intersection between political economy and social movement research, I have tried to illuminate the curious absence of an austerity frame in the 2013 Bulgarian protests. My research is exploratory and aims to provide information on both the political and the economic contexts of the protests, as well as the ways in which grievances and identities were framed. In the first section of the chapter, I have shown how pursuing neoliberal policies combined with more and more centralization of the state after the financial crisis and a diminished ability of the EU to sanction local politicians after the Bulgarian accession led to rising inequality and a pervasive merging of business, media, and politics. In the second section, I have shown how the three consecutive waves of protest all focused on the development of local oligarchic structures and

corruption, but none of them problematized austerity as such. Nationalist, civil society-oriented, and anti-communist identifications prevailed in the three waves of protest that searched for neoliberal solutions to the problems triggered by neoliberalism itself. Multiple reasons can be pointed out for the absence of a strong left critique in the protests: the involvement of former leftist elites in preying on the state that compromised them politically, the dominance of neoliberal thought and think tanks, the unprecedented concentration of media ownership which makes it difficult for new voices to emerge.

My claim is that only a political economy analysis that focuses not only on oligarchic structures and state weakness but also on the general logic of neoliberalism and the way Bulgaria has suffered from austerity within the EU can provide a common narrative for the winter protests, the summer protests, and the subsequent student occupation. What is more, only such an analysis can explain the common features of the Bulgarian protests and protests in countries as diverse as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey, and Brazil. The strength of the current book lies precisely in juxtaposing these different country cases and exploring the protest cascades across different countries in the world system, paying attention to the particular protest dynamics but not losing sight of the general transformation of capitalism that ultimately led to a crisis that shook the whole system.

Last but not least, this chapter has shown clearly that framing is a relational agentic process. If exploring austerity policies and the logic of neoliberalism is to be more than a theoretical exercise, political subjects have to work on the ground and actively put forward diagnostic frames that focus on austerity and prognostic frames for a more just and equal society. New political subjectivities on the left should be built. They can be achieved not by emigrating but on the contrary, by working closely with local communities. The way out of the dead end paradoxically starts with staying, not with leaving.

## List of interviews

- BG1      Doncho Dudev, manager, organizer of the Sunday protests in the winter of 2013. Sofia, July 2014
- BG2      Yanaki Ganchev, head of the Association of Users of Telecommunications and Internet Services, organizer of the weekday evening protests in the winter of 2013. Sofia, July 2014

- BG3 Konstantin Pavlov, blogger, member of Protest Network and active participant in the summer #ДAHCwithme Protests. Sofia, August 2014
- BG4 Lea Vajsova, PhD in sociology, member of Protest Network and active participant in the summer #ДAHCwithme Protests. Sofia, April 2014
- BG5 Ivaylo Dinev, student, MA in Cultural Anthropology, one of the leaders of the Student Occupation of Sofia University. Sofia, May 2014
- BG6 Ivaylo Achev, journalist, editor of the news site Aktu-alno.com. Sofia, July 2014
- BG7 Gueorgui Zhechev, analyst and consultant on energy politics. Sofia, April 2015
- BG8 Martin Vladimirov, analyst on energy politics at the Centre for the Study of Democracy. Sofia, April 2015
- BG9 Ivo Hristov, sociologist, one of the authors of the books *The Black Hole of Bulgarian Power Industry* and *The Networks of Transition: What Actually Happened in Bulgaria after 1989*. Sofia, April 2015

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## 7 “Sow hunger, reap anger”

From neoliberal privatization to new collective identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina

*Chiara Milan*

### Abstract

The 2013 and 2014 mass protests emerged unexpectedly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country still recovering from the difficult experience of the 1992-1995 war. A thorough analysis of the protest events and their dynamics reveals that, although unexpected, the rebellion at the periphery of Europe was far from unpredictable. This chapter offers a close reading of the two episodes of protests: the 2013 demonstrations for citizenship rights and the 2014 protests against corruption and for social justice. The chapter analyzes the social basis and organizational format of the mobilizations, exploring in detail the connections with the local cultural environment, as well as the frames used. The chapter discusses the extent to which the neoliberal restructuring of the country on the one hand pauperized the population, and on the other hand fostered the emergence of a renewed solidarity grounded in deprivation rather than ethnicity.

**Keywords:** Bosnia-Herzegovina, non-ethnic mobilization, divided societies

### 7.1 Introduction

The social uprising of February 2014 is said to have marked a watershed in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. For the first time since the end of the 1992-1995 conflict, people took to the streets in huge numbers, voicing their discontent with a political elite considered as unaccountable, opposing the privatization of their factories and lamenting the worsening of their living conditions. Sparked by a workers' struggle in a city with a long-lasting history of labor movements, the protests escalated upon violent police intervention. The riots spread almost all over the country, while the images of buildings on fire hit the international headlines. Analysts and media rushed to define the social upheaval as unexpected.



Contrariwise, a thorough analysis of the protest events and their dynamics reveals that the rebellion at the periphery of Europe was far from unpredictable. Inspired by the anti-austerity protest wave unfolding in 2011, the 2014 social uprising represents the peak of a cycle of contention that began in 2013 with a mobilization for civil rights. Owing to the targets of the protests, the social base of the demonstrators, and the organizational formats adopted, the Bosnian Herzegovinian protest events present commonalities with similar movements mobilizing in the context of the crisis of neoliberalism. Similarly, the discontent and claims of those who protested on the squares of the former Yugoslav state resonated with those of their peers in the peripheral countries of Europe. Notwithstanding the peculiar features stemming from the context in which it emerged – a post-socialist country still recovering from the war experience – to be properly understood, the 2014 social uprising needs to be contextualized within the global cycle of contention spawned by the crisis of late neoliberalism.

The analysis presented in this chapter delves into the factors accounting for the emergence and dynamics of the 2013 and 2014 waves of protest, the grievances of the demonstrators populating the squares and the streets of Bosnia-Herzegovina, their social base, and the repertoire adopted. Particular attention has been devoted to the economic and political context in which the country is embedded, which shaped the social base of the protesters, their actions, and the demands they articulated in the participatory assemblies that sprang up throughout the country following the three-day riots. The chapter concludes by reflecting upon the transformative effects of the protests, in particular the emergence of a new collective identity no longer grounded in ethnicity, but rather in deprivation. This new encompassing subjectivity clusters together the disempowered, the so-called “losers of the transition,” regardless of ethnic or religious belonging.

The chapter draws on in-depth interviews with activists, academics, journalists, and external observers participating in both waves of protests. Furthermore, it relies on the analysis of press articles and the existing literature on the 2013 and 2014 mobilizations, as well as on participant observation in the final phase of the 2014 protests and plenum sessions. I have also analyzed archival material, press releases, flyers, and plenum bulletins collected both from the websites of the initiatives and in person during field trips in the country. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between July 2013 and August 2015 in the major urban centers of the country. Given the sensitivity of the topics and owing to the potentially easy identification of the subjects in a small activist environment like the Bosnian-Herzegovinian one, I have chosen not to report interviewees’

private data. A progressive number has been assigned to every recorded interview, and the full list of interviews is available at the end of the chapter. The interviewees were selected as among the key actors in both waves of protests by following a snowball procedure, that is to say, through the identification of an initial relevant informant who provided contacts with other key actors.

## 7.2 The political economy of protest on Europe's periphery

An analysis of the political and economic situation of the country helps to make sense of the 2013 and 2014 happenings, which need to be placed in the broader context of long-term structural socio-economic reforms implemented in the former Yugoslav state after the collapse of the socialist system. Unlike its neighbors and former members of Yugoslavia, currently new or brand-new members of the European Union (Slovenia since 2004 and Croatia since 2013), or candidates for membership (Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro), Bosnia-Herzegovina is the only post-Yugoslav state (together with Kosovo) enjoying the status of potential candidate for EU membership. In the perspective of future integration into the EU, a set of structural adjustment programs has been imposed upon the former socialist countries, "absorbed into the economic mechanisms dominated by the hegemonic old member states of the EU" (Lane, 2012: 23). Consequently, Bosnia-Herzegovina had to abide by the rules and conditionalities set forth by the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. The reforms reshaped the previous socialist economy in neoliberal terms, transforming it into a transitional economy. In practice, the shift from a socialist to a more liberal market-oriented economy translated into reforms in the realms of privatization and social policies, while other reforms envisaged financial opening and welfare cuts. The transition process resulted in the progressive pauperization of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian citizens, increasing social inequalities to the extent that the middle-class disappeared, while the working class transformed into *lumpenproletariat*. The neoliberal restructuring of the country brought about further declining of living standards for a population already ravaged by a four-year conflict, bringing them to the edge of existence.

By the end of the 1992-1995 war, the privatization process of the industrial apparatus had led to the bankruptcy of former industrial giants that provided occupations to most of the population before the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the wake of the war, a corrupt ethno-political class handled

the privatization process of state enterprises and, in the absence of an appropriate institutional framework, benefited from it (Pugh, 2005: 451). Following the state withdrawal from the economy, ethno-political elites gained control and took advantage of the once public enterprises (2005). The workers faced mass layoffs due to a non-transparent privatization of their workplaces (Donais, 2002). In addition, labor flexibility has increased over the years. The new labor law, adopted in 2015 under the auspices of the IMF and the EU, increases labor flexibility even further, making layoffs easier, and jeopardizing even more the rights of what is left of the working class. The IMF imposed the reform as a necessary condition to further financial investments. The labor law is in fact part of a set of reforms launched in November 2014 by Germany and the UK, known as “new European initiative,” and it is closely linked to the reform agenda known as “Compact for Growth and Jobs” endorsed by the EU in May 2014. Aimed at reshaping the path of Bosnia-Herzegovina towards EU membership after years of stalemate, the program envisages reforms aimed at getting “Bosnia and Herzegovina moving again on the reform track towards becoming a state that can be functional as a member of the EU” (Steinmeier and Hammond, 2014). In practice, it calls for cuts in the public sector and further privatization, likely to intensify the crisis of legitimacy of a corrupted and already contested political class.

The transition process had been following its path without receiving open criticism. The political elite adopted and uncritically implemented the neoliberal reforms as necessary steps towards the EU accession process, while opinion polls revealed increasing trust of the citizens towards the EU. Lately, however, something changed. Partially inspired by the anti-austerity protest wave of 2011, since 2013 the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina have started to voice their discontent towards the negative effects of the “failed transition” and “to question the post-socialist transition that led to brutal capitalism and diminished democracy” (Horvat and Štiks, 2015: 2). As an interviewee put it, “It was as if, all of a sudden, we woke up from the dream of transition” (Interview BH8). On the squares and in the plenums, they lamented that the expectations of a rise in wealth and living standards that the advent of market economy and democracy had predicted had not been fulfilled. Similarly to the 2011 anti-austerity movements, they called for the restoration of the rights they had enjoyed under socialism (della Porta, 2015). On the one hand, the social groups most affected by the consequences of neoliberal reforms – workers, pensioners, unemployed, laid-off workers, and precarious workers – took to the streets to express their anger towards their government and the international community,

blamed for having embraced a program of reforms that had resulted in the plundering of their factories and the degrading of their living conditions. On the other hand, academics and intellectuals in the region started to criticize the transition as "an ideological construct of domination [...] hid[ing] a monumental neo-colonial transformation of this region into a dependent semi-periphery" (Horvat and Štiks, 2012: 46). Notwithstanding the absence of an anti-austerity narrative, as was the case in the 2013 Bulgarian protests (see Rone, this volume), the socio-economic reforms undertaken in the last years echoed in the motivation of the protesters and in the demands articulated in the citizens' assemblies that followed.

### 7.3 A tangled governmental structure and an unaccountable political class

Besides the economic and social problems that beset the country, the Bosnian citizens have to cope with a labyrinthine governmental structure that, built on ethnic divisiveness, obstructs progressive change (Hetman, 2013). Following from its constitutional asset, a result of the General Framework Agreement for Peace (widely known as Dayton Agreement) signed in 1995 to end the conflict, the country is now divided into two semi-autonomous halves called entities: the Serbian republic (Republika Srpska), where the majority of Bosnian Serbs live, and the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which mostly Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats are settled. The consociational system grants equal representation to the three constituent peoples of the country: Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslim). Those who do not fit into (or refuse to identify with) one of the above-mentioned categories belong to the group of "others" (*ostali*). The "others," though, are not entitled to the same rights of representation as the other groups. For instance, they can be appointed neither to the presidency of the country nor to the upper house of the state parliament. Owing to the decentralized and complex governmental structure, such a dysfunctional state is estimated to spend half of its GDP on redundant government offices at the various administrative levels – state, entities, cantons, municipalities<sup>1</sup> – while the economy relies

<sup>1</sup> While Republika Srpska is a centralized sub-state divided into municipalities, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina is composed of ten administrative units called cantons, each with its own constitution, government, and court. Each entity has its own president, parliament, government, and courts, as well as jurisdiction in the areas of civil administration, education, health, police, environment, and many others. Only foreign policy, foreign trade, defense, fiscal and monetary politics rely upon the competences of the weak national government.

on foreign aid and foreign banks control the banking sector. The presence of the High Representative (HR) – an international civilian supervisor in charge of overseeing the peace process and the implementation of civilian aspects of the peace accords – undermines further the accountability of the political class. Since 1997, the HRs are entitled to the so-called “Bonn powers,” namely the right to adopt binding decisions in case of disagreement among local parties, and to remove elected officials if they violate the commitments envisaged in the Dayton agreement. Instead of being accountable to the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Parliament, the HR is responsible only to the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), an international body charged with implementing the Dayton Agreement. Owing to the control and governance exercised by the international community over domestic policy, some scholars have defined the country as a semi-protectorate (Belloni, 2013) “whose internal policy is largely dictated by the US and EU” (Živković, 2014).

The administrative system that the peace accords foresaw fuels corruption and mismanagement, and presents plenty of opportunities for nationalist leaders to abuse public office (Divjak and Pugh, 2008). Instead of fostering equal citizenship, the institutional framework of the country further fragments the population along ethnic lines, encouraging it to vote for the (often nationalist) party perceived as defending its ethnic constituency. Nationalist political parties benefit from the situation of maintaining the population divided and retain their grip on power by playing on the constant threat of the ethnic “other.” Political representatives gain mutual benefit by being permanently at odds, as the citizens in the squares and in the plenums clearly unveiled. Already undermined by a low level of social trust, clientelistic loyalties and familist networks, and the fear that their rights will be denied, the citizens “would not vote for lower taxes or ecological laws, but just to guarantee their own survival” (Mujkić, 2008: 22). According to Transparency International’s corruption perception index, which measures the perceived levels of corruption in the public sector, the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina ranked their public sector 39 on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). A report of the Gallup Balkan Monitor shows that the majority of citizens also had a low level of trust in their institutions, and that they mostly disapproved of their national leadership. Only around one-fifth of the respondents support their leaders, whereas more than two-thirds disapproved of them (Gallup Balkan Monitor, 2010).

Over the years, the political class turned a blind eye to the growing discontent and social demands of the population, stricken by the economic crisis and impoverishment. The elite-society cleavage deepened over time, while the consociational setting of the country increased the likelihood

for the political class, defined as "ethno-oligarchy" (Mujkić, 2008), to hold onto power by maintaining frustration among their ethnic constituencies and by constantly fueling their distrust and fear towards the other ethnic groups. The level of alienation of the powerholders from their constituencies has been clearly shown by the 2013 protesters, who urged the HR and the international community to dismiss their policymakers, once their attempts to address them failed. Simultaneously, though, the same international community is acknowledged to exacerbate this crisis of legitimacy, since it keeps negotiating with the Bosnian-Herzegovinian political class, turning a deaf ear to the demands of the demonstrators on the square. As a banner on the streets during the 2014 demonstrations read (in English): "EU, we are the one with whom you should talk."

#### 7.4 The unpredicted rebellion on Europe's periphery: the onset

##### The 2013 cycle

Although the 2014 protests are said to have arrived unexpectedly, they capitalized on the previous wave unfolding in 2013. In the opinion of many interviewees, the 2014 uprising would never have happened had the 2013 #JMBG protests not taken place. The so-called *babylution*, a term coined to identify the revolution of the babies, surfaced in Sarajevo during the summer of 2013, sparked by a seriously ill three-month-old baby girl unable to travel abroad in order to receive the medical treatment she needed. The absence of an ID number prevented her from getting a passport, and thus from leaving the country. The Ministry of the Interior could not assign her the 13-digit Unique Master Citizens Number (*Jedinstveni matični broj građana*) (JMBG) necessary to issue personal documents because a Law on Identification Numbers was not in force in the country.

The deadlock originated from a disagreement among MPs upon the amendments necessary to adopt a unified state law on identification numbers. Whereas the MPs from the Bosnian Serb political parties demanded that the last digit indicate the entity borders, the representatives of the other ethnic groups opposed the proposal (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2013). As with many other issues, the recognition of the internal geographic divisions of the country on personal documents turned a technical matter into a pretext for a dispute over the centralization vs. decentralization of the state (Armakolas and Maksimović, 2013: 4). In line with their persistent threats to secede from the state, the Bosnian Serb MPs used a technical matter – the definition

of registration areas – as a tool to call for more autonomy from the central power, while the other MPs perceived it as a further attempt to strengthen the internal partitioning of the country. Owing to the constitutional asset that recognizes veto rights to each constituent people in case a vital interest of the ethnic group is threatened or endangered,<sup>2</sup> the refusal of Bosnian Serb MPs to collaborate in drafting a new law on identification numbers provoked an impasse in parliament. Confronted with the inability of the parliament to reach an agreement upon the issue, a Constitutional Court pronouncement erased the law on February 13, 2013, thus freezing the newborns' registration. From then on, no passports and personal documents necessary to travel abroad could be released to children born after February 2013.

Touched by the case of the baby unable to leave Bosnia-Herzegovina to receive medical treatment abroad, several citizens of Sarajevo decided to take action. On the morning of June 5, organized and coordinated through the social platform Facebook, about ten people parked their private cars in front of the Parliament's garages, at the outskirts of the city, with the intention to prevent the MPs from exiting the building. Although notified that a temporary solution for Belmina had been found in the afternoon, the demonstrators refused to step back. Joined by other citizens, informed through Facebook, on the night of June 6 they organized a "siege" of the Parliament building through a human chain that surrounded the venue (Milan, 2013). Nearly 1,500 persons, among them civil servants, MPs, and foreign investors who happened to be inside the building, were allowed to leave only at dawn. Subsequently, the demonstrators occupied the square in front of the Parliament for 25 consecutive days.

### Repertoires and tactics

Throughout the occupation, the demonstrators staged cheerful parades, raising billboards and effigies portraying the politicians from all political parties. Every day at noon, a meeting called "Coffee for the ID number" (*Kafa za JMBG*) took place, during which the children played, sang, and drew together in the garden surrounding the building, while their parents

2 The Constitution, Annex V to the Dayton Agreement, guarantees the protection of vital national interests of each constituent people, according veto rights to each community in case of a threat to a vital national interest (literally "is destructive of a vital interest of the Bosniak, Croat or Serb people"). At the state level, in entities and most cantons, each community has the right to veto decisions by parliament that may negatively affect the community (Bieber, 2006: 44). Although the Constitution recognizes as vital interests issues related to constitutional amendments, identity, education, religion, and so forth, the veto rights can be expanded to virtually any issue (2006).



drank coffee together. Through the symbolic reappropriation of the public space, the demonstrators intended to affirm with their physical presence the emergence of a new collective subjectivity, that of the citizens opposing atomization and ethnic partition in the name of human rights. The concept sounds particularly subversive "in a country where the rule is that my presence denies yours" (Interview BH1), and where "the idea of ethnic equality (the equality of the constituent peoples) dominates over that of ethical equality (the equality of its citizens)" (Mujkić, 2008: 119).

Owing to the newness of the initiative and the lack of movement experience, autonomous self-organization proved sparse. Unlike similar movements taking place throughout Europe, during the *babylution* the protesters did not succeed in organizing a proper debate through square or neighborhood assemblies (Milan and Oikonomakis, 2013). In the words of one activist, present on the square since the car blockade, the result was indeed quite chaotic (Interview BH2). In the attempt to organize efficiently, four working groups were appointed to deal with planning, logistics, media communication, and contact with the other cities across the country. Two big demonstrations were organized in the capital on June 11 and 18. On those occasions, hundreds of people from other cities joined the demonstrators in Sarajevo, while well-known bands from the countercultural scene of Bosnia-Herzegovina played in support of the #JMBG protests. The number of people peaked at thousands. Meanwhile, solidarity rallies were staged in the major urban cities, including Banja Luka, the capital of the Serbian entity.

Beyond the occupation of the public space, parades, and public gatherings, the protesters wrote open letters addressed to the authorities on behalf of the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The letters urged the High Representative of the country and the international community respectively to force their elected representatives to adopt a permanent law on ID numbers. The powerholders were blamed for being irresponsible, since they had proved unwilling to uphold the basic human rights of their constituencies – the right to life and the right to existence (JMBG.org, 2013a). Although entitled to intervene in the internal political affairs of the country thanks to the competences granted him by the Bonn powers, "the highest and ultimate authority of the country" (2013a) refused to meddle in the political row. In the meantime, another sick baby without an ID number had died, and the majority of MPs had ceased to attend the parliamentary sessions due to the alleged "safety risk" represented by the demonstrators standing outside the parliament building (Balkan Insight, 2013).

The month of protest ended on July 1 with an action called "Dismissal day" (*Otkaz*). Confronted with political inertia and the powerholders'



unwillingness to find a permanent solution to the ID law as the demonstrators had requested, the citizens declared their wholesale dismissal, as they were “no longer credible representatives of the citizens of Bosnia Herzegovina” (JMBG.org, 2013b). That day, the demonstrators blocked the traffic of the main road of the capital, chanting the slogan “Come out and fire them!” On that occasion, the movement organizers called for a nonviolent disobedience action through economic boycott, inviting their fellow citizens to stop paying bills, fees, and taxes for a week, as a way to pressure politicians. The “Non-payment day” (*Dan neplaćanja*) had sparse resonance, though, and on July 1 the protesters disbanded. In the meantime, metallic fences had been placed to surround the parliament square, preventing the demonstrators from occupying it.

### Claims and grievances

On the square, the demonstrators, whose number had increased from dozens to thousands in just a few days, demanded the immediate adoption of a permanent law on ID numbers; the creation of a state solidarity fund to finance medical treatment abroad for those citizens who could not receive proper care in Bosnia-and Herzegovina; the curtailing of 30 percent of MPs’ and ministers’ salaries for the duration of their term in office, to be devoted to the proposed solidarity fund; and the non-prosecution of the protesters who took part in the blockade of the Parliament (JMBG.org, 2013c). They urged their MPs to fulfil the requests by the end of the month. Otherwise, they claimed, the citizens would dismiss them.

The claim for the right to life and for a dignified existence for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity was bridged with the struggle against corruption. Opposing the brand attributed to the demonstrations as ethnically driven and orchestrated by political parties, as well as the portrayal of the protesters as terrorists threatening the safety of their opponents, the #JMBG demonstrators stated clearly that they targeted the powerholders as a whole amoral group, regardless of ethnic belonging. As a member of the delegation invited for negotiation on the first day of the protests recalls: “We wanted to talk to MPs from *Republika Srpska* and the Croat MPs, because we heard rumours from inside the building that it was an ethnic protest, and we wanted to explain it was not against some of them in particular, but against all of them together” (Interview BH2). The unaccountable political class was blamed for violating the rule of law by placing its interests before that of its constituencies, to the detriment of the most vulnerable, the innocent babies. A cleavage was thus singled out between a small, powerful, and corrupted elite, and a majority of impoverished citizens siding with their

most vulnerable fellows. On the other side remained the deprived citizens, united beyond alleged ethnic hatred, who claimed the right to existence as individuals rather than as members of a collective kinship. The portrayal of demonstrators as *individuals* disconnected from any organization, party, or ethnic group was clearly stated in the movement manifesto, published on the website, and circulated through the social networks:

We represent no organisation or political party, nor do we want for any of the 191 political parties, the countless local and foreign NGOs and associations, international and local institutions, initiatives, formal and informal groups to speak in the name of citizens. If necessary, we are prepared to list you all by name, because we want to make a clear distinction between you and the citizens. We have no organizers and everybody is welcome to support the #jmbg initiative, but only as individual citizens with full first and last names, and not in any other way (JMBG.org, 2013c).

### **The social base of the babylution**

Although the demonstrators on the streets of Sarajevo belonged mostly to well-educated urban groups, it would be inaccurate to identify them as middle class, given the questionable existence of a middle class in the country. The transition process from socialist to market economy, coupled with the devastating effects of the war, deepened the divide between an impoverished majority of the population and a powerful, wealthy minority. Similarly to its neighboring countries, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian middle class has been "swept by transition and war events" that left it "without jobs and properties" (Čabaravdić, 2009). Nowadays, a petty bourgeoisie is considered "in its infancy" (Čabaravdić, 2009), composed mostly of civil servants of the huge public apparatus (Milojević, 2012).

Regarding the young, the country faces a brain drain of large proportion. Although official statistical data are not available, Bosnia-Herzegovina is estimated to be fifth in the world for brain drain. The rate of highly educated and professional emigrants fleeing the country increases constantly. The young who constituted the bulk of the 2013 protesters are mostly students, activists, cultural workers, and young professionals employed in the third sector or international organizations in the capital. Familiar with social networks, many have studied abroad and developed ties with their peers outside the country. They represent the secular and progressive Sarajevo youth, to which an interviewee attributed the moniker "aesthetic left" (Interview BH9). Through social networks and blogging services, the protesters broadcasted and shared information, posting their content in the form of

comments and tweets. The hashtag #JMBG enabled them to launch and follow protest events, and resulted in the branding of the protest events with “#JMBG.” Social media played a productive role that intersected with and shaped the framing activities of the movement.

Many university students were spotted among the protestors, owing to the proximity of university faculties to the Parliament building. In addition, parents with children, carrying their strollers, populated the square, to the extent that “most of the days the protests took the form of a friendly meeting of Sarajevan families” (Armakolas and Maksimović, 2013: 6). Drawn by local artists, the image of a pacifier turning into a closed fist became the symbol of the movement and soon appeared on the flags waved on the squares and on the walls of Sarajevo.

## 7.5 The unpredicted rebellion on Europe’s periphery: the peak

### The 2014 uprising

While the babylution might be placed at the beginning of the protest cycle, the February uprising represents its peak. At odds with the low level of protest activity registered in the country, the February 2014 upheaval was the most disruptive political event to hit the country in the transition period. Everything started from a workers’ demonstration in the former industrial hub of Tuzla, the third largest city in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the northeastern part of the country. On February 5, 2014, workers laid off from the recently privatized factories of the area took to the streets, as they had done many times before. The redundant workers were once employed in five factories belonging to the SODASO holding until 2002, which bankrupted upon privatization. Unable to collect the salaries, pensions, and healthcare benefits they were owed, the former workers gathered to protest in front of the canton’s building.<sup>3</sup> They demanded their unpaid benefits as well as their 50 months back pay, and they called upon the government to fight youth unemployment, whose rate had ramped up to 60 percent in the last years.

The rally, organized by some local trade unions and the association of unemployed of the canton, was also announced on the Facebook page “50.000 people for a better tomorrow” (*50.000 za bolje sutra*). Students and citizens joined the workers, who stood in front of the canton’s court before moving towards the canton’s government building. Pushed violently back by the

3 During the February protests, the demonstrators targeted mostly the headquarters of the decentralized administrative units.

police, the demonstrators hurled eggs and stones against the building's wall. The riot police, intended to secure the entrance of the canton's building, reacted with teargas and rubber bullets. As a response, the demonstrators set fire to the canton's building which, as an irony of fate, had housed the former SODASO headquarters. As Gordy put it, "It is probably not too difficult to imagine the anger attracted by a building that has come to symbolise how once a big functioning industry provided a livelihood for people, and now a bigger functionless bureaucracy lives off them" (Gordy, 2014).

Two more days of unrest followed. Although the event initially seemed to be quite contained, the anger generated by the violent police response to the workers' protest sparked a "collective nervous breakdown" (Lynch, 2014). Solidarity rallies organized in the following days across the country converted into violent attacks to official buildings, burning of cars, and clashes with police. While the gathering in Banja Luka, the capital of the Serbian entity, remained limited to a one-day peaceful demonstration, in Zenica, Mostar, Bihać, and Sarajevo, the major urban centers of the country, the protests escalated further and became violent (Milan, 2014). On the third day of demonstrations (February 7, 2014), the canton government of another nearby industrial town, Zenica, was torched, and its premier resigned, following the example of the premier of Tuzla canton. In the divided city of Mostar, the town hall, the cantonal building, and the headquarters of the two main nationalist parties were set ablaze. In the capital Sarajevo, the presidential building and both the canton and the town councils became the target of the rage, symbols of a corrupted and incompetent political class that had plundered the country since the end of the last war. In Sarajevo, at first, police reacted with stun grenades and rubber bullets, and clashes were reported in some areas of the city. Differently from the nonviolent and carnival-like occupation of the square during the 2013 babylution, the 2014 riots were the most violent scenes the country had witnessed since the end of the war.

### **Repertoires and tactics**

In terms of repertoires, the February uprising differed considerably from the babylution. Molotov cocktails and stones replaced strollers and pacifiers. Police clashed with demonstrators, several arrests followed, and the symbols of power were destroyed during the three days in which the protests escalated. A young participant in the riots explained the reasons beyond the outburst of violence as follows:

Many people from abroad condemned the violent turn protests took in February. I've been asked why we did set fire to the presidential building

that during the last war stood up as a symbol of freedom. The point is that it does not represent freedom anymore: it is just a three-headed beast<sup>4</sup> representing who is stealing our country. No, we needed to take it down and I am glad this happened (Interview BH4).

By assaulting the institutional buildings, the demonstrators wanted to symbolically attack the political class, which had brought the country to become the symbol of a failed experiment. Some understood the violent repertoire as a reaction to the violence experienced in citizens' everyday lives. Soon after the beginning of the uprising, Antić wrote: "The violence that happened just a week ago was already well past us, present only in so far as we were all distancing ourselves from it, having forgotten, of course, that such violence is only a reaction to the kind of violence perpetrated by this state for over 20 years" (Antić, 2014).

A few days after the beginning of the riots in Tuzla, people began to channel their rage into a constructive experiment called plenums, participatory assemblies embracing a direct democratic method of decision-making. The practice of the plenums, drawn from the previous wave of student protests that swept the region in the spring of 2009, culminated with the occupation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Following their peers in Croatia, the students of the faculty of Philosophy in Tuzla occupied it in a one-day action, adopting the plenum as a decision-making tool. In Croatia as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the students followed the lines of *The Occupation Cookbook – or the Model of the Occupation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb*, a book issued in Zagreb in 2009, describing the organization of the students' occupation for use by other activists.<sup>5</sup>

In the wake of Tuzla, 22 towns and cities across the country organized in plenums. Each assembly followed its own organizational path but was generally established in a decentralized way through thematic working groups that dealt with media, education and culture, social problems, cooperation with the other plenums, legal issues, and so forth. The demands that emerged during the plenums' assemblies were collected and handed on to working groups charged with reformulating them. Once re-elaborated, the demands passed again to the plenum for the final voting, according to the rule "one head, one vote." An organizational body called an "interplenum" connected

4 In order to guarantee equal representation to each constituent group, the Presidency of the Republic is a tripartite one that includes a Serb, a Croat, and a Bosniak member. The chairmanship of the presidency rotates every eight months (Bieber, 2006: 48).

5 The book is available at: <http://marcousquet.net/pubs/The-Occupation-Cookbook.pdf>.

the various assemblies that sprang up across the country, clustering citizens' requests addressing the government level. By the same line, each plenum articulated the demands targeting the local level of government.

As alternative practices of autonomous self-organization, the plenums worked similarly to other assemblies that had blossomed since 2011 in many squares of Europe. The assemblies were leaderless: nobody was entitled to represent anybody else, or to speak on his/her behalf. NGOs, trade unions, and other collective actors participated in the plenums solely as individuals and owned the same right to vote as the others, since plenums were seen as arenas with neither leadership nor representation. In these participatory arenas, citizens' demands and grievances were articulated in a coherent way and later handed on to politicians. However, the agenda of the Bosnian plenums differed from those of the other European squares. Without calling explicitly into question the system of representative democracy, the participants asked for a change in the political establishment. The target of demonstrators was identified in the whole Bosnian political elite, held responsible for the mismanagement of the privatization process of public enterprises and state-owned assets. If one considers the context where the protests arose, it is no surprise that people rejected the political class instead of the political system. In a country hanging in the balance of a delicate system of ethno-national quotas, few dared tackle the issue of democracy for fear of undermining its already fragile equilibrium.

Regarding the organizational format of the plenums, the 2014 protests inherited, to a certain extent, the organizational forms and claims of the Occupy movement, especially with reference to horizontalism – that is to say, the "break with the logic of representation and vertical ways of organizing" (Sitrin and Azzellini, 2014). Unlike the Global Justice Movement of the early 2000s, whose organizational structure included networking with formal actors such as voluntary organizations and trade unions alongside grassroots groups (della Porta, 2007), the new global movements spreading all over the world since 2010 adopted a non-representational and non-hierarchical structure that the Bosnian demonstrators endorsed as well.

## 7.6 Claims and grievances: The shift from human rights to social justice

The February demonstrations catalyzed the increasing discontent of all the sectors of population bearing the brunt of government policies, and brought socio-economic issues to the foreground. Economic grievances were

coupled with post-materialist claims that had already emerged during the previous wave of protests in 2013. The right to existence and to a dignified life – “to be a normal citizen in a normal country,” in the words of the plenums’ participants – were bridged with materialistic claims such as the revision of the factories’ privatization process, labor reforms, more effective health care, the fight against unemployment, and cuts of irresponsible expenditures. In the plenums, the most voted demands dealt with labor, the economy, and workplaces. Other requests tackled the resignation of the Federal and Canton’s governments, and addressed the suppression of benefits in institutions and public administration (among them the famous “white bread” allowance<sup>6</sup>); the containing of maximum salaries of elected officials; the improvement of social welfare; and the suspension of criminal procedures against the demonstrators (Mujanović, 2014). In short, the citizens gathered in the plenums demanded the observance of the common good (Mujkić, 2015), calling for the establishment of a non-partisan technocratic government rather than a radical change.

The lack of a deep critique of representation originated discontent among some plenums’ members, willing to advocate for more radical change. However, it has to be taken into account that, in a contested and divided state like Bosnia-Herzegovina, the introduction of an antisystemic rhetoric ran the risk of hijacking and undermining the significance of protests. One of the participants in the protest explained the use of the social justice frame in the following way: “The protests were socio-economic, people asked for jobs, end of corruption and of nepotism, and they wanted that specific message to get through. If they’d asked for anything else, they knew that immediately the nationalists would take it and just destroy the original message. People know that here everything gets manipulated, therefore they stayed with a simple message: socio-economic issues” (Interview BH3). Although the demonstrators overcame the ethno-national rhetoric, the time was not ripe for the development of a more radical, antisystemic critique of representation. Another plenum member explained: “What we want is first to talk about socio-economic problems, and socio-economic solutions. And when we will live as human beings than people will have the luxury to talk about constitution” (Interview BH5). In sum, the demonstrators rejected their political class, not their (distorted) representative parliamentary political system.

6 According to the Law on Salaries and Allowances of FBiH, elected officials and holders of executive functions have the right to receive one year of salary after the termination of their mandate, and until obtaining new employment, of the same amount as they had while in office. Such an allowance is called “white bread” (*bijeli hljeb*).



The centrality attributed to material issues proved that economic factors and processes are important for movements (Goodwin and Hetland, 2013). The demands of the workers, deprived of their jobs, their means of production, and their livelihoods, resonated with the broader population and sparked outrage because they showed that neoliberal privatization affected not only their factories, but virtually all sectors of society, without respecting ethnic borders (Walsh, 2014). The workers were nothing but the most visible symptom of the economic collapse of the country, whose administrative and political system guarantees only an ostensible stability. Materialist claims contributed to return political economy to public discussions, and triggered an anti-nationalistic rhetoric. As one of the interviewees and members of the plenums explained:

People have finally overcome this talk about ethnicities and are finally waking up. Nobody before knew how to define the vital national question, now we do know it: our vital national question is that we are unemployed, we do not have neither pensions nor jobs. This is the vital national question, not self-determination or belonging to an ethnicity! People are moving beyond that, they started asking this question, not just hiding in their respective camps anymore. They know they suffer the same. We are all in this, together! (Interview BH6).

Although the dynamic of neoliberalism stood at the core of the protests and has been defined as "the reason behind the uprising" (Interview BH8), an anti-austerity narrative had not been explicitly used. An interviewee explains it with the lack of an ideological basis: "People are just screaming out that who had been in power until now just resign. In each protest you have different kind of people, and lot of them are ideologically on the left. But that is not a sort of anti-capitalist movement. The common denominator is that things are bad, and people want change. That is why everybody united. But it will take sometimes to articulate some ideological basis" (Interview BH3). The lack of a theoretical elaboration is praised as proof of the non-partisanship of the 2014 mobilization, but it also constituted one of its weaknesses. "Our social reality," elucidates a member of plenum Sarajevo, "changed most dramatically in response to the challenge which had not come through theoretical engagement but with stones and fires and language of swear words combined with slogans" (Nedimović, 2014). The criticism towards the political class was expressed in a violent way, and it made only partial reference to the neoliberal reforms the powerholders were responsible for.



### **The social base of the February uprising**

The social base of the 2014 uprising is much more heterogeneous than the previous wave of protests. Whereas the educated urban youth constituted the majority of the 2013 demonstrators, in 2014 it was mostly the workers, unemployed, and pensioners who took to the streets. Workers are indeed a category considered more entitled than other social groups in protests since, during the socialist period, they had been an essential means for constructing a cosmopolitan, internationalist, modern, and supranational identity of Yugoslavs (Petrović, 2013). Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, the deindustrialization of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the privatization of its factories – the backbone of the Yugoslav economy – the role of workers declined dramatically. From being a constitutive element of society, they turned into the most vulnerable social group. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav socialist heritage is still part of the personal biographies of those middle-aged people who marched on the streets and populated the plenums. Still vivid in their memories are the social and economic rights from which workers benefited during the socialist time, lost after the transition to market economy. Once celebrated in socialist times as heroes of work, workers are today transformed into its victims (Petrović, 2013). It is no surprise, then, that the protests spread from Tuzla to the pre-war industrial urban centers such as Zenica, Mostar, and Bihać, where the economic hardships hit the hardest and where the overwhelming majority of laid-off workers as well as other categories of unemployed citizens reside (Mujkić, 2016).

Tuzla, the city where the riots began, acted as a source of legitimacy for the uprising (Interview BH5). The area has been economically well developed since the Austro-Hungarian domination owing to the availability of resources such as salt and coal (Calori, 2015). In the course of time, the mining industry attracted migrants and qualified workers from all over the Empire, which contributed to alter the social fabric of the city (Calori, 2015). During the socialist period, the country hosted the majority of the heavy industries of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Unlike the capital Sarajevo, Tuzla has always been recognized as a city of workers' tradition, owing to the strong presence of an industrial and mining workforce throughout time (Calori, 2015). Besides its multicultural fabric, Tuzla counts on the long-lasting history of labor movement. In 1920, a miners' strike against industrial slavery in the village of Husino, close to Tuzla, was brutally repressed, but its memory contributed to build the narrative of an anti-authoritarian and resistant community. As Weiss put it, "their working class identity interestingly seemed to trump their other, more ethnic, affiliations because it was more genuine" (2002: 13). Furthermore,

Tuzla was the only city in which non-nationalist parties won the elections after the 1992-95 war, making it a unique case in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Armakolas, 2011). Over the years, Tuzla's fame has thus been built on the narrative of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and anti-fascist community (Calori, 2015: 16). The city today counts on a vibrant civic fabric, composed of students' associations active in the area, owing also to the presence of the university – the only one in the country to be occupied during the 2009 student protests. Today, the consequences of the economic crisis are more visible in Tuzla than in the capital Sarajevo, where the majority of the population finds employment in the tertiary sector. Contrariwise, the economy of Tuzla still relies almost completely on the industrial sector.

Other social groups like students, activists, and cultural workers sided with the workers. More visible in the plenums than on the squares, the educated youth played a role in particular during the constructive part of the movement. They acted as moderators and spokespersons, contributed to articulate and elaborate the demands that emerged during the assemblies, kept contacts with the international activists, and especially coordinated the activities among the plenums throughout the country. Most of them had an activist record, and some had participated in the student protests of 2009 against the commodification of education. In Tuzla, in particular, the educated youth had developed strong ties throughout the years with the disenfranchised workers fighting against the privatization of their factories. The pre-existing networks proved essential to activate the mobilizing potential. While the workers could count on the availability of human resources – since over the years they had developed strong ties with their peers of Tuzla facing similar conditions – they lacked the organizational and strategic resources necessary to expand their networks and connect their struggle for concrete improvement of their work conditions and lives with that of other social groups. The words of Emina Busuladžić, leader of the workers of DITA factory, clearly portray the strong connection between the youth and the workers, on which the movement capitalized:

When Dita and workers of other factories were joined by so many other forces: school pupils, college and university students, the unemployed, pensioners, war veterans and the marginalized, the government resigned. Later that day, people I had known for some time, those who had been with us during our struggle, called me to come to Kuća Plamena Mira.<sup>7</sup> There were about 20 people there. I was the oldest. The rest were all

7 The "House of the Peace Flame."

the next generation of our young and educated people. That is how the Plenum was created. Why Plenum? Because it consisted of honest, decent, educated youth, young people that I knew, those who were following us through the struggle to save Dita, to save jobs; youth I trusted, smart, stubborn, persistent, fearless young people (Busuladžić, 2015).

During the plenum sessions, different strands of opposition movements were brought together: the workers, the unemployed, with the academics and intellectuals. By contrast, the younger generation born during or right after the war – those who threw stones and plundered public buildings during the three-day riots in February – vanished as soon as the situation calmed down. They were not present in the plenums, nor were they interested in articulating their demands.

Unlike the *babylution*, during the 2014 protests a cross-class alliance was formed among different social groups. While the middle-aged and retired conceived the plenums as sort of “collective therapy sessions” (Antić, 2014), an opportunity to share their suffering and to speak about their personal problems, the young strove to articulate demands, acting as a kind of community leader. Two factors account for the visibility of the middle-class educated youth in the plenums: first, their expertise acquired by working in international organizations, academia, press, or the third sector provided them with the necessary expertise to moderate public discussions, to articulate demands, and to network with their peers. Second, their English-speaking skills allowed them to maintain constant contacts with the international press. Putting their knowledge at the service of the plenums, they strengthened the networks among domestic fringe groups all over the country.

## 7.7 Conclusions: A new collective identity

If a crisis of legitimacy of the political class set in motion the #JMBG movement, structural conditions lay the groundwork for the emergence of both waves of protest. Specifically, the effects of the political and economic crisis helped to develop solidarity among different social groups, uniting them across, and especially beyond, ethnic belonging. The 2014 uprising, capitalizing on the 2013 wave, brought together individuals from various social groups. Although considered strangers to contentious politics, by taking to the streets the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed that their situation exhibits commonalities with the discontent emerging in other peripheries.

Drawing on Kerbo's categorization, the Bosnian mobilizations bear the characteristics of movements of crisis. Unlike movements of affluence, surfacing in times of economic and political well-being and abundance in which the basic needs of the participants are met, the movements of crisis emerge in times of life-disrupting situations such as widespread unemployment, food shortages, and major social dislocations (Kerbo, 1982). The spontaneity of the 2014 uprising, the predominance of movement-specific members (that is to say people directly experiencing life-threatening situations owing to the crisis), the absence of prior organization, and the sparse resources led to classification of the 2014 protest events as movement of crisis.

The newness of the February uprising stands in the concept of togetherness and solidarity that emerged in the country, where for the first time "citizens came out as citizens, for the first time a rebellion had no national, ethnic or faith-based framework, and for the first time the participants spoke using human rhetoric" (Balkan Insight, 2014). The slogan "We are hungry in three different languages," which often appeared on the billboards during the rallies, expresses starkly that the worsening socio-economic conditions affected to the same extent all Bosnian citizens regardless of their ethno-national belonging. "The slogan," writes Hunt, "proclaimed the futility of ethnic distinctions in the face of common distress and mocked the pretense that Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian, though mutually quite intelligible, are completely separated languages (as nationalist ideologues insist)" (2015). Neoliberalism and its crisis, then, brought about a recomposition of former ethnic cleavages and the emergence of a new one opposing the deprived citizens to the unaccountable elite. It also triggered a process of mutual recognition among the so-called disempowered. An interviewee mentions mutual recognition among the results of the 2014 protests: "We recognized each other [...], we started to count each other. And now we are starting to connect" (Interview BH10).

Like Gezi Park in Istanbul (see Atak in this volume), the plenums acted as spaces for the formation of a new subjectivity emerging from the bottom up, rather than from the top-down reconciliation programs promoted by the NGOs and the international community. Protests and plenums fostered the creation of a new identity on the ground. One of the members of Tuzla plenum explains how the reclamation of the space, begun with the 2013 square occupation, continued and gained strength in the plenum venues: "the protests and plenums disrupted the passive fascination with the management of identitarian difference and created an active, practical site for new social ties and new solidarities to be forged, tested, and lived in the street and in the plenum venues. In this reclamation

of space, body, and voice, a boundary was crossed: from the ‘exhibition of dissent to dissent in action’” (Arsenijević, 2014). The protests had also an empowering effect on the plenums’ participants and the society, making them feel increased leverage on politicians. One activist declared: “People are finally talking, you feel the difference even on the streets. People are talking to each other, even with their neighbors. They feel powerful, they felt their politicians are finally vulnerable, and it happened *because they made them so*” (Interview BH6, italics added by me). Another saw in the plenums and protests a tool to overcome the widespread mistrust still affecting the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society: “Before the protests, we were closed in our own homes, occupied with personal problems, the common problems of every citizen in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [...] Now we realized we have power in our hands, [in the hands] of the citizens, of normal people. The protests have been successful because people began to understand their own people” (Interview BH11).

While, on the one hand, the crisis brought the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the edge of existence, on the other it fostered the emergence of a grassroots mobilization that united them in solidarity across social divisions and ethnic lines. Along with a movement calling for social and economic justice, new political subjects emerged in the country in the wake of the 2014 protests: redundant workers organized autonomously in alternative grassroots trade unions, in response to the unwillingness of traditional unions to negotiate on behalf of their rank-and-file; one of the bankrupted factories had been occupied and is currently self-managed by the workers, who capitalized on the solidarity networks that emerged after the protests; several groups fighting for social and economic justice connected across the country; and new spaces for political action opened. Furthermore, in May 2014 the plenums coordinated the body of volunteers after the floods that shook the country (and marked the end of plenum activities). Since then, the country has been experiencing increasing social and political unrest, still ongoing although on a smaller scale.

To conclude, times are not ripe to thoroughly assess the long-term structural changes that the protests have brought about in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although it is undeniable that a new subjectivity emerged, it would be naïve to expect it already to have supplanted the ethno-national divide. However, the feeling of an increasing agency remained once euphoria faded away. As a young human rights activist said, “Even if it does not happen in the same way in the future, the future will be different, because people saw they have a way of influencing, a way to articulate their demands, they can politically act” (Interview BH7).

## List of interviews

- BH1 Feminist activist, NGO president. Sarajevo, July 2013
- BH2 NGO president, participating in the car blockade of the Parliament. Sarajevo, October 2013
- BH3 Human rights activist. Prijedor/Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH4 Students participating in both waves of demonstrations. Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH5 Activist, plenum Sarajevo. Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH6 Researcher and activist, plenum Tuzla. Tuzla, April 2014
- BH7 Human rights activist, plenum Sarajevo. Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH8 Researcher and activist, plenum Sarajevo. Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH9 Journalist, external observer. Sarajevo, April 2014
- BH10 Activist, plenum Zenica. Zenica, July 2015
- BH11 Activist, plenum Bihać. Bihać, July 2015

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## 8 A spirit of Maidan?

Contentious escalation in Ukraine

*Daniel P. Ritter*

### Abstract

At its outset, the Euromaidan movement of 2013-2014 promised to become yet another example of a mass-based, predominantly nonviolent movement against an authoritarian leader bent on clinging to power. However, as the movement played out over the course of three months the script with which the world has become familiarized over the past few decades was to be betrayed. As the regime dug in, committed to its own survival, it set in motion a vicious cycle that came to include violence perpetrated not only by the government, but also by the protesters. In the end Viktor Yanukovych fled, but not before Kyiv had turned into a war zone. This chapter explores some of the ways in which scholars of social movements and contentious politics may begin to understand this particular turn of events.

**Keywords:** Euromaidan, Ukraine, Yanukovych, contentious politics, social movement, civil society, protest, political violence, Russia, EU

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the causes and outcomes of Ukraine's Euromaidan movement that forced President Viktor Yanukovych from power in late February 2014 after several months of protests. While the movement began in a manner by now familiar to students and observers of anti-authoritarian politics, i.e. with mass-based, nonviolent protests in a major square in the capital city, it would soon alter its appearance. Turning violent, the protests against Yanukovych introduced new actors into the story, all of whom had their own intended conclusions in mind.

In line with the objectives and framework of this volume, the chapter's focus is on neoliberal economics, "authoritarian democracy," and the emergence of new collective identities. Rather than offering an explanation, the emphasis here is on description and exploration. Focusing on the three factors just mentioned, my goal is to provide a possible starting point for future discussions of the Euromaidan protests.



The chapter begins with a brief description of the three months of protests. After that I offer a discussion of the domestic and international economic factors that set the stage for the protest movement. I focus in particular on domestic corruption and international neoliberalism. Next, the focus becomes the structural international conditions that made protests against Yanukovych effective, but that also helped turn the protests into a low-intensity civil war. The last section of the chapter discusses the emergence of new – and strengthening of existing – identities in and around Kyiv's Independence Square.

## 8.2 The Euromaidan protests

The Euromaidan protests began on November 21, 2013 after the well-known Ukrainian investigative journalist Mustafa Naim posted a message on Facebook encouraging people to congregate in Kyiv's Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) to protest against Yanukovych's decision to renege on his commitment to sign an Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union. The agreement was to be signed at the Vilnius Summit a week later, and Naim's rationale for calling for demonstration appears to have been to put pressure on Yanukovych to reconsider. It is important to note, as Andrew Wilson (2014b: 68) does, that Naim "had something like the original Maidan [Orange Revolution] model of peaceful and carnival-like demonstration in mind." However, Naim's vision of a nonviolent protest movement was not to be concretized. In recounting the events of November 2013-February 2014 I will follow Onuch (2014a: 6) and divide the protest movement into "four distinct phases."

The first phase began with Naim's call for a demonstration on November 21. Due to the journalist's fame in Ukraine and his prominence on Facebook, "it is hardly surprising that his call for protesting against the government's decision to thwart the Association Agreement with the European Union became highly instrumental in organizing an initial protest on the Maidan in late November whose core consisted of Internet users" (Kulyk, 2014: 182). It is noteworthy that this "online spark" resembles the Egyptian call for anti-government protests in January 2011. As in Egypt, it appears that the role of the Internet was most crucial in the initial stages of the protest, when Google employee Wael Ghonim's "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook group was responsible for the initial organizing of protests (Ritter, 2015).

By nighttime, about 2,000 people – mostly students – had congregated in Independence Square (Kvit, 2014: 29). The next several days saw their

numbers swell to between 50,000 and 200,000 (Cybriwsky, 2014: 278). By November 24, the movement began to assume a nationwide character as the protests spread to other cities (although protests elsewhere were much smaller than in Kyiv), resulting in a total of about 300,000 participants (Diuk, 2014: 85-86; Onuch, 2014b: 45-46). The protests remained deliberately limited in terms of participation as the student core of the early protests “actively discouraged politicians and parties from taking part” (Diuk, 2014: 85-86). As noted, the early protests focused almost exclusively on Yanukovych’s decision to refuse to sign the AA during the upcoming Vilnius Summit on November 28-29, a matter that Ukrainians at large appear to have found only moderately upsetting. In fact, once that rumor was turned into reality by the president’s actions in Vilnius, the movement’s size began to dwindle rather than grow (Onuch, 2014b: 45).

As scholars have observed, the fall of the Yanukovych regime was hardly predestined. In fact, both Onuch (2014b) and Wilson (2014b) have speculated that the president might well have been able to remain in office by simply waiting the protesters out, since early demands on the regime came almost exclusively from the movement itself, with both the United States and the European Union putting only limited pressure on Yanukovych. However, the regime miscalculated matters and committed serious mistakes on at least two crucial occasions. The first of them occurred in the early morning of November 30 and represents the beginning of the second phase of the Euromaidan uprising.

Having returned from the Vilnius Summit, Yanukovych withdrew to his mansion just outside of Kyiv. Meanwhile, Ukraine’s infamous riot police, the Berkut, responded to orders (it is unclear exactly who issued them) to clear Independence Square of protesters. The official justification for the action was to facilitate the raising of the square’s traditional Christmas tree, but Berkut members used significant force in an effort to intimidate protesters from later reviving their presence on the square. However, as is often the case when less than total violence is used against demonstrators, repression had the opposite effect of that intended by the government (Martin, 2006). The following day the protester numbers grew from 10,000 to at least 500,000. These numbers continued to grow until approximately 800,000 Ukrainians throughout the country left their dwellings to express disapproval with the government’s actions (Charap and Darden, 2014: 8; Diuk, 2014: 86; Kvit, 2014: 29; Onuch, 2014b: 4). As one commentator summarizes, “the decision to use force against the few remaining protesters on November 30 greatly widened the movement’s support and radicalized its demands” (Kudelia, 2014: 28).

By the time Euromaidan had taken on its “self-organizing” character (see below), it was no longer a protest simply against Yanukovych’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement. A poll conducted on the square about a week after the repression began found that 70 percent of the protesters listed “police brutality during peaceful protests” among the reasons for their participation, while only 53.5 percent cited the president’s refusal to sign the AA (Dobrzahanska, 2014: 86). Delcour and Wolczuk (2015: 8) astutely capture the movement’s motivational shift by concluding that “the Ukrainian protesters expressed strong support for European values – democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – rather than the policies of the EU.” This was no longer a movement against the foreign policies of the Yanukovych government, but a protest against its “non-European” actions at home.

On the basis of the poll findings, it is therefore not surprising that by the middle of December, the size of the movement once more began to dwindle. The most likely reason for this was that the government had now changed its tactics, with repression no longer taking the naked form it had assumed on and around November 30. More cynical means of repression were instead employed, what Wilson (2014b: 76) refers to as “off screen-repression.” Without explicit persecution of protesters, it became more difficult for the movement to attract the numbers necessary to pressure the government. As a result,

[I]n early January, there was a sense of drift. Numbers were down, with a hard core of 1,000 to 2,000 on rotation duties. Sunday rallies were now institutionalized [...] around 50,000 came out on Sunday, 5 January, even though there was no official call. But the original momentum seemed lost (Wilson, 2014b: 80).

Had it not been for the regime’s second major blunder it seems quite likely that the movement would eventually have petered out. However, Yanukovych, perhaps due to his uncompromising character, wished for the protests to end sooner rather than later. With that objective in mind, he had parliament introduce what became known as the “dictatorship laws” – a set of laws that “criminalized or introduced harsh administrative penalties for many peaceful protest activities, such as driving cars in groups, picketing in front of politicians’ residencies, defaming politicians, collecting information about police officers or judges, and distributing vaguely defined ‘extremist’ materials” (Popova, 2014: 68). Anyone found in violation of the new laws, which were ambiguously labeled “participation in mass disruption,” would face maximum prison sentences ranging from ten to fifteen years (Popova,

2014: 68). Yanukovych had parliament, which he controlled, rush the new laws through, with the intent of using them to crush the movement once and for all. Instead, just like in late November, government repression resulted in increased activist resolve and marks the beginning of the third phase of the insurrection (Onuch, 2014a; Wilson, 2014b: 81-82).

The most direct consequence of the introduction of the dictatorship laws was the opposition's strategic transformation. As one observer vividly explains, the result of that change was a spiral of violence:

The protests stopped being strictly peaceful. People donned helmets, put on bulletproof vests and took up shields and bats. Molotov cocktails and stones began flying, massive tire fires were lit and improvised trebuchets appeared. In response, for the first time in independent Ukraine, the government unleashed a nefarious campaign of murder, beating, torture, arrests, and kidnapping across the country. Police hunted down civic activists, journalists, and medical workers. But the intensification of political repression evoked only greater indignation from society (Kvit, 2014: 29).

Still, the protests were not yet unequivocally violent. Instead, violent fighting between radical protesters and regime forces were interspersed with mass protests attracting attendances in the hundreds of thousands. Nonetheless, the steadily increasing level of violence on both sides meant that a major, direct confrontation was always a distinct possibility. Protesters were radicalized by the dictatorship laws, but also by the fact that the regime resumed its more cynical forms of repression by making protesters disappear and even snatching injured protesters from their hospital beds. Two protesters were shot to death on January 22, and while nine of the twelve dictatorship laws were repealed in late January, the regime simultaneously planned how to deploy even larger militia groups against the protesters. Furthermore, negotiations between government and opposition failed repeatedly; even when they resulted in agreements between the two sides, it was only a matter of time before the regime would violate their terms (Wilson, 2014b: 82-86). Consequently, the radicalization of the protesters continued and eventually violence became their sole strategy of choice.

The fourth phase of the uprising, which only lasted a few days, began on February 18. At this point the protesters had not yet abandoned nonviolent means of struggle. On the contrary, that day witnessed a 20,000-strong march on parliament that had been named the "peace offensive." Ironically, this would prove to be the last major peaceful event of the uprising. By ten o'clock in the morning violence broke out, and soon thereafter the

pro-regime militia was engaging protesters in several of the streets leading to Independence Square. Around twenty people died in the initial fighting. In the evening the regime began its offensive operations, which resulted in the protest forces losing significant ground on the square. February 19 provided the crisis with an interlude as both sides weighed their options and Western leaders made phone calls to the regime in an effort to minimize the violence. It would prove to little avail (Wilson, 2014b: 86-88).

The opposition forces surprised the militias in the early morning of February 20, a Thursday. Already at 7:30am they began to push the regime's thugs back. In response, the government resorted to utilizing the snipers who were to become one of the most lasting impressions of the uprising. The first sniper shots were fired at 9am, but it has been reported that the snipers had been in place for weeks. Over the next few hours Kyiv turned into a war zone as the opposition forced the snipers to retreat, in the process capturing dozens of militia fighters. According to some estimates, 70 people died on February 20 alone, with another 166 people unaccounted for. The Health Ministry reported that 622 people had been injured, with 405 of them seeking care at hospitals (Charap and Darden, 2014: 8-9; Cybriwsky, 2014: 280-281; Wilson, 2014b: 88-90).

The bloody events of the previous day caused matters to move in a new direction on February 21. European leaders now rushed to Ukraine to help broker a deal between the government and the opposition, and in the end such a deal was agreed to: Ukraine would return to its 2004 "Orange" constitution, which would in turn result in a national unity government. The deal also mandated that a new constitution be written in September and early presidential elections held in December, with Yanukovych remaining in the post until then. Furthermore, new election laws were to be introduced, and those arrested after February 17 would receive amnesty. Finally, a team composed of representatives from the government, the opposition, and the Council of Europe would investigate the violence of the previous months. Parliament approved the deal unanimously, and although the deal does not appear to have been a bad one from Yanukovych's point of view, the president ultimately opted to flee the country. Once he had escaped into exile, parliament officially removed him from power the following day (Wilson, 2014b: 90-93).

### **The role of the military**

Reminiscent of events in other recent popular uprising throughout the world – in Tunisia and Egypt in particular (Bellin, 2012; Gause, 2011) – the armed forces appear to have been split over how to deal with the Euromaidan

protests. As described above, police and more “unofficial” internal security organizations were deployed against the protesters, but the army was not. It thus became the task of internal security forces to execute the waves of repression unleashed by the government (Ryabchuk, 2014: 128). Still, as in most uprisings of this kind, the risk of military involvement cannot be underestimated. In many non-democratic countries the armed forces, especially its upper ranks, hold considerable stakes that largely depend on the survival of the political leadership (Nepstad, 2011; Ritter, 2015).

The most concerted attempt to quell the protests occurred in the final days of the uprising. However, this effort was carried out by the SBU (Ukrainian Security Service), in what was named “Operation Boomerang,” and through the Interior Ministry’s parallel “Operation Surge.” The armed forces were not called upon to participate in these operations. Quite possibly the regime was concerned with how such overt repression would be received by Ukrainians who had already on several occasions mobilized in response to naked brutality of that kind. Still, it appears Yanukovich at least considered calling upon the military, and may even have done so since “there are reports that the army twice refused to be dragged” into the conflict (Wilson, 2014b: 87).

As in any case of mobilization against the state, the army’s refusal to intervene is critical (Bellin, 2012; Gause, 2011; Nepstad, 2011). According to Wilson (2014b: 91), plans on how the military was to be used in the conflict were later released.

At least one helicopter would be deployed, as well as armored personnel carriers, supporting thousands of army soldiers to back up 22,000 law enforcement personnel comprised mainly of riot police and the national guard. [...] It was planned to involve up to 10,000 fighters and internal forces and about 12,000 police officers, including 2,000 Berkut. The operation would have used as a pretext an alleged plot by Right Sector to set off bombs at government buildings.

Fortunately, these plans were never executed, but any comprehensive explanation of the Euromaidan’s (or any other anti-government movement’s) success (or failure) should consider the decisions made by military leaders. Why did the military not allow itself to get dragged into the conflict? As in the case of the Tunisian revolution, it is quite possible that the regime’s decision to prioritize funding for internal security organizations at the expense of the military may account for its refusal to protect a regime that had not sufficiently committed itself to the armed forces.

### 8.3 Klepto-liberalism and Euromaidan

In line with the overall objectives of this volume, this section highlights some of the consequences of the neoliberal context in which the Euromaidan protests took place. In doing so, I first consider the domestic results of Ukraine's peculiar form of neoliberal economics. After that, attention is turned to the international neoliberal context in which the movement played out. The focus here is on how economic conditions created a set of discontents and grievances that helped fuel the protests.

#### Domestic economics and politics

The political opportunity that triggered the Euromaidan – Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU – differs substantially from the structural conditions that eventually led to the president's flight. Ukrainians had plenty of reasons to be discontent with their political leaders, and as noted previously they had voiced that discontent repeatedly since independence. In 2012, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found that the issues of greatest concerns to Ukraine's citizens were food prices (58%), communal housing fees (54%), unemployment (34%), wages and pensions (32%), corruption (27%), and crime (20%). Issues concerning cooperation with the EU only registered with 3 percent of the respondents (Ryabchuk, 2014: 130). Yet, in 2013-2014 the issue of corruption – broadly conceived here to include issues related to the rule of law and democratic shortcomings – would rise to the surface. This focus was a result of Ukraine's patrimonial political structure and klepto-liberal economic policies, both of which were taken to new heights during Yanukovych's presidency.

Anders Åslund has suggested that “a key to understanding any society is its informal institutions, which influence both its economy and its politics. In Ukraine, the most important such institution is endemic corruption” (2014: 64). According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Ukraine lands in a far from flattering 144<sup>th</sup> place out of 177 countries. Similarly, the Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders had Ukraine in 126<sup>th</sup> place in 2013. It is worth noting that in 2009, the same index placed Ukraine in a significantly less horrific 89<sup>th</sup> place (Åslund, 2014: 64; Leshchenko, 2014: 53). Yanukovych became president in 2010.

Like its Russian counterparts, Ukrainian politics and economics are dominated by a group of oligarchs – wealthy businessmen who control virtually all of the most lucrative sectors of the Ukrainian economy, including the energy, metallurgy, mining, and chemical industries (Åslund, 2014: 64). Their access to economic power depends directly on their access to



political power, and such access operates through a few different channels. First, and perhaps most importantly, the role of the Ukrainian president has historically been, with a brief exception during the 2004-2010 period, to manage this division of the Ukrainian economy among oligarchs – in much the same manner that heads of organized crime families manage their lieutenants' relationships to one another. In other words, the president had tremendous informal power when it came to deciding who got to put their hands in what parts of the country's economic pie. This patrimonial system was taken to new heights during Yanukovich's presidency as Ukrainians began to speak of "the family," i.e., Yanukovich, his immediate relatives, and the oligarchs closest to him (Åslund, 2014: 65; Kudelia, 2014: 20-21).

Although the outcome of the Orange Revolution, due to political infighting, had fallen short of the high expectations characterizing its aftermath, Ukraine had at least not moved in a more authoritarian direction after the 2004 events (Leshchenko, 2014: 52). After Yanukovich was elected president in February 2010, he immediately set about turning the clock back on the modest advances the country had accomplished in terms of democracy and rule of law. The reestablishment of oligarchic domination – with the added twist of a more powerful presidency – commenced on October 1, 2010, when

[A] compliant Constitutional Court overturned the constitutional changes brought by the Orange Revolution and restored the superpresidentialist model. [...] With this achieved, Yanukovich immediately received wide unilateral powers to hire and fire executive branch officials, while a set of subsequently adopted by-laws required the president's consent for any of the government's initiatives. Significantly, his personnel powers meant that he could put his own people into all the top law-enforcement posts, with parliament having no say in the matter. He was now the country's preeminent political actor not only informally, but formally as well (Kudelia, 2014: 21).

Thanks to his new, expanded powers, Yanukovich was now able to cash in economically. Satter (2014) and Åslund (2014) have both documented the gregarious abuses of power that helped Yanukovich and his family become wealthy beyond comprehension. After Yanukovich's ousting, acting prime minister Arseniy Yatsensyuk accused the ex-president of stealing a staggering \$37 billion from the state's coffers during his four years in power. Although this bounty had to be divided among numerous individuals, it is believed that the Yanukovich family alone embezzled \$12 billion (Åslund, 2014: 65). Åslund concludes that "the economic effects of this larceny have



been massive. According to the World Bank, Ukraine is one of five former Soviet republics that now produce less output per capita than it did in 1989. [...] For the last two years, Ukraine has had no economic growth" (2014: 66).

The economic consequences of Ukraine's oligarchic arrangement were severe, but perhaps of even greater consequence, at least as far as the Euromaidan is concerned, is the fact that "the conditions necessary for this rapid concentration of wealth by those who exercised political power meant that there could be no reliable legal mechanisms to protect individual rights" (Satter, 2014: 7). It was precisely the violation of individual rights, specifically the right to peaceful assembly, that turned Euromaidan from a minor protest movement into a globally transformative event. In hindsight, the consequences of Ukraine's vast culture of corruption appear to be the central structural condition of the Ukrainian uprising.

Ukraine's national economy suffered tremendously due to the country's oligarchic system, but "corruption is not only the main business in Ukraine; it is also at the heart of Ukrainian politics" (Åslund, 2014: 67). As a result, few political leaders – including oppositional ones – enjoyed the trust of Ukrainians voters. Ever since Viktor Yuchshenko had failed to live up to the high hopes the electorate had placed on his shoulders during and after the Orange Revolution, it seems that Ukrainians had given up on politicians (Kudelia, 2014: 30). And they had good reason to be cynical. Despite being a poor country, politics is highly profitable in Ukraine. Many of the 450 members of the Ukrainian parliament, the Rada, are more or less for sale, meaning that election campaigns in Ukraine are, relatively speaking, "among the world's costliest" (Åslund, 2014: 67). As Åslund explains,

[A] safe seat in parliament could fetch up to \$5 million. Businessmen were known to buy seats and then trade them to the winning party at a profit. The ruling party or coalition could offer high bidders "profitable jobs" [...]. These included posts chairing state committees and running state enterprises, to mention some of the more valuable ones (2014: 67).

This way of running politics was well entrenched in Ukraine, but Yanukovych took the scheme to a new, less covert level. Furthermore, the new president's inclination to take an increasingly large chunk of the oligarchs' collective booty meant that some of them began to worry that the stability of the system was being weakened by Yanukovych's greed.

By letting his "family businessmen" take over the assets of loyal oligarchs, Yanukovych had already shown that he could turn on his wealthy allies

[with the consequence that] some of these responded by quietly funding the protests as a form of self-defense (the main demonstration, in Kyiv, cost about \$70,000 a day). As another way to keep the administration off balance, most oligarch-owned television networks gave the protests ample and largely favorable coverage. By turning to familism, Yanukovych had swollen the ranks of his foes (Kudelia, 2014: 29).

In short, corruption was the accepted way of doing both business and politics in Ukraine, but Yanukovych's greed caused him to experiment with what was at this point a rooted and, from its profiteers' point of view, well-functioning system. As a result, elite cleavages emerged, with some oligarchs feeling that unlike his predecessors, Yanukovych could not be trusted to be content with what was "his." Consequently, the elite rifts that many theorists place at the center of explanations for revolutionary social change had been established (Tilly, 1978; Skocpol, 1979; Goldstone, 1991).

Still, it is important to remember that the Ukrainian movement was not an elite-led movement. On the contrary, elites – whether political or economic – were distrusted by the protesters. Symptomatic of this is the fact that when Yulia Tymoshenko was released from prison at the height of the protests, she received a lukewarm reception by the masses in Independence Square. In many ways, the 2013-2014 movement was much more revolutionary than the Orange Revolution of 2004. Unlike the latter, the most recent installment of Ukrainian politics from below did not rely on the leadership of traditional elites. This radicalization of the regular citizen can likely be traced back to persistent corruption in both the economic and the political spheres.

### **International neoliberalism**

As noted above, the immediate political opportunity setting the stage for the Euromaidan protests was President Yanukovych's decision to withdraw from the signing of an Association Agreement with the European Union on November 21, 2013. The agreement, which had been negotiated and developed since 2008, would have offered Ukraine many neoliberal benefits, including a "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement" (DCFTA) with Europe. However, the EU had been slow in its moves to increase its cooperation with Ukraine due to the country's political shortcomings, most importantly its rampant corruption and the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (Wilson, 2014b: 63). Ironically, it was Yanukovych's election victory in 2010 and the "promise of executive stability" that rejuvenated the EU-Ukraine dialog (Pridham, 2014: 55).

Had it not been for the Tymoshenko issue, the Association Agreement could have been signed in 2011, but as the EU's policies stipulate certain political criteria for partner countries, the EU instead put pressure on Ukraine to release Tymoshenko from prison. More concretely, albeit vaguely, the EU demanded that Ukraine undertake "electoral, judiciary, and constitutional reforms" before an agreement could be signed (Wilson, 2014b: 63). While this strategy was intended to lead to Ukrainian progress, it did in fact have the opposite effect. By challenging the very foundation of Yanukovych's style of government – i.e., near-absolute executive control of the judiciary – the EU made itself part of the problem rather than the solution. Yanukovych now had to choose between Europe and power, and he was never likely to opt for the former unless he was paid for it. Consequently, the negotiations between the EU and Ukraine took on absurd features. Rather than the EU dictating the terms of the partnership, Ukraine's negotiators began to ramp up their demands on the Union, arguing that the economic consequences for the country – including the loss of trade with Russia – meant that the EU would have to be expected to compensate Ukraine (Wilson, 2014b: 65).

In addition, Russia did what it could to interfere with Ukraine's European journey. Keen to avoid seeing the EU's influence over Ukraine increase, Russia used both stick and carrot tactics to make sure that Yanukovych did not sign the Association Agreement. Among the stick tactics were economic sanctions against Ukraine, including the closing of the physical border between the countries – an action intended to target oligarchs who favored closer relations with the EU, including post-Euromaidan president Petro Poroshenko. Wilson (2014b: 64) estimates that Russia's sanctions against Ukraine cost the latter \$500 million in the second half of 2013 alone.

But Russian economic sanctions mainly served to remind Yanukovych of how an Association Agreement with the EU would differ from how business was currently being done in Ukraine (and with Russia). Russia therefore also provided big carrots, as

It understood the Ukrainian leaders' greed and lack of "European values" perfectly well. The most notable part of the supposed Russian strategy document for dealing with Ukraine, leaked in August, was the stated desire to "influence the President's family business [...] with the aim of creating and enhancing the dependence of this business on Russian structures" (Wilson, 2014b: 64).

Russian pressures were in the end effective, as Yanukovych decided to forego the Association Agreement with the EU. The price he paid was a

relatively small wave of protest in Kyiv headed by local Europhiles. For a president who had faced “real” adversity in his political life, this was likely a challenge he did not think very much of.

Neoliberal economics thus had a twofold influence on Ukrainian politics. Domestically, a perverted free-market system represented by the rule of oligarchs led to the pillaging of the country’s natural resources and, by extension, to poverty and hardship for the vast majority of Ukrainians. In addition, this economic injustice was exacerbated by the fact that corruption dominated politics as well. On the international level, the promise – and its betrayal – of closer relations with the EU and its markets encouraged Kyiv’s middle class to take to the streets in protest. In short, the corruption accompanying Ukrainian neoliberalism helped create a setting in which discontent with Ukrainian politics could flourish and combined with the abandoned promise of “authentic” neoliberalism to incentivize the initial protests in Kyiv. While other grievances eventually became more salient to protesters, it would be a mistake to overlook the structural context created by corruption and neoliberalism alike.

#### **8.4 International political opportunities in authoritarian Ukraine**

To understand the emergence of the Euromaidan protests – and the regime’s responses to them – it is not sufficient to focus solely on the domestic consequences of corruption and neoliberalism in terms of grievances. In addition, it is necessary to examine the wider international context in which contentious politics occurs (Lawson, 2015; 2016). To that end, this section explores how Ukraine’s relationships with both the European Union and Russia shaped both the protest movement and the government’s reactions. This section concludes with a discussion on the use of violence on both sides of the conflict during the protests.

##### **Ukraine and Russia**

While the EU, and the West at large, remained reluctant to get involved in the conflict, the same cannot be said of Russia. It may be compelling to assume that the country’s reactions to the uprising and, more acutely, to its aftermath were based on geopolitical and economic concerns. Indeed, the argument has been made that Russia did not wish to see a country it considered to belong to its sphere of influence move closer to the West. Supposedly, such a move would have had both economic and geopolitical

consequences for Russia: Ukraine would increasingly trade with the West rather than with Russia and a future EU membership might result in Ukrainian NATO membership, making the country a potential base for Western armed forces (Charap and Darden, 2014: 9-13; Pridham, 2014: 57).

In addition to geopolitical and economic motivations, Putin himself has argued that Russian responses to the Ukrainian crisis had their roots in the country's duty to protect the Russian-speaking (and sometimes Russia-leaning) minority in Ukraine. Commentators have speculated that such motivations stem from Putin's plans to build a Greater Russia, or at the very least that such actions would benefit his plans for a Eurasian Union. While such long-term strategies are present on the Russian agenda, others have argued that this explanation, like those based on economic and geopolitical grounds, falls short of accurately capturing Putin's motivations. Rather than economic and geopolitical/regional goals and aspirations, internal Russian considerations may in fact best explain why Putin acted the way he did in the face of Ukrainian protests (Arel, 2014).

The real threat the Euromaidan uprising represented for Russia was thus a systemic one. Ukraine's rule of oligarchs as a political and economic system – what has sometimes been referred to as kleptocracy – is almost identical to what Russians refer to as the *sistema*, the unofficial arrangement that allows Putin and his “friends” to pillage Russia's economic resources. The removal of that system in Ukraine, scholars have argued, would set a dangerous precedent as far as Putin is concerned. If Russians, who are well aware of the politico-economic system in which they live, were to be provided with evidence that oligarchy could be removed and replaced with more transparent, democratic rule, then what would prevent them from seeking the same type of change at home? Consequently, once Putin realized that he could not maintain power for Yanukovych (an individual for whom he incidentally had no personal affection), the task became to destabilize Ukraine in order to show reform-minded Russians that the *sistema's* demise would inevitably result in chaos (Satter, 2014: 8; Shevtsova, 2014: 76-77; Wilson, 2014a: 67).

Seen from this perspective, Russia's actions during and after Euromaidan were designed to sufficiently weaken Ukraine and show that a popular movement, regardless of its intentions and origins, would be detrimental to any country even remotely similar to it. By annexing Crimea and destabilizing eastern Ukraine, Putin sought to create enough chaos to discourage those Russians eager to replicate the Ukrainian strategy for removing a political leader. In short, Russia's actions in Ukraine should not be seen exclusively, or even primarily, as a foreign policy response, but rather as a

somewhat desperate attempt to protect a corrupt political system at home – emphasizing the notion that foreign and domestic politics can rarely be separated in today's interconnected world.

### **Ukraine and the West**

If Russia was quick to react to events in Ukraine, the same can hardly be said for the West (Pridham, 2014: 55). Quite on the contrary, “until the protests turned into mass killing, the EU and the United States were in fact criticized in the West for how little concrete help they provided to Maidan, the EU resisting, for instance, the imposition of personal sanctions until the very end, when the police began shooting at demonstrators” (Arel, 2014). However, the West's distancing itself from the Ukrainian elite was not a novel feature of 2013. Although the West had sought to aid Ukraine's transition to democracy after the Orange Revolution, the resulting infighting within the new national leadership eventually caused Western governments to back off. This development was accelerated when Yanukovych won the presidency in 2010, causing Western governments to reassess their aid packages to Kyiv. Most obviously, the EU transformed even the language it used in its interaction with the Ukrainian leadership, as

The assistance agenda for 2011-2013 did not mention democracy as a key reform priority and focussed on constitutional reform, the rule of law, combating corruption, and improving the business and investment climate. Overall, there was a shift toward good governance in more threat-oriented areas such as justice, freedom and security, “integrated border management,” and disarmament (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015: 4).

But even if the EU refrained from making democracy promotion an explicit dimension of its assistance narrative, it did continue to fund civil society organizations and media outlets in Ukraine while serving as “a powerful role-model, and a reference point for the pro-democratic forces” (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015: 5). Eventually, however, Ukraine's deteriorating political situation forced the EU to use democratic conditionality in its negotiations over the forthcoming Association Agreement. European leaders demanded that the political harassment of opposition leaders, including Yulia Tymoshenko, come to an end, and that elections, unlike the 2012 parliamentary vote, be conducted in adherence to international standards (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015: 7).

During the actual protests, both the European Union and the United States were largely passive, although Washington employed a more powerful

rhetoric against both the Ukrainian leadership and its Russian allies than Europe did. However, the US role in the uprising remained small as its political leverage in Ukraine was all but nonexistent. Meanwhile, “the EU limited itself to welcoming the expression of support for Ukraine’s European orientation and calling for a peaceful resolution to the crisis, punctuated by periodic visits by officials from EU institutions and member states” (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015: 8). As noted above, it was not until the protests turned into mass killings that European leaders helped negotiate an agreement between Yanukovych and the opposition, an agreement that had the unintended consequence of causing Yanukovych to flee the country (Wilson, 2014b: 90-93).

The one positive implication of Western reluctance to act during the majority of the Euromaidan process is that unlike after the Orange Revolution (Wilson, 2005: 60), few commentators have suggested that the West had much, if anything, to do with the movement’s emergence and outcomes, as there is “no evidence that the EU or the US were involved in any way in instigating the mass protests or providing any material or organizational support” (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015: 8). Following Yanukovych’s flight, however, the EU has sought to aid the new Ukrainian leadership in its attempts to stabilize the country. The EU embedded officials in several ministries to help the country deal with legal and energy issues and worked closely with Kyiv to combat fraud and embezzlement. As it had been prior to the Euromaidan movement, the EU’s focus has continued to be on the rule of law and corruption, as these factors are identified as the most acute obstacles to a meaningful Ukrainian transition to real democracy (Pridham, 2014: 56). The Association Agreement, which had been stalled first by the EU and then by Yanukovych, was finally signed in March 2014, a mere month after the former president’s fall from power.

### **Explaining the violent nature of Euromaidan**

One of the most striking features of Euromaidan was the amount of violence that accompanied the uprising. As Onuch (2014a: 21) notes, “although for the most part there seems to be much continuity between 2004 and 2013/14, the use of extreme violence both by the regime and by the protesters is a substantial departure from a long history of the nonviolent repertoires by dissidents, activists and opposition parties.” Importantly, and in contrast to the Arab Spring uprising in Tunisia and Egypt (Ritter, 2015), not to mention Ukraine’s own 2004 Orange Revolution, the fact that the use of violence was not one-sided during Euromaidan is particularly puzzling. While the opposition’s use of violence led to an outcome similar to that achieved in



the other cases just mentioned, its long-term effects perhaps most directly facilitate the notion of Euromaidan as a failure. Opposition violence provided Russia with the justification it needed to annex Crimea and engage in a substantial effort to “protect” Ukraine’s Russophone population in the country’s eastern parts. In order to understand the crisis and the less than optimal outcome of the Euromaidan protests, it is therefore essential to understand why the movement took its violent turn (Diuk, 2014: 87).

Among the most frequently cited explanations, and one embraced by both Russia and ousted president Yanukovich, is the idea that opposition violence was driven by violence-affirming right-wing/fascist political groups, including the Svoboda (Freedom) Party as well as two social organizations by the names of Right Sector (Pravy Sektor) and Common Cause (Spilna Sprava). Evidence suggests that members of these organizations did indeed feature at the front lines during the confrontations with the regime’s militias, although the label of “fascist” might be slightly exaggerated. (This is not to say that these groups do not advocate nationalist principles in line with Western Europe’s right-wing parties, such as France’s Front National, the UK’s UKIP, and Sweden’s Sverigedemokraterna.) Furthermore, seeking an explanation for the use of violence in these groups’ central ideologies misses the central part of the story: opposition violence emerged as a direct consequence of the regime’s decision to apply brute force against protesters in late November, mid-January and, most importantly, in late February. Had the government responded as it did in 2004, it seems highly unlikely that Ukrainian protesters would have diverted from their historically nonviolent path (Onuch, 2014a: 15, 21; Popova, 2014: 69; Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014: 59).

The question therefore becomes, “why did the regime use such brutality against the protesters?” The answer may well be “because it could.” Having abandoned the idea of signing an AA with the EU, and with Russia willing to deepen its engagement with Yanukovich’s regime regardless of its treatment of protesters, the president faced few constraints in using repression against peaceful protesters. When right-wing groups responded in kind, the sort of violent cycle beneficial to autocrats in situations like this manifested itself, much to Yanukovich’s and Putin’s delight one may assume. Indeed, the fact that the violence was not one-sided seems to be the most reasonable explanation as to why the deal between the government and the opposition did not include the president’s removal from power. That Yanukovich left power in haste on February 21 was due to a “personal choice” (Wilson, 2014b: 92-93) rather than to pressure from the movement or any external actor – and more than anything else, proof that “like many bullies, he was also a coward” (Wilson, 2014b: 93). So while the immediate outcomes of the



2004 and 2013–2014 Maidans seem identical – on both occasions Yanukovych was the loser – the medium-term consequences differed markedly as the legitimacy of the 2014 “winners” was more easily contested by forces keen to stop democratic progress in its tracks. As Lucan Way concludes,

[D]emocracy is most directly undermined by the numerous associations promoting violence that emerged during the protests. Such associations include the Right Sector’s paramilitary formations and the “heavenly hundreds” that arose to fight the police and the pro-Russian *titushki* or vigilante groups created to harass protesters. Also problematic are the “ultras,” groups of hardcore soccer fans that began providing protection for anti-Yanukovych protesters in January. By promoting vigilante violence outside state control, such groups directly threaten democratic development. They facilitate state breakdown and bloody patterns of aggression and retribution, making civil war much more likely (Way, 2014: 42).

In short, then, international factors provided the Euromaidan protesters with the political opportunity they needed to get their movement off the ground, but such factors also help explain why and how the outcome of the protests was not only the defeat of Yanukovych, but also a low-intensity civil war.

## 8.5 The emergence of new collective identities during Euromaidan

The role of civil society and collective identities in the Euromaidan movement is complex. In one sense, civil society drove the movement, as it was regular citizens that protested in Independence Square. In another, stricter sense, it played a relatively minor part, as existing civil society organizations and institutions were not the main actors of the movement. In fact, Euromaidan’s most distinctive feature may well be its spontaneous character. Unlike earlier movements for change in Ukraine (and elsewhere), no organization dominated the discourse or took responsibility for the organizations of the protests. To some extent this might help explain the power of the movement, as it became virtually impossible for the government to respond in a targeted fashion to the protests. However, the downside of the movement’s spontaneous, self-organizing dimension was that no unifying figure or group emerged with the capacity to consolidate its

gains (Way, 2014: 35-36). This section begins to explore the role of collective identities in the Euromaidan protests.

Cybriwsky (2014) has explored the deeper meaning of the “maidan.” While the word literally means “square,” following the original Maidan protests during the 2004 Orange Revolution, “maidan” has become synonymous with protest, so that “a call to protest has come to be a call to maidan, as in ‘come to the square!’” (Cybriwsky, 2014: 270). As in 2004 – and several times since – Independence Square became the physical and emotional center of the movement; but unlike in 2004, the 2013-2014 protests have been described as “self-organizing,” leaderless, and spontaneous (Diuk, 2014: 86-87; Kachkan, 2014: 4; Way, 2014: 37). In the words of one commentator, “EuroMaidan was a movement of people and civil society, despite the involvement of opposition politicians” (Kachkan, 2014: 4). Kachkan calls the square “a free state,” while Way (2014: 37) refers to it as a “small ‘independent republic.’” Nonetheless, the characterization of the Maidan as a civil society-dominated space needs to be unpacked, because while the Maidan was indeed made up of *civil society*, it was not dependent on existing *civil society organizations*. In other words, the protests were led not by the pre-existing civil society, but rather by a new, emerging civil society.

To a certain extent, the self-organizing character of the movement simply became a necessity. As the size of the protests grew, buildings adjacent to the square “were taken over to provide kitchens, a press center, meeting rooms, sleeping space, and a medical-aid station” (Diuk, 2014: 86). In terms of the actual protest activities, the 2013-2014 movement differed from the Orange Revolution in the sense that political parties and youth organizations, like Pora, were not in charge of leading the protests (Onuch, 2014a: 7). Instead, various protest-oriented groups emerged more or less spontaneously out of the protests themselves. Many of them used the “maidan” as their central theme,

[I]ncluding the Maidan Self-Defence, the Auto-Maidan (from “automotive,” mobile units of car owners that became the Maidan’s cavalry), “Ne Zlyi Maidan” (the phrase has a double meaning in Ukraine: “Don’t anger Maidan” and “Don’t betray Maidan”), Euromaidan SOS, Maidan Open University, the Hospital Guard, the “Maidan” All-Ukrainian Association, the Civic Council of Maidan, the Civic Committee for Investigating Human Rights Abuses in Ukraine, and the “MaidanPost” Media Guard (Kvit, 2014: 29-30).

This eclectic nature of the Euromaidan protests has been noted by several researchers. Kvit (2014: 31) has asserted that the movement was highly diverse. He points out that language disparities, which had in the past been

used by those in power to divide and rule, became a virtual non-factor during the 2013-2014 movement and that the protesters included individuals from all walks of life, including students, workers, farmers, white collar professionals, teachers, physicians, artists, and office employees from every corner of the country. This observation is backed by more systematic research that suggests that although students were important in the first few days of the protests, they soon became a group like any other in the square. Empirical data collected during the protests shows that two-thirds of those in the square were above the age of 30, and that the average protester was 36 years old. Men made up approximately 60 percent of the demonstrators, and although women therefore participated in large numbers, they were largely absent from the more dangerous aspects of the protesting, such as late night demonstrations (Onuch, 2014b: 47; Phillips, 2014: 414). Furthermore, once things turned violent on November 30, the predominant position of males increased, especially in the “zones where violence clustered” (Onuch, 2014b: 47. For more detail about the gendered dimension of the protests, see Onuch and Martsenyuk [2014] and Phillips [2014]).

One of the most striking research findings from a survey carried out by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on December 7 and 8, 2013, is that 92 percent of the respondents claimed not to belong to any political party or non-governmental organization. Supporting this finding, only 5 percent claimed to have joined the protests as a response to calls to do so issued by opposition leaders (Ryabchuk, 2014: 131). Again, these findings suggest a certain paradoxical feature of the Euromaidan movement, namely that for a country in which civil society is evidently strong (Ukrainians mobilized in the streets to help execute political change four times between 1990 and 2014), civil society *organizations* did not play a crucial role. As Lucan Way perceptively notes, “large and even successful protests do not necessarily reflect the presence of powerful organizations in society. Protests can emerge spontaneously or be generated by organizations outside civil society” (2014: 36). As noted earlier in this paper, the fact that the protests took on a life of their own, causing the creation of new organizations in and around the square, makes Euromaidan a good example of eventful protest (della Porta, 2008).

The fact that the protests were largely spontaneous and gave birth to new groups and organizations does not of course mean that pre-existing groups and parties were completely absent or non-influential. No pro-democratization group like the 2004 torch-bearer Pora emerged, but the established opposition parties attempted to exploit the sudden outpouring of demonstrators to further their own goals. However, the explosive

and unexpected nature of Euromaidan made it very different from the Orange Revolution – where opposition politicians were among the driving forces – and it meant that the opposition found itself engaged in a game of catch-up, never managing to take control of the movement. The leaders of the main opposition parties – Tymoshenko (Fatherland), Vitaly Klitschko (Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform, UDAR), and Oleh Tyahnybok (Svoboda) – had already prior to the protests formed an alliance in preparation of the 2015 presidential election, but even so they found themselves incapable of making the most of the political opportunity handed to them. The best they could do was to erect a stage in Independence Square from which they would give speeches, but beyond that “they had no plan” (Diuk, 2014: 86). Consequently, Wilson has argued that rifts emerged between the established opposition and the protesters, as “one notable feature of the Ukrainian crisis has been the mutual distrust between the new forces on the Maidan and these ‘official’ opposition parties, widely regarded by Maidan protestors as also part of the system” due to the fact that “all three official opposition parties have taken money from Ukraine’s notorious ‘oligarchs’” (2014a: 69).

Rather troubling to both Western and Russian observers was the fact that of the established opposition parties, the one furthest to the right received the most attention during Euromaidan. Svoboda (Freedom) had been a relatively small party prior to the uprising, and largely unknown to European commentators, but when the protests turned violent it was the political party best equipped to exploit the situation. Svoboda has been described as a fairly typical European right-wing nationalist party that “mixes classic right-wing themes (anti-Semitism, national monolingualism, militarism, ethnocentrism, cryptoracism, homophobia, opposition to abortion) with economically left-wing appeals, calling for a sizeable state role in the economy (including partial nationalization of some sectors), reinforced social-support programs, and limits on land sales” (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014: 59).

Even more troubling for Ukraine’s future is the fact that Svoboda did not rise alone. Other right-wing groups also took part in the armed defense of the Maidan, including Pravy Sektor (Right Sector). Although Right Sector was a very small group – some scholars estimate that its membership totaled only around 300 individuals as of January 2014 – it “formed the core of violent resistance on behalf of the EuroMaidan” when the regime resorted to violent repression (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014: 59). Its success in this endeavor has since caused it to grow, and the group is now believed to have several thousand members as its name has developed into something

of a brand used by a variety of local groups keen to take advantage of Right Sector's new-won popularity. It should be noted that several other right-wing groups also played their part in the violent resistance to the state between November 2013 and February 2014. These groups, unsurprisingly, played on historic narratives of Ukrainian resistance to outside forces and fully embraced a nationalist narrative to frame their struggle. Groups like Patriots of Ukraine, Karpatska Sich, Trident, The Ukrainian National Assembly, the Social-National Assembly, and White Hammer formed an alliance whose "purpose in banding together was to fight Yanukovych's regime by force" (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014: 59. See also Onuch [2014a: 22]). Although none of these groups has yet emerged as a legitimate political force in Ukraine, their presence in Euromaidan helped Moscow justify its framing of the Ukrainian movement as a fascist/nationalist movement while simultaneously making many European countries less willing to support the protesters in February 2014.

In sum, the Euromaidan movement was unconventional in the sense that it was neither led by pre-existing civil society groups nor clearly dominated by any particular group of individuals. Students were, as noted above, instrumental in the early days of the protests, but in stark contrast to 2004 their importance diminished fairly quickly (Diuk, 2014: 85; Kvit, 2014: 29; Onuch, 2014b: 46). Similarly, workers, new social movements, ethnic movements, and religious movements played no independent role in the uprising. However, the new groups that emerged in the course of Euromaidan were often "continuations or revivals of SMOs active in 2004 and 2010 [but] unlike in 2004, when in order to be an activist you had to join a network, this time activists created new networks around their aims, strategies and tactics for revolution" (Onuch, 2014a: 13). This depiction of an emerging movement is also supported by the activists' efforts to bridge the ethnic and regional divides that had existed in previous protest movements, not least during the Orange Revolution (Onuch, 2014a: 10), as "ethnic Ukrainians waving their flags were joined by Crimean Tatars, Jews, Poles, Belarusians, Georgians, Armenians, and others [while] on the Maidan stage, clergy representing different [*sic*] Christians, Muslims, and Jews prayed together" (Kvit, 2014: 31).

The Euromaidan protests can thus be said to display two opposing sets of collective identities. The first one, conservative and right-wing in nature, was pre-existing and came to the fore largely as a result of the Ukrainian leadership's decision to respond to peaceful protests with violence. The other major identity formation on display during the protests was characterized by dynamism and spontaneity. This emergent collective identity is reminiscent of the kinds of liberal, pro-democratic demands for political

and social change that characterized protest movements in the Middle East in 2011 (Ritter, 2015). While this section has only begun to scratch the surface of how such identities come about through – and due to – eventful protest, future research should seek to delve deeper into how protesters reshape their collective identities during protests.

## 8.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored Ukraine's 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests, with an eye to understanding how neoliberalism, authoritarian democracy, and collective identities played their respective roles in fomenting and shaping the protests and their outcomes. I have argued that in order to understand factors such as the movement's (and the regime's) turn to violent strategies, it is helpful to put Ukraine's domestic political and economic conditions in their appropriate international context. Domestic factors like neoliberal economics, semi-authoritarian rule, and collective identities are seldom as domestic as we might like to think. Although no firm conclusions should be drawn on the basis of this admittedly explorative chapter, future research should withstand the temptation to find the answers to the events of 2013-2014 in domestic factors. Ukraine's corrupt version of neoliberalism, its authoritarian form of government, and the creation of new protest identities all borrowed from external conceptions of how economics, politics, and protest are organized. Nonetheless, the factors focused on in this volume are highly useful for our understanding of mass protest movements in this era of austerity and neoliberal economics.

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## 9 Riding the wave

Some conclusions

*Donatella della Porta*

### 9.1 Movements' cascade

The wave of protest that started in 2011 was especially visible in those countries that had been particularly hard hit by the financial crisis of 2008 – arguably, the losers of neoliberal globalization (della Porta, 2015). As protests cascaded later on, they also started to become strong and visible in countries that had been considered as winners in neoliberal globalization (such as Turkey or Brazil), as well as those that seemed still to be dreaming of growth and development within a neoliberal consensus (as, for example, Bulgaria and Bosnia – with Venezuela as a case of a difficult attempt to develop an alternative social formation within global capitalist evolution).

With the broadening of the range of countries involved in the protest wave, the chances to investigate common trends in the variety of late neoliberalism also increased. The appeal to a broad coalition of groups and interests is one of the common characteristics of the protest. In fact, “Like the Arab Spring, the Gezi Uprising attracted an unprecedented mix of protesters ranging from opposition political parties, nationalists of sorts, radical-left organizations, anarchist groups, the LGBTTQ and feminist networks, environmentalists, shanty-town dwellers resisting eviction, members of non-Muslim/non-Turkish communities, Alevi organizations, worker’s unions, students, youth, football fans, and the middle classes” (Yıldırım, 2014).

In terms of the class effects of neoliberalism, reflected in the social basis of the protests, we noted a general trend of proletarianization of the middle class and pauperization of the working class that produced multi-class mobilization. The myth of the growth of middle class as indicator of progress was challenged by the effects of the precarization of middle class and workers alike, with increasing inequalities within the various forms of neoliberalism that developed in the periphery. These similarities notwithstanding, there was also diversity in the social background of the protests and in their claims. While protests in Turkey and Ukraine involved people with different social backgrounds, in Brazil and in Bulgaria an increasing presence of the middle classes was noted, in a sort of alternance with other



social groups. The middle class remained the only group in the Venezuelan case, while the poor protested in South Africa, but with few connections with workers' mobilizations.

The changing relations between the state and the market had political consequences in terms of a crisis of political responsibility. As once acquired citizens' rights now became commodities, citizens started to oppose their various manifestations. In fact, the protests challenged the myth of a consistent relationship between economic and political liberalism, pointing at authoritarian tendencies among the liberal leaders (Tuğal, 2013). A shared element of the protests was indeed the discontent – anger or outrage – at what was perceived as a violation of acquired entitlements by a small and corrupt oligarchy of businessmen and politicians. While the longstanding assumption had been that capitalism needs democracy, and vice versa, anti-austerity protests have shown that late neoliberalism fuels illiberal tendencies, challenging previous strategies of incorporation and, in doing so, becoming less and less tolerant of dissent. Degrees of illiberalism also varied among our cases, as did the regimes' reactions to the protests – being stronger in Turkey and Ukraine and (much) less so in Brazil, Bosnia, Bulgaria, or Venezuela.

In Turkey – where the Gezi occupation came to epitomize the development of a new spirit – but also in Brazil, Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine, taking to the streets proved not just an instrumental form of political participation, whose effects can be analyzed merely in terms of policy achievements, but also an action that transformed the relations among people. Protests become, i.e., transformative in their capacity to create a new way of conceiving politics and citizens' (ordinary people's) participation in them.

In order to face the social and political challenges of what has been defined as the neoliberal critical juncture, social movements must rely on the eventful capacity of protests. Social movements in times of crisis have often been defined through two, quite different, categories of countermovements or antisystemic movements. In Polanyi's (1957) analysis, countermovements reacted to the disruption of a moral economy that left some space for social protection. More recently, Alain Badiou (2012: 5) located a return of history in what he defined as historical riots – “yet blind, naïve, scattered and lacking of a powerful concept or durable organization.” “With a subjectivity based especially on rebellion, they nevertheless allow for the emergence of the inexistent beings of the world” (2012: 56). Notwithstanding their claim to represent the people, however, they are said to lack the idea as well as the political organization that allows going beyond the event (2012). Differently,

Wallerstein's and Arrighi's antisystemic movements resist greedy capitalism, opposing the logic of the system, as "to be antisystemic is to argue that neither liberty nor equality is possible under the existing system and that both are possible only in a transformed world" (Wallerstein, 1990: 36; Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, 1989: 1).

## 9.2 Shifting class alliances

The 2013 protests have triggered a debate on the class basis of contentious politics in neoliberal times. Our cases point at the relevance of the class basis for recent protests, with a range of capacity to build cross-class coalitions. Data collected on the social background of those who protested do not unequivocally confirm either the thesis of the mobilization of a new precariat, or that of a middle-class movement. In all protests, a broad range of social backgrounds is represented, from students, to precarious workers, manual and non-manual dependent workers, petty bourgeoisie and professionals. Over-proportionally young in terms of generation, the protests also see the participation of other age cohorts whose high educational levels do not correspond to winning positions in the labor market.

This is particularly the case in the Gezi campaign. The social background of the protesters has indeed been described as plural:

The largest single group of protesters was from the manual formal proletariat (36 percent), followed by the non-manual proletariat (20 percent), the informal proletariat (18 percent), the petty bourgeoisie (11 percent), professionals (6 percent), executives (5 percent), and capitalists (4 percent). In other words, more than half of the protesters – approximately 54 percent – belonged to the formal and informal proletariat, the two lowest echelons of the class structure. Adding the non-manual formal proletarians, i.e. white-collar employees and technicians, increases the proletarian participation rate to 74 percent (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014: 111).

More than half of the protesters could therefore be defined as proletarians. It is true, however, that the upper classes were more present in Gezi Park than in the total population. While the middle classes represented about one third of the protesters, they are only about one fifth of the entire population. In addition, while up to 40 percent of professionals took part in the protests, only up to 20 percent of proletarians did (2014: 115). A similar

distribution was noted for wages. Also, “despite the public perception that workers were hostile or at least indifferent to the protests, the surveys show that around two-fifths of all proletarians supported Gezi, while among the upper strata this ratio increases to around three-fifths” (2014: 115). If students and professionals were indeed overrepresented, a majority of those who protested were “predominantly workers, potential workers (students), children of workers, unemployed and even retired workers” (2014: 107).

The social background of protesters in Brazil has been similarly multifarious. According to surveys, protesters were young, the majority of them below 25 years old (and only up to 20 percent of them over 36). They also had high levels of education: no more than 2 percent had only primary-school education, as compared to 54 percent in the overall population, and up to 43 percent had advanced degrees, against 8 percent of the whole population. There was high participation by those with low incomes (around half the demonstrators, up to 88 percent in Rio). So, “a substantial proportion of the protesters came from the lower half of the country’s income distribution – in marked contrast with the image suggested by the data on education levels, which implied that almost all were in the upper half” (Singer, 2013: 85).

In fact, there were two blocs, of similar size: “on the one hand, middle-class young adults, and on the other, people of the same age but drawn from the lower half of the Brazilian social pyramid” (Singer, 2013). These two blocs took on different weights at different moments of the protests, with a shift from a left-wing movement to a rainbow one as the middle class increased their presence in the street, along with more anti-governmental stances (2013). While Brazil seemed to be a success story, the struggle around the right to public transport catalyzed the claims for a right to the city, which the government had left unanswered (Roman, 2013). In fact, as in Turkey, protests in Brazil were said to demonstrate “how stifling the heaven promised by liberalism is” (Tuğal, 2013: 162) – as Lula’s social liberalism had subsidized the acquisition of private cars while public infrastructure for the population was still lacking.

In South Africa, various forms of protest involved different social groups in different social locations: from the workers in the factories to the poor in the neighborhoods. Differently from Brazil and Venezuela, the broad and radical protests over poor public services involved people living in the poorest areas; workers were also involved in large strikes. What was similar to the situation in Brazil and Venezuela, however, was that the poor and the workers rarely converged. Indeed, in social movement studies in South Africa, much stress has been put on the continuous centrality of workers’ struggles and materialistic concerns, with a primary role played

by mobilization calling for economic redistribution. In the 2000s, social movements emerged with explicit links to sister movements fighting against neoliberalism in other countries (Seddon and Zeilig, 2005). Especially in the informal settlements, protests also took the form of a “rebellion of the poor” (Alexander, 2010). In fact, “Since 2004, South Africa has experienced thousands of local protests, many of them popular insurrections, which, taken together, represent a rebellion of the poor. Lack of service delivery has been the main issue, but protesting communities have also demanded the removal of corrupt officials, re-demarcation of political boundaries and employment. In terms of endurance and geographical spread, the movement is unprecedented” (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2013).

In these protests, besides the lack of basic services (among them sanitation, drainage, sewage, water, electricity, and street lighting), there have been claims addressing housing, roads, price of electricity, schools, as well as political corruption and employment. These protests have “strong similarities in forms of contention (burning barricades being common), geographical space (most emerge from townships and informal settlements), organisation (community meetings are typical) and demographics (generally speaking ‘the poor’, particularly those regarded as ‘youth’), indicating that we are dealing with a broad process, rather than merely a set of discrete events” (2013: 4-5). Only rarely, however, have social movement organizations and trade unions allied; instead, unions have been increasingly fragmented and involved in collusion as well as corruption (Ngwane, 2014). Large waves of protest like the public sector strikes in 2007 and 2010 subsided, in fact, due to the lack of connections between the strikers and the activists who mobilized the community protests (Ceruti, 2014).

The Ukrainian Euromaidan has been described as being as multi-class as the Turkish Gezi. While for Maidan the triggering event revolved around the agreement with the EU and main claims were therefore defined in terms of freedom and Western values, ethnographic work on the square highlights a central concern with socio-economic issues that was visible in opinion polls as well as in the claims of previous protests in the country – against changes in tax codes and labor codes, the commodification of education, and the privatization of public spaces (Ryabchuk, 2014; Kvit, 2014). The call for a “revolution of dignity” pitted the people against an oligarchy of business and politicians who had accumulated enormous wealth, leaving the rest of the population in conditions of insecurity (Satter, 2014). The EU was thus considered as a symbol for secure jobs and freedom of travel – in general, better living standards – and there were even claims for nationalization of some enterprises (Ryabchuk, 2014; Leshchenko, 2014).

In Bosnia, while the first wave of protest focused on human rights issues and the rule of law, the second wave in 2014 clearly addressed labor issues, although with a broader alliance between workers and students. Developing in an area well-known for its working-class traditions, protests explicitly aimed at overcoming ethnic definitions and ethnic conflicts, more openly addressing issues of social inequality and unemployment and specifically targeting the privatization program as responsible for the increasing misery of large parts of the population. A cleavage was indeed emphasized between the large majority of the suffering people and the small elite of the rich and powerful.

In Bulgaria, as well, the protests that started on February 4, 2013 and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Borisov saw the mobilization of different groups. Here, however, there was a shift, moving from poor(er) people's concerns with privatization and electricity bills to the "young, beautiful, and successful" on issues of corruption, up to the student protests in October for justice and knowledge (Rone, in this volume). Developing from a strong wave of contestation of the ACTA agreement on counterfeiting trade, the protests definitely overwhelmingly involved young people, especially from the capital Sofia. However, they also offered occasions for an encounter of the poor and the rich, the "ugly" and the "beautiful."

Based on observation of the geography of protests, researchers have defined a similar evolution towards broader participation by the middle classes in Venezuela, with a shift towards the wealthiest areas in Caracas and in the country in general. While the initial claims of the protest are also widespread among the workers and poorer sectors of the population – especially about lack of security, high inflation rates, and scarcity of some goods – the anti-governmental tone of the mobilization kept those groups away, or even led them to mobilize in countermovements. The lack of participation by the popular sectors from the impoverished *barrios* is linked to their support for Chávez and the Bolivarian revolution, which indeed notably improved the life conditions of the poorest groups of the population through better public services but also a network of local associations (Hawkins, 2010).

In sum, while multi-class, the various protest campaigns are not inter-class. Rather, they tend to reflect some of the changes in class structure that have characterized neoliberalism and its crisis: in particular, the proletarianization of the middle classes and the precarization of workers. Regarding the former, much research has pointed at the declining power of the middle classes, with trends of proletarianization of a) independent petite bourgeoisie (transformation of commercial structures brings about the

elimination of independent shopkeepers in favor of multinational corporations); b) free professionals (through processes of privatization of services, creation of oligopolistic firms, de-professionalization through Taylorization of tasks); and c) public employees (through reductions of status and salaries, flexibilization of contracts, and so on). Regarding the latter, precarization affects dependent workers in the industrial sectors (through closing down of traditional Fordist sectors and flexibilization of working conditions) as well as in the tertiary sector, with increases in informal labor, low paid jobs, and precarious working conditions.

In conclusion, rather than a single class, the protests mobilized citizens with a multifarious social background. Boratav has defined the Gezi protests as

[A] *matured class-based rebellion* against this plundering capitalism. It is class oriented hence; it is against the bourgeois and its State apparatus, the resistance is a collective act by individuals not in a unity of predestination with the system but who are in a dis-unity of predestination with the State and bourgeoisie. Also it is a matured class-based action. [...] People resisting today are resisting against the transformation of their collective property, which has been left by the past generations to present society, into bourgeois private property (2013).

In Brazil, Bosnia, or Bulgaria, as well, various social classes, with their concerns and traditions, participated in the protests. Their movements involved a large majority of highly educated youth, reflecting frustration with the lack of prospects for a satisfying future. Although they often expanded beyond the big cities, the protests did in fact present claims that addressed the increasing inequalities in the global cities. In Turkey, as in Brazil, in Bulgaria, and in Bosnia, at stake was the formation of a restricted oligarchy representing a consolidated coalition of business and political power. In Maidan as well, students, artists, workers, farmers, professionals were all represented. Differently, in Venezuela, the lack of capacity of the organizers to involve a cross-class coalition around their claims testifies to the roots of Chavism among the poor, whose conditions had notably improved under the Bolivarian government. Even when dissatisfied by the post-Chávez course of the party, they expressed their dissatisfaction in different types of protests. Similar to a certain extent is the fragmentation of protest arenas in South Africa where, however, the poor have broadly and frequently contested what activists consider as a betrayal by the ANC of its roots.

### 9.3 A global crisis of political responsibility

First of all, in the core but also in the peripheries of the empire, personalist forms of political power develop, in some cases inspired by old traditions within authoritarian regimes. In general, the shift in power from the legislative to the executive institutions as well as the transformations in political parties fuel personalistic forms of power. In Turkey, authoritarian democracy assumed the characteristics of Erdoğan's imitation of the absolute power of the sultanate. As Açıksöz and Korkman (2013) noted, in his uncompromising attitudes during the protests, "Erdoğan embodies a very particular gendered political persona that relies on an innovative (neoliberal) synthesis of Islamist and urban, tough masculinities." Claiming to represent "the interests of the majoritarian popular classes, while pursuing an orthodox neoliberal, pro-EU, pro-NATO line" (Yörük and Yüksel, 2014: 108), the AKP became increasingly authoritarian during its victorious fight against the secular and nationalist Kemalists (but also against the PKK, the unions, or the Alevi religious minority) with the repression of politicians, journalists, academics, but also army officers (2014). The authoritarian turn of the AKP is in fact linked with a self-perception as the "'authentic' representatives of the 'people' whose religious/conservative identities and values have been suppressed by the secular republicanism of the Kemalist elite since the founding of the Republic in 1923" (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014: 121).

In general, a growing intolerance towards opposition is linked to rhetoric of legitimization through electoral majority. In Turkey as elsewhere, contentious politics is considered as a challenge to a national community that is seen as represented only and fully by elected delegates. So, in Turkey, this is related with a specific religious vision of the community – as:

[A]part from voting procedures (elections and referendums), the millet cannot and should not have any further political participation. Their volition is expressed through the ballot box, and that means through a democratic process. The national volition in this way approves or rejects the government's acts and therefore confirms the democratic process. The democracy of the ballot box thus becomes the status of the nation, whose representative and carrier of values is the ruling party, the AKP. Therefore, the party itself is converted into the absolute vehicle of democracy, too (Moudouros, 2014: 184).

The majority is thus deified as "a carrier of an 'ontological justice,' while in the same way the political representative of this majority expresses 'by its



nature' the right and the fair. Thus, any kind of criticism is marginalized not only as hostile and dangerous, but also as 'foreign, materialistic and Western' exactly because it is not recorded on the basis of the common traditional values of the nation – millet" (2014: 184).

In Turkey, Gezi was often defined as a reaction to authoritarian neoliberalism that affected everyday life. So, "The different groups that were camped in the park, from leftists to rightists, from the Islamists to secularists, from the young urbane sophisticates to older 'mothers of the protesters,' all encountered the full wrath of state authority. [...] The majoritarian conservatism of the AKP has reconfigured the memory of the Turkish nationalist project through the projection of a neo-Ottoman pro-Islamic and prodemocracy future, but, primarily, through the lens of a past that was once considered glorious" (Abbas and Yigit, 2014: 3). Authoritarianism also ignited protests in a more short-term dynamic. After the brutal repression,

Minorities and majorities, men and women, mostly young but also older people, leftists and rightists, atheists and religionists, simultaneously fused together into a national outcry against the responses to the protesters by the police and the heavy-handedness of the state that emerged over several days and weeks. The events created a national swell of sympathy and ownership. Food was left for the protesters, which was then distributed by volunteers. Yoga classes were set up in Gezi Park at noon every day. Bands played music, and kebab sellers sold their fodder in and around it. There was almost a carnival-like atmosphere, bringing people together rarely detected in Turkish society (Abbas and Yigit, 2014: 4).

The spiral of repression and mobilization was all the more visible in Ukraine where brutal, but also inconsistent repression brought about a rapid and exponential growth in the number of people in the square – from a few thousand to several hundred thousand (Popova, 2014). Protest targeted what was considered an increasingly authoritarian regime, with super-presidential power. It moreover addressed a regime moving towards forms of "soft authoritarianism" (Shevtsova, 2014), with centralization not only of decisional power but also of wealth – including the enrichment of a few protected oligarchs, especially in the circles more loyal to the president, Victor Yanukovych. Violence escalated, with protesters using not only Molotov cocktails but also blockades and takeovers of governmental buildings, as demonstrators were killed (20 on February 18, 2014, and 70 people two days later), snipers fired on the crowd, and torture was used by the security



service. Illiberal reactions included an attempt to pass new legislation in order to criminalize participation in so-called “mass disruption.”

In Venezuela, as well, protests were fueled by repression, which transformed localized actions into national ones. The issue of lack of security, given high crime rates, was politicized following brutal police intervention (with over 40 people dead), which was then exploited by oppositional politicians. The claims against an illiberal regime were expressed first of all in the call for freedom of the press and freedom of demonstration. After Chávez's death his successor faced difficulties that were social (with growing inflation rates and scarcity of goods) as well as political – leading to a shift from the more negotiated policing promoted by Chávez to a militarized approach. This had been proposed as a solution to crime, impunity, and insecurity, but its use in the policing of protests also contributed to the spreading of the dissent. As has been observed, Chávez's success in the incorporation of the Venezuelan workers and poor people was linked to “a reaction to systematic violations of the rule of law that can be interpreted as corruption, particularly in combination with economic crisis” (Hawkins, 2010: 160). While not directly transmitted to his successors, Chávez's leadership proved capable of creating long-lasting loyalties.

In South Africa, as well, there was a turning point following an escalation of repression by the government led by a former movement-near party, culminating in a terrible massacre reminiscent of the crimes of the apartheid regime. As in Brazil and in South Africa, the cooptation and betrayal of former social movements by a party brought to power thanks to the protest have been denounced by activists and singled out by scholars. This was the case, among others, of social movement organizations active since the late 1990s against privatization and evictions and in support of landless peasants or AIDS patients. A crisis of legitimacy of the former movement-party now long in government has been linked to a mix of neoliberalism and corruption that affected the post-apartheid regime. The ANC's adoption of the neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy is singled out as being at the root of socio-economic inequalities that challenge formal equality (McKinley, 2014). As Alexander (2013) noted, “Increased unemployment, stagnant real wages and heightened inequality arise from the government's pro-capitalist economic policies. The African National Congress (ANC) government permitted massive capital flight from South Africa soon after it came to power. [...] It privatised important industries.” The cooptation of the main trade union, COSATU, but also of the South African Communist Party in an ANC-led Alliance, is stigmatized as weakening the perspective for the Left (McKinley 2014), while claims by the workers and the poor

were not answered and even repressed (Duncan, 2014). Local protests often escalated given the lack of responsiveness of political institutions: “Slow response to long-standing complaints and failure of officials to attend meetings have often acted as triggers. Heavy-handed policing has led to, or worsened, violent confrontations” (Alexander and Pfaffe, 2013). So, “the election of a democratic government, and the preceding struggle, brought an end to racial domination of politics, but economic and social gains have been distributed unevenly. Anger and frustration among the losers has been accompanied by strategic and tactical problems for those challenging the authority of a ‘legitimate’ government” (2013).

In Brazil, although with less open use of repression and a more conciliatory mode, the protests were perceived as a reaction to a growing separation between the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or Workers’ Party) – which had once developed as a movement party – and its former base of reference. Increasing tensions between the party and the social movements on the left had already emerged under the charismatic leadership of Lula, considered by activists on the Left as too ready to accept the pressures of international lending institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The protests later increased against what was perceived as a neoliberal policy, based on increasingly tighter relations between the party oligarchy and business elites. Not by chance, the protest grew on the claims for *Paso Libre*, free access to public transport, considered as a citizens’ right but threatened by the commodification of public services.

Here as well, the brutality of the police is stigmatized as yet another indicator of the incapacity, since the democratic transition, to deal with the influence of the military and its brutal practices, especially against the poorer groups of the population (see Mendes in this volume). Within less repressive strategies, however, the PT in power in Brazil tended to consider protesters as either right-wing or irresponsible (“vandals and troublemakers,” according to the mayor of São Paulo) towards a party that is presented as embodying the national community as well as representing the real social movements. The protests indeed escalated when the mainly peaceful forms of direct action were met with brutal police repression, with many arrests and injured demonstrators on June 13, with a quick spreading of protest thereafter. Although the president of the republic and PT leader, Delma Rousseff, later promised to consider the protesters’ requests, the overreaction in the policing of the protest on June 13 did produce a quick scale shift in the contention as well as a stronger anti-party rhetoric. In fact, the governmental reactions have to be seen in a context of further distancing of the PT (already under Lula) from the promises of radical social

change (Saad and Morais, 2014; Hunter, 2008; Samuels, 2008). Here as well, anti-political class slogans were widespread, including “The people, united, govern without any party.”

Similarly, in Bulgaria, protesters denounced the oligarchic development of economic and political power in an elitist, rather than pluralist, perspective. Not by chance, the main claim was for the resignation of the prime minister, considered as the incarnation of a system dominated by the monopoly in the energy sector, with strong collusive support on the part of political elites (Rone, in this volume). Although less repressive strategies were used, the president’s offer of “citizens’ committees” to discuss protesters’ proposals did not placate the mobilization. Rather, the protest claims grew more and more critical of those in power, with a refusal of parties as either allies or interlocutors, and demands instead for clean politics. The dominance at the institutional level of widespread patronage as well as the accusation of rampant corruption fueled the protests, also influencing their radically critical stance towards institutional politics.

The delegitimation of the political class proved very strong in Bosnia as well, where demonstrators often targeted the interests and privileges of politicians and their friends in the business sector. The perception of widespread corruption also contributed to outrage against an irresponsible political class. While the first wave of protests met with limited repression, the labor mobilization escalated in response to brutal intervention by the police. The apparent lack of support for human rights by the international institutions present in the country also further contributed to growing mistrust towards those who were increasingly perceived not as protectors, but rather as colonizers.

In sum, a crisis of political responsibility was felt not only where the crisis had hit more strongly and triggered broad and deep protest, but also in countries such as Brazil, Turkey, or South Africa that had been considered as being on the winning side of neoliberal development. In fact, discontent spread even where parties connected to movements had come into power – even if the capacity to keep the loyalty of their movements varied from strong in Venezuela to weak in South Africa, with Brazil in between. Moreover, as the Bosnian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian cases indicate, protest also challenged the legitimacy of recent political classes in Eastern Europe that apparently failed to get support through promises of well-being in competitive markets. While repression appears as a common choice in light of growing political dissatisfaction, different degrees of brutality are reflected in different degrees of radicalization of conflicts, with cases like Ukraine but also Turkey and South Africa leading the way.

#### 9.4 Emerging subjectivities

The movements of the rolling wave, in and around 2013, were also defined as middle class since they addressed issues that were traditionally considered as post-materialist (such as the defense of the trees in Gezi Parks, clean energy in Bulgaria, public transport in Brazil), or because they opposed socialist parties in power. In the vision of the protesters as middle class, their claims have been defined as post-materialist, addressing issues of corruption and for a clean government in Bulgaria and Brazil, but also in Turkey, South Africa and, even more, in Ukraine.

In an opposite view, the collective identity of the 2000s protests has been defined as anti-capitalist. As noted about Gezi Park, under late neoliberalism, “certain parts of the state themselves start to act like capital in commercializing their operations to attain revenues under the pressure of financial constraints, struggles over accumulation often take the form of protests directed against the state itself rather than capital. Since these are struggles against the reproduction by the state of various facets of capital accumulation, these protests always have working-class content” (Ercan and Oğuz, 2015: 116). In this vision, Gezi reflects “a struggle against commodification of nature in the context of the revalorization of capital and the reproduction of the state” (Ercan and Oğuz, 2015: 116). In a critique of the middle-class syndrome, the movements of the 2000s have been seen in fact as signs of a shared opposition to the commodification of public spaces, in an attempt toward, instead, a “commonification,” or constitution of public goods. Karakayalı and Yaka noted that “urban politics and ecology can no longer be seen only as ‘middle class issues’ within a post-materialist framework, in the sense of a frivolous concern of people who suffer from no ‘real’ economic or social constraints” (2014: 120). In fact, a “process of urban destruction/re-construction has become so central to the current capital accumulation regime that in the last few years it has been defined as ‘urban neoliberalism’ or even ‘bulldozer neoliberalism’” (2014: 120). Similarly, protests in Brazil or Bulgaria focused on the very role of the state and claimed for public services as citizens’ rights. In Venezuela, too, the protests initially mobilized in the universities, as students called for more security, pointing at the internal contradiction of a state with rich resources and large growth that has difficulty distributing those benefits among the population. In Bulgaria, as in Brazil, environmental issues were indeed bridged with justice claims.

The interpretation of a middle-class revolt is also criticized from the point of view of the cultural middle-class subculture, which is defined rather

than supported. Regarding Gezi, it has been observed that “the middle class designates what people ceased to be when they started participating in the insurrection, since it refers to all those conditions by default that breed general conformism. From the perspective of the question of agency, this must be called a ‘proletarian’ movement: it is the revolt of those for whom life has become an oppressive term of survival” (Eken, 2014: 431). The call for participation from below is also seen in Brazil or Bulgaria as a turning point, with potential empowerment of citizens in the long term (but less so in Venezuela, where protest either remained rooted in the more traditional forms of the demonstration or escalated into violence, which eventually interrupted any potential for the broadening of the mobilization).

First and foremost, the development of a new spirit has been noted in the occupied squares which represented the space for the formation of new subjectivity, based on a recomposition of former cleavages and the emergence of new identifications. These spaces have been defined, in fact, as spaces of becoming, with “the spontaneous coming together in a moment of ‘irruption’” (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014: 118). In this sense, “Recomposition is also connected to the emergence of new subjectivities and social practices, and eventually to the emergence of new norms as well” (2014: 118-119).

In fact, in Turkey, the protests were often read as producing and reproducing the conditions for their own existence. The social diversity I have already mentioned brought about the need to invent new categories for the definition of the self. The focus on “becoming” emerges through practices that stress the importance of encounters – often celebrating the diversity of people in the various squares. So, for instance, “in the intermixing of bodies, signs, objects, voices, stories, and emotions, Gezi solidarity renewed existing ties and spawned new intimacies and affections, giving its participants a ‘belonging in becoming,’” as “Amid the temporary absence of the state within the barricaded Gezi zone, heterogeneity of visibilities and voices collectively exist, gaining radical and transformative potentials [...] namely, a queer becoming in togetherness that transgressed self-castigating sensations of anxiety and fear in the face of state violence” (Zengin, 2013). Engaging in the very definition of their identities, social movements express a claim to exist that comes even before the claim of recognition. Regarding the Gezi mobilization, Gambetti (2013) stated, “One reason why the state resented the mobilizations was because they embodied the constative ‘we exist.’” The “collective thereness” (Butler, 2014) of bodies refusing to be disposed of was a manifestation of endurance, but also a demand for existing as part of a larger totality. Frequently heard were statements like “This has never happened before; what is happening here is amazing.” As Avramopoulou

(2013) noted, “If anything, the Gezi resistance made it possible to get many voices attuned to the passionate attachment of claiming ‘to be present, to exist’ (as in the slogans chanted in the streets).”

In these intense times, emotions were strongly felt. Excitement was recalled at the observation of the unexpected: “Everyone was excited and hopeful about the unexpected gathering of millions from multifarious segments of society – soccer fans, feminists, LGBTQs, socialists, Kemalists, environmentalists, Kurds [...] – in the Gezi protests. The forum’s atmosphere was cordial: no harsh debates, no confrontations whatsoever” (Bozcalı and Yoltar, 2013). An element of surprise was emphasized. Extraordinary time also implies “the suspension, sometimes spontaneous, sometimes deliberate, of an awareness of the vulnerability of individual bodies in order to cross that threshold of fear, or, as specified by yet another memorable graffiti printed across the pavement steps that leads to the entrance of the park, to cross the remaining steps to the threshold of fear” (Parla, 2013).

The assessment of living in exceptional moments brings about the breaking of routines, leaving hope for what was once considered impossible. Protesters experience “everyday chance encounters and have the chance to experience a different kind of knowledge going beyond the mere experience of effects. The reason for this is that in the rebellious practice of commoning, people encounter the very causes of their own capacity to act, their ‘trans-individual’ condition, the fact that everything and everyone is enchained in a ‘causal community’” (Karakayalı and Yaka, 2014: 132). In action, citizens indeed change their identification.

Democracy thus developed in the streets. Remaining with the Turkish example,

[T]he Gezi spirit became an historical opportunity by which people creatively engaged in the very definition of democracy. They became active residents of their city by claiming their right to the city as the most basic of their democratic rights. They became politicized global citizens by forging links of solidarity and inspiration with other urban movements around the world. They became conscious bearers of their Ottoman past and their republican present, demanding a change to a brighter future that is at the same time cosmopolitan and democratic. This was to be a democracy beyond its limited definition as the rule of the elected people. It was to be an inclusionary democracy where people engaged in how they were to be ruled, and had a say on what their cities would look like (Örs, 2014: 8).

Maidan – at least in its first moments – was also described as a space welcoming plurality of religion but also ethnicity (from Tartars to Jews, Poles, and Byelorussians, even close to 20 percent ethnic Russians), within an “independent Republic” (Phillips, 2014). Praising horizontality against a corrupt political class – including the oppositional parties – Maidan in 2014 was quite different also from Maidan 2004, in terms of the weak role played by existing civil society organizations (Kvit, 2014). While many and varied groups were formed in Euromaidan (Way, 2014), to coordinate the protest but also to experiment with different ways of living in the square, pre-existing groups were viewed with skepticism – as 92 percent of interviewed protesters proclaimed that they did not belong to parties or organizations (Onuch, 2014a; 2014b). With the heavy repression, however, many cleavages (generational as well as political) and military skills and attitudes (including on the radical right) became more and more prominent (Shekhovtsov and Umland, 2014).

In Brazil, where about half of the protesters had never participated in contentious politics before (Singer, 2014), the action in the street constituted a space for the development of a sort of rainbow identity. Protests spread the impression that “something was happening deep inside the Brazilian society” (2014). While the claims of the Free Fare Movement were clearly resonant in a left-wing narrative stressing citizens’ rights and public services – indeed, slogans included “There is money for stadiums not for education,” or “If your son gets sick, take him to the stadium” – there was also an attempt to construct a new identity through the mobilization, as many banners said, “Come to the street,” “We are changing Brazil,” “The giant woke up” (Mendes, in this volume). Opposition to a center-left party, long in power, was therefore framed through attempts to rise above the definition of a right and a left, promoting participation from below. While in Brazil the PT had pre-empted protests in the past, the mobilization for Free Fare represented a first experience of political participation for the citizens. The daily demonstrations in June intensified the feeling of sharing a power from below.

While it is too early to assess the degree of changes they produced “from below,” in South Africa as well the protests in the aftermath of the 2011 worldwide mobilizations had apparent empowering effects. In particular, the police killing of 34 striking platinum miners on August 16, 2012 in Marikana has been characterized as a watershed moment, a tipping point, a tectonic shift, or a seismic event (Alexander et al., 2013). The massacre “was a rupture that led to a sequence of further occurrences, notably a massive wave of strikes, which are changing structures that shape people’s lives,”



as “Marikana has revealed structures unseen in normal times, providing an exceptional vantage point, allowing space for collective creativity, and enabling actors to envisage alternative futures” (Alexander, 2013). After the massacre, “First, there has been a shift in the ‘mood,’ particularly among workers, which, while difficult to measure, is indicated by the frequency, form and demands of strikes. Second, Marikana led to the rapid rise of a new union opposed to political alignment, and it contributed to division within COSATU between pro- and anti-government unions. Third, it has spurred the development of a radical new party with the potential to mobilise millions of unemployed youth” (Alexander, 2013). The Marikana protest events represented a model to apply in other struggles as well.

Similarly, in Bulgaria, where regime transition had been an elite issue and changes had been extremely slow, the contention against the privatization of the energy sector paved the way for further mobilization – in the squares and streets of Sofia in the summer, at the university in the fall. The protesters’ claims, especially at the beginning of the mobilization, were resonant with traditional left-wing discourses, justifying constraints on the market in the name of public goods. The opposition to privatization, price increases, and environmental threats were also quite resonant with old and new claims by progressive movements on the left. In a country that had long been ruled by an authoritarian, “real socialist” regime, however, the protesters avoided ideological references. Rather, the narrative was an inclusive one, establishing a dichotomy between the oligarchs and the people:

Let’s not allow political preferences to blind us! The oligarchy and the mafia are what we protest against. It is not important which party we support. Now we are Citizens against the mafia! [...] We are the people who are not represented in the National Assembly. [...] We are not the rich against the poor, the intelligent against the stupid, the beautiful against the ugly, the young against the old, the citizens against the peasants, the right against the left. [...] We are the angry ones [...] even though we smile. Because we follow the rules and we protest against those who ignore them (cited in Rone, in this volume).

In Bosnia, as well, protests developed, in both ways, in a horizontal and participatory format. Horizontality was praised, with the squatting of public spaces aiming at nurturing new repertoires of action but also at promoting new collective identities. While neither parties nor NGOs were welcomed in the occupied spaces, attempts were made to construct alternative unions. If the occupied spaces resonated with the protests of 2011 and beyond, the



organization in plenums as well as the use of facilitators were also taken from previous student protests in the country. While rarely reaching its immediate aims, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the waves of protest also innovated on a (recent and weak) repertoire of collective action, empowering the citizens.

In sum, participants describe experiences of empowerment related to the protests in countries as diverse as Brazil (Mendes, in this volume), Bulgaria (Rone, in this volume), Bosnia (Milan, in this volume), Ukraine (Ritter, in this volume) as well as South Africa (O'Connor in this volume). Besides their capacity to obtain policy and political outcomes – such as the reduction of public transport fares in Brazil or the ousting of the prime minister in Bulgaria – protests had an eventful character in terms of their capacity to build cognitive, affective, and relational resources for future mobilization. While initially protests in Venezuela also emerged spontaneously, the quick intervention of oppositional politicians interrupted the potential for the emergence of a new spirit (Masullo, in this volume). Here, in fact, repertoires of action were not innovated, as violent escalation discouraged processes of cross-fertilization.

Without yet being able to predict the long-term effects of eventful protests, we can however point at their empowering capacity. As neoliberal developments weaken their accumulated resources, social movements need to construct them in action. Failing old identifications, they need to develop a new spirit. They are, i.e., in the process of becoming, rather than being, in a situation of rapid changes, of which they are the causes and the consequences. In the social movements we have analyzed, continuing a trend that had already characterized the 2011 protests (della Porta, 2013a; 2015), the morality of the protesters (and the fellow citizens in general) is opposed to the immorality of those in power. The struggle against corruption (the corruption of the elite) was indeed the common target that allowed the transcendence of ideological counterpositions. Protests have also shown different degrees of eventfulness – as a politics of becoming was most visible in Gezi, emergent but interrupted in Euromaidan, and intermittent in Bulgaria and Brazil or South Africa, while it remained latent in Venezuela.

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