

## Social movements in the global era: from Seattle to the war in Ukraine. Interview with Donatella della Porta

di *Thomas Aureliani*

### *Introduction*

The era in which we are living appears to be characterized by an everlasting situation of crisis. The two-year period 2020-2022 was in fact characterized by the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and by an incredible number of disruptive and extraordinary climatic events. Events that have profoundly affected the daily lives of millions of people as well as international political panorama. The spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus – which causes the disease known as Covid-19 – and the restrictive measures implemented by governments have had very remarkable impact from a social, economic, political, cultural and psychological point of view on the population of the whole planet. Although the pandemic can be considered the first global phenomenon in human history in which the majority of the world population found itself to face a similar event at the same time, it should also be noted that its effects occurred locally in a diverse manner, deepening inequalities, conflicts, social fractures, racism and discrimination whose roots were already present in numerous national contexts (Chernilo, 2021; della Porta, 2021; 2022; Milan *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the subsequent conflict have forcefully brought the war back within the European (and Western society) borders, bringing the shadow of a new, catastrophic world conflict onto the world stage triggering a deep energy and food crisis. We are also witnessing the proliferation of impactful climatic events, which seriously endanger communities living in fragile territories, as well as the consequences of environmental degradation: pollution, aggressive forms of extractivism of natural resources, disposal of toxic waste, deforestation and so on.

It should also be noticed that the pandemic, the war and extraordinary climatic events have manifested themselves within a complex set of systemic crises of our contemporaneity, of which in part they are a consequence: the ecological crisis; the crisis of capitalism and that of democracy (Delanty, 2021). Neoliberal globalization, that is, the global framework that is the background of our age, is clearly showing the

pitfalls of a system that is no longer sustainable from different points of view: the ecological-environmental, the economic and the financial, the social and the political ones.

Faced with this turmoil, therefore, tools of analysis that help us understand and interpret our times seem to be increasingly necessary. In this sense, the perspective of the study of social movements enables us to observe the moments of rupture and of crisis with a different look, through an alternative and critical, more global view compared to that offered by governments and mass information systems. Social movements not only do offer us a different perspective, but starting from their interpretation of the world, their collective identities, their claims and their repertoires of protest, they try to work out possible solutions. Phenomena such as the war in Ukraine and the pandemic have in fact stimulated new and interesting forms of mobilization, which have made solidarity and the defense of fundamental rights the center of their commitment, thus giving further impetus to already existing global social movements – such as the pacifist one or that for climate justice – but also to local forms of resistance and activism (Gerbaudo, 2020; della Porta, 2021; 2022; Pleyers, 2020).

As an expert scholar of social and political sciences and through a vast scientific and popular production, Professor Donatella della Porta has been able to interpret and frame global changes and challenges precisely through the prism of social movements. From the study of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) to the most recent reflections on progressive movements in times of crisis, through research on environmental movements and climate justice, her works have inspired several generations of scholars and guide the most attentive public opinion. Donatella della Porta is one of the most cited Italian scholars – with over 50.000 citation in Google Scholar – and she has published and edited an impressive number of scientific articles and books on social movements, political participation and violence, as well as some essential manuals for anyone studying these topics<sup>1</sup>. Through the research center COSMOS – The Center on Social Movement Studies which she directs at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the *Scuola Normale Superiore* in Florence, she has stimulated the organization of countless research projects, workshops and public meetings with the aim of spreading knowledge on the forms of protest and resistance present on the world stage. Who, therefore, better than Professor della Porta, may be able to try and frame the current political and social dynamics that we are facing and the legacy that the first movements that contested the direction that capitalist globalization has taken have given to us?

<sup>1</sup> In particular, she edited different editions of two large manuals in English with Mario Diani (2020; 2015).

In this interview, therefore, an attempt was made to retrace the history and the salient characteristics of social movements in the context of globalization, from the Seattle protests that represented the *début* of the GJM, up until the current critical juncture relating to the health and military crisis. This is also an opportunity to recall the author's most important works at an international level which have marked the studies on social movements.

The interview is divided into three thematic cores, this division having the purpose of trying to better understand: 1) the role that social movements have had during the cycle of protests in the last 20/30 years and the evolution of GJM 2) the trajectory of these movements in relation to theme of the environmental and climate crisis in its various forms and 3) the role of social movements in times of crisis or difficult conjunctures such as the ones we are currently experiencing.

**Thomas Aureliani** (from now on, **TA**):

We have seen through the last decades, how the affirmation of neoliberal capitalism has increased the wealth and well-being of some, leaving behind and on the margins an increasingly large group of people, especially in the global South but not only. In fact, in the global North itself and in the “more advanced” Western societies, social fractures and inequalities have deepened, which has clearly shown the *logic of expulsion* mentioned by Saskia Sassen (2014) in a famous and important book, in which she describes how finance, mining, land grabbing or environmental pollution have produced a mass of expelled or marginalized people. People who have become a waste which are to be removed from the social contexts to which they belong (Armiero, 2021).

The movements and networks that have characterized the protest cycles that have developed over the last 20/30 years have moved precisely from a profound critique of the economic and financial system, while at the same time claiming greater protection of social, civil and political rights. Knowing that much of your research activity has been focusing precisely on mobilizations within neoliberal globalization, I would ask you to illustrate, in the first place, how scholars of social movements have approached the topic and how they have been studying it and, secondly, how social movements have been interpreting and criticizing globalization itself, but also what were their specific claims, their repertoires of protest and the subsequent effects of this activism.

**Donatella della Porta** (from now on, **DdP**):

Initially, the issue of globalization and transnational relations was a question mainly addressed by scholars of International Relations. There was therefore a distinction of fairly precise roles with respect to those who studied social movements. Some scholars of International Relations dealt with the participation of civil society organizations, the so-called

NGOs, i.e., non-governmental organizations: the reflection was that beyond the States that are normally the units studied in International Relations, there were also non-governmental entities worthy of attention in the new globalized context. In the concept of non-governmental organization, everything from the company to an international trade union, to a social movement was put into it. Attention had also been focused on the decisions taken by international organizations on the subject of human rights and therefore also on the battles for democratization in countries such as those of Latin America, many of which came out of years of dictatorial regimes. For example, a reflection was developed on what was called the “boomerang effect”, that is, the attempt made by activists from countries subject to dictatorship to involve international institutions and associations to put pressure on national governments (Keck, Sikkink, 1998).

Of course, peace was another important issue, while the environment is going to become another one. Much attention was then focused, in that first period, on the various processes launched by United Nations to tackle the great global problems.

These studies were initially conducted by scholars of International Relations. Later, particularly from the 1990s, social movement scholars like me, Dieter Rucht and Sidney Tarrow began to apply the research categories that had been developed on movements at a national level also to transnational dynamics and actors. The first attempt was therefore to directly apply categories that had proved useful in the analysis of conflicts at the national level, such as “political opportunities structure”<sup>2</sup>. The observations that emerged were that the processes of globalization shift decisions towards supranational or international institutions that are not subject to the principles of electoral accountability except in a very mediated and approximate way (della Porta, Kriesi, 1999).

And with this, the difficulties that social movements had in interacting with institutions that were increasingly powerful at an international level and that were capable of using instruments of economic conditionalities began to transpire: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was shown that these latter institutions were much more difficult to access and to condition than those at the national level where there was a developed system of parties and the incorporation of different interests.

Social movement scholars who analyzed globalization were beginning to observe two things.

First, that the international institutions were very different one from each other. Take for example the research on the European Union: it has

<sup>2</sup> For a literature review on this approach see McAdam D., Tarrow S. (2018) and della Porta (2013).

been shown that its institutions boast very different characteristics (della Porta, Parks, 2018)<sup>3</sup>. The European Parliament, the Commission and the Council have different channels, and even in the Commission there are different directorates that have different degrees of openness with respect to the pressures that are exerted from below. The first observation was therefore that international organizations are as different one from each other as different are national political systems.

Moreover, from the point of view of the groups – such as social movements or social movement organizations (SMOs) – that sought to influence the institutions mentioned above, it was seen that they tended to develop strategies which aimed to adapt to the different characteristics of these international organizations. The social movements that intervened to put pressure, for example on the IMF, used different strategies than those that intervened in the European Union. In the United Nations, on the other hand, there were various channels and structures from this point of view. It was also observed that in reality there was no clear-cut division between the transnational social movement organizations that intervene at the transnational level and other actors that intervene at the local level but that, on the contrary, there were broad multilevel networks. Economic globalization required global governance and to achieve this global governance, new international institutions were strengthened and created: social movements perceived that it was necessary to intervene at that level.

**TA:**

In your studies and also in several articles you have written, you went through the matter of the GJM and the first major protests that seriously questioned capitalist globalization.<sup>4</sup> We recall, for example, the first protests in Seattle in 1999, a year that had and still has an important resonance. What did Seattle mean and what were the consequences? Who mobilized in those first experiences attributable to the World Social Forum?

**DdP:**

The Seattle movement represented the emergence of what demographers call *Generation Z*, but it was not a generational movement: it involved activists of the most diverse generations. We did a research on the Social Forum of Florence in 2002 where we used the focus group method, a sort of group interviews (della Porta, 2005a; della Porta, 2005b).

<sup>3</sup> See also della Porta (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Donatella della Porta's works regarding the GJM, globalization and social movements are several. See, for example, della Porta (2005a); della Porta *et al.* (2006); della Porta (2007a); della Porta, Marchetti (2011); and Andreatta *et al.* (2018).

We had organized activists into different categories, from teenagers to those who had made the resistance; therefore, they were a very broad generational spectrum and above all it was a global protest that started from the global South.

One of the decisive moments in the development of these protests was in fact the 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where there were movements that did not involve only middle classes or activists with student backgrounds, since there was also a strong participation of associations peasant women, workers' associations, and other very different social actors. Brazil was chosen because during Lula's presidency it was a country that seemed to play a role also from the cultural point of view of innovation and development of new ideas: it was the cradle of this process that saw the development of a movement for global justice.

The beginning was in Seattle in 1999 when a meeting of the World Trade Organization was contested through a form of action that immediately became a form of protest widely used within this movement: the so-called counter-summit. The counter-summit was symbolically very interesting because the basic idea was that the policy developed by international institutions was not transparent because decisions of international importance were taken directly by governments often without opening a debate in parliaments, let alone with organizations of civil society. Often being complex issues, they were also issues that were hardly addressed in the press.

In fact, one of the characteristics of the counter-summit is that of exploiting the attention that from time to time focused on the summit, in order to challenge and bring different and alternative visions of globalization onto the public and media scene. The counter-summit sought to get media attention as well at one of several times when the media was concerned with international politics. The implications of this international politics were also clearly visible at the national level (della Porta, 2007b).

The very history of the Genoa Social Forum in dispute with the G8 in 2001 is indicative. It was an event that managed to involve very large networks of subjects ranging from trade unions to cooperatives, to Catholic groups, to anarchists, to the traditional left. For Genoa, the launch document of the counter-summit is signed by over 800 organizations: the idea was to create large networks where movements that had previously been specializing in the themes of the environment, women, peace and other issues all cooperate. The counter-summit also envisaged a more or less symbolic blockade of the summit as an instrument of protest.

In fact, both Seattle and Genoa are remembered as moments of violent clashes between the police who defended the summit and the heads of state and government who were involved in these official events, and the protesters who tried to block access by means of non-violent forms of protest.

This was one of the most visible forms of a long-term process. First in Seattle and then in Genoa, in Prague, in Copenhagen, various counter-summits were organized, also oriented towards a challenge by the European Union, which were transformed into visible and concrete moments of cooperation between activists from different countries. This was a movement that had its roots in the past and that in reality started from a movement of trust towards large international conferences such as those organized by the United Nations on central issues such as the environment or gender equality. However, given the ineffectiveness of such meetings and the few concrete implications, growing discontent was generated.

It was initially a participation also made by many activists who had tried other paths and had different backgrounds behind them. For example, in Italy the spokesperson for the Genoa Social Forum was Vittorio Agnoletto, the director of a non-governmental organization that dealt with the pandemic of the time, that of AIDS. There were often many organizations that had tried to go through the institutional channels and then realized that their action was not very effective.

This was linked to a series of transformations linked to globalization and to the development of neoliberalism that was increasing the inequalities between the global South and the North but also within individual nations. The cornerstone of the neoliberal doctrine contested by the movements was the growing influence of the free market on state policies, with a consequent weakening of the public function and a growth instead of private interests. This was also seen with the idea of patents with respect to a whole series of natural products carried out by the WTO. There was therefore the impression of a strong barbarization of the market structures against which it was necessary to put a barrier and offer alternatives. In this context, the GJM was born and developed. It is important to point out that these were not anti-globalization movements. In our research we have in fact called them alter-globalists or precisely movements for global justice because they were movements that organized themselves on a global level and that developed an idea of solidarity by criticizing the forms that neoliberal globalization was taking.

Above all, they criticized the growth of economic inequalities, the weakening of citizens' rights and the lack of democracy in the new global context dominated by international economic institutions. One of the slogans was in fact "for a globalization from below" which did not envisage a closure and a retreat on nationalism but rather on a necessary but decidedly alternative globalization compared to the one that had materialized.

This phase of the GJM for studies on social movements in sociology and political science had led to expectations of a growing globalization of movements as well: there was the idea that the movements would be increasingly oriented towards a global level of contestation. This was



only partially true, since in reality the movements that followed seemed, in part, less global than the GJM. Indeed, the wave of protests immediately following Global Justice was that of the anti-austerity protests against the economic crisis and austerity policies in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (della Porta 2015a; 2015b; 2017). These movements, while still having a transnational perspective, were much more local in the sense that they followed the evolution of national economic crises that had different characteristics, even if they all originated from a global crisis.

Some countries were hit the hardest, such as the European periphery, Southern Europe or Ireland, but they were hit in a different way: in some cases the crisis was linked to a heavy state debt, in other cases to private debt. It was these movements that, while lying to pay attention to a global phenomenon, have developed in a multilevel way. The initiatives and protests at the transnational level were therefore intertwined with those very present at the national level. The effects of the anti-austerity movements have also been very different. For example, in some countries such as Greece, Spain and Portugal they have also led to transformations at the level of parliaments and governments, with the birth of new parties on the left or with the strengthening of other parties, but above all with the weakening of major pre-existing political parties.

The third major wave of protest came in 2019, which was then abruptly halted by the pandemic. Wave characterized by the presence of movements very strong on the issues identified by the movement for global justice such as social inequalities, but which focused on their intersectionality, i.e. on the interaction of different sources of inequalities, from gender, to race, to social position. Protests particularly visible in Chile, Lebanon or Ecuador, where there was a clear desire to forcefully claim civil, political and social rights considered at risk. Also, from this point of view these movements have had different effects in national contexts. Chile is a very interesting case because protests often born on very limited, focused and contingent claims, then expanded to the contestation of the same regimes and managed to transform the very constitutions of the countries even in a period of difficulties such as that linked to the pandemic, which has not completely stopped civil society's desire for change (della Porta, 2022).

**TA:**

The mobilization you describe on a global level in recent decades seems to me to be precisely centered on the relationship between state and market and its distortions, even if it embraces broader themes and issues such as, for example, pacifism and the fight against all forms of organized violence. I would like to ask you, in this regard, if you could sew a fundamental passage in my opinion that goes from July 2001 to September 2001, that is the period between the protests on the occasion of the G8 in Genoa, – with all that has dramatically happened, since the



death by Carlo Giuliani at the raid on the Diaz school – on 11 September. There, perhaps something changes, perhaps the themes and the focus on which the movement for global justice had concentrated up to that moment changed.

A second question that I would like to raise concerns the growth of claims on a global scale of issues related to the ecological crisis, environmental degradation and climate change.

An example of this is the extraordinary success that the Fridays for Future (FFF) have had, at least in terms of visibility and resonance. What trajectories does environmentalism take within the context of globalization?

### **DdP:**

What you are highlighting is a very important passage which is due to the effects that 09/11 had on all political systems, not only on the American one, with an accentuation of a repression that in Italy had already been very strong before 09/11 but which will be further strengthened. What certainly happens in the GJM is a growing attention to issues related to violence and, in particular, given that an indirect effect of 9/11 was precisely war, to the question of peace. In those years, the GJM was transformed into one of the greatest pacifist movements that ever existed: on February 15, 2003 the largest pacifist demonstration in the world was organized, a moment in which the themes of peace, war and violence became central. And it remains a central theme because many other crises that have been dealt with subsequently are crises where violence understood as system violence and violence in the form of repression is very present.

The story described so far can also be told from the point of view of the development of environmental movements. It was a development strongly influenced by the perception that global problems existed and that it was necessary to act globally but, at the same time, to take root at a territorial level. In fact, in the history of the environmental movement we have on the one hand strong attempts to influence and put pressure on international institutions, also through very intense forms of lobbying, but on the other hand, the environmental issue has materialized in local conflicts also marked by moments of hard repression.

For example, the conflicts in the global South have seen the killing of activists and the intensification of mobilizations to claim truth and justice for the victims of repression, also carried out through the use of private and illegal armies against the defenders of the land and human rights, indigenous peoples and their leaders and anyone who takes action in a conflictual manner against pollution, the intensive exploitation of natural resources or mega-projects with a high environmental and social impact. Also in this case, the history of the “transnationalization” process is a complex one because on the one hand we have the creation of

large transnational organizations – the largest transnational movement organizations are linked precisely to the environmental movement – but we also have a process of contestation from within of a series of summits, such as the COP (Conference of Parties) in Copenhagen. Conferences that see tensions within environmentalism itself between activists from the North and South of the world, but also a tension between a more conciliatory vision regarding the relationships to be held with institutions and large multinational companies in view of obtaining of reforms, and a more radical vision that underlines the need to return to protest.

The FFF are rooted in this process (della Porta, Portos, 2021). A process that is based on the perception that the institutional ways have been ineffective in countering this extremely dramatic challenge and which tends to grow and worsen year by year in a situation of lack of policies. The FFF movement represents a strong appeal to politics itself and also recalls the urgency of an intervention. What is interesting thinking about globalization is that the FFF are born in a very specific place, in Sweden, with the individual action of Greta Thunberg, only to immediately develop onto a global level with what are the “Global Days of Action” and the global climate strikes. These demonstrations show how these movements understand the problem of the environment and climate as a global issue to be addressed globally. In the same manner are also other movements, such as the recent wave of feminism represented by “Ni una menos” and other movements that come from the global South.

They have also extended to Southern Europe, with the ability to develop very decentralized processes of globalization. One movement we studied in the summer of 2020 is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest campaign that followed the killing of George Floyd. These protests also surprised many observers and perhaps the activists themselves because what was an episode of great brutality and violence (and it was not the first for the United States) in the moment of the first post-lockdown opening in June-July 2020 manages to involve all the World. In Italy, not only has it a national resonance, but we have counted hundreds and hundreds of protests even in small towns and suburbs (della Porta *et al.*, 2022). A movement structure that is very reticular and widespread and which also develops in part thanks to the use of new technologies which, not alone, but combined with direct communication, have been effective in giving a global structure to the protest. So, while in the GJM the globalization of movements passed through the creation of more or less formal international organizations, today with the FFF, BLM and “Ni una menos” this process takes place without the need to build structured organizations, basing instead much more diffusely on locally rooted networks.

**TA:**

The peculiarity of FFF, as you mentioned, is that the movement starts from an almost single and solitary revolt and then positively contami-

nates an entire generation. Perhaps we must go back to 1968, when the student movement had a predominant role to see such organized activism on the part of the younger generations. In this case they are even younger generations: the revolt for the climate starts right from middle school or during the first years of high school. How was it possible that starting from the protest of a very young teenager it was then possible to organize a movement that probably today represents the global movement *par excellence*?

### **DdP:**

It is an organizational structure that has developed in a very particular way, it was as if the ground was ready because Greta's gesture catalyzes a process that is already underway. In fact, it was also possible to notice the participation of other generations, because often teachers, professors or parents had already made pupils aware of these issues. Furthermore, the movement develops at a time when there is a strong perception of a lack of future, or at least of having to win back one's future by generation Z. Greta's gesture is interesting because it occurs after a particularly torrid period in Northern Europe which had made immediately visible the effects of environmental destruction caused by climate change. It is therefore no coincidence that the protest begins in that place and at that moment. However, the development of the FFF testifies that the perception of destruction of our planet is a very widespread perception that is also particularly felt by a generation that feels at risk of not finding a planet available anymore. It is also a very busy generation: studies carried out through opinion polls have disproved the idea that this is a generation that feels defeated. It is a generation that feels in danger but having the ability to react. In fact, Greta's gesture becomes particularly important because it is followed by so many others. It shows a generation that can act, that is very articulate, that has faith in science and that seeks solutions. What emerges from our research is that there is a core of FFF activists with particularly high and complex degrees of commitment, highlighting problems and presenting solutions (della Porta, Portos, 2021). The great capacity of the movement is to be able to mobilize very large masses of students beyond the core of the very young of middle school, also involving university students. We did some surveys on the occasion of the "Global Strike for Future" events and at each event the number of non-students also increased: therefore, the ability to expand and create different organizational models was shown, precisely much more decentralized but also deeply rooted in schools. For this reason, it is also a movement that has suffered a lot from the pandemic with the closure of institutes and universities: even if it is true that it has shown the ability to reconvert its activism towards online platforms, the difficulties of not meeting again have made themselves felt.

An interesting aspect compared to these generations is that both from

our research and from others, what emerges is that students and young people were very present in these progressive mobilizations and instead almost absent at the no-vax demonstrations, characterized by the presence of older people. This generational dimension is an element that I consider as very positive as a citizen, but also interesting for the studies of social movements. Although young people have always represented the most important group of activists because they are also the most numerous, they are those who have more free time, more idealism and more desire to participate, what the no-vax protests have shown is precisely an absence of young people who instead occupied, almost simultaneously, the squares of Black Lives Matter.

**TA:**

This was evident when looking at the demonstrations during the pandemic. You talked about the young men and women of FFF who have faith in science who clash with those who do not have that trust, for example by looking at the no-vax protests and the deniers of the pandemic. Connected precisely to this, a further question on which it is important to reflect concerns precisely the role of the movements within a context of crisis such as that of a pandemic and, thinking about the very topicality, the war in Ukraine. How do they behave and what role can social movements play in these critical junctures?

**DdP:**

What we see is that crises of this kind create both challenges and opportunities (della Porta, 2021; 2022). From the point of view of challenges, the process you mentioned starting from 09/11 is also a typical process: every crisis that is seen as an emergency reduces the space for protests and reduces the space for expressing criticism. Yesterday's news that Italy has dropped 17 points in the "Reporters Without Borders" ranking in terms of press freedom is indicative: these are times when access to institutions, transparency, accountability tend to be very limited. On the other hand, there are also moments in which a lot of suffering is created. A suffering that does not automatically turn into protest but that can be one of the strong pushes for activism and the creation of discursive opportunities. For example, in the case of the economic and financial crisis, the pandemic crisis and the current military crisis linked to the war in Ukraine, the idea that public intervention is necessary has strengthened. The financial crisis and the pandemic in particular have reintroduced important issues for social movements that oppose neoliberal globalization from 1999 to today. If we look at these dramatic moments from a historical perspective, many researches highlight how on the one hand there is a strong tendency towards individual selfishness, fears and all those types of feelings that do not facilitate aggregation, while on the other these phenomena are occasions in which

union is created together with very intense expressions of solidarity and collaboration. This has been studied in wars and in major disasters, such as the typhoon in the Philippines (Curato 2020). Critical conjunctures represent ruptures and strong novelties that reduce the possibility of basing one's actions on past experiences, but can also open up positive possibilities. In some cases, pandemics, wars and destruction have created pressures for more inclusive reforms. For example, Charles Tilly had observed that "war made the state, and the state made war" (Tilly, 1975, 42): it is through war that citizens are mobilized. Citizens who develop a greater perception of their rights in times of conflict.

As social movement scholars we expected that with the restrictive measures there would be no protests and instead from the very beginning, from the protests of the riders to the protests of the workers' unions, to the expressions of solidarity that have developed we have seen that the pandemic was a moment of thrust and development of social movements. For example, the great "Spanish flu" pandemic at the end of the First World War was the basis for the creation of health services because it dramatically underlined how necessary it was to organize public health facilities. Critical conjunctures are moments in which, quoting Gramsci, "the old is dead and the new is yet to come". These are moments in which monsters are created but also situations in which possibilities for transformation are created.

**TA:**

Concerning mobilization in high-risk contexts, can we consider the protests in Iraq in 2019 as part of the third great wave of protests and define them as social movements? What are the future expectations of these recent movements?

**DdP:**

Certainly yes. They have been considered as part of this wave of 2019 that has spread worldwide: from Hong Kong in Asia, to the great protests in Latin America, to what is defined as the "new Arab spring" where in addition to Lebanon there are also Sudan and many more cases of very participatory protests that were directed against the growing social injustices. Protests in authoritarian regimes have had very dramatic short-term outcomes in the past but also long-term consequences. Egyptian activists interviewed for various research carried out on the Arab Spring of 2011 said, in this regard, that "we expected the revolution to be a moment, only to realize that it is actually a process". It is therefore a long process, because even in the past in the so-called countries of first democratization the process of transformation of institutions rarely took place quickly, but surely we can expect as it happened in the past that these networks that have been created, these experiences also from part of the new generations continue to remain important for the consequent

stages and for the subsequent movements, where there is often also a strong self-reflection on the mistakes that have been made and on the possibilities of improving in the future (della Porta, 2014).

**TA:**

The World Social Forum took place in Mexico from May, 1 2022 to May, 6, and it saw the participation of a multitude of grassroots movements, civil society organizations, associations, entities and networks of various kinds, discussing decisive issues at a global level, such as the environment, migration, discrimination, the right to work, political participation and gender disparities. The relevance that these issues should have, often does not correspond to an equally relevant space in the medias. In Italy, for example, virtually no television news or newspaper reported the news and the public debate on these issues, unless they turn into more or less announced tragedies. This is particularly true with regard to the work and commitment of the movements from below that seek to act on these issues. What relationship exists today between mass media information and social movements?

**DdP:**

Certainly, both pandemics and phenomena such as the invasion of Ukraine, and in general war situations, worsen the quality of information and the level of inclusion and pluralism in the public debate. Thus, on the one hand, progressive social movements are committed to information gathering and counter-information to compensate for the closures that are noted at the level of the mass media (what is defined as “published opinion”). Even the report by “Reporters Without Borders” underlines, with regard to the mainstream mass media, a concentration of newspapers on which the same political line is noted. Then there is a tendency to compete with other media as well, such as online newspapers, which lead to a search for the scandal. In fact, the way in which all these crises have been dealt with is visibly a little reflective way, and one that goes towards accentuating conflict and confrontation. So there are phenomena of polarization and a lack of pluralism at the same time. And this helps us explain why in these circumstances, in these critical junctures, social movements are more stigmatized by the mainstream media, and why no tools of critical expression are given.

**TA:**

Thank you very much for the comprehensive and enriching picture you have been able to provide. The ideas and the subsequent reflections that have emerged, together with the current challenges that the contemporary world places before us, require social researchers an even greater commitment to deepen not only the forms of mobilization we have talked about, but also the infinite other forms of resistance and activism that



was born and developed over the last few decades. Which often have no voice, but to whom it would be appropriate to provide a space, for example by means of the tools of an emancipatory social research that close to the demands of movements from below.

**DdP:**

Thank you to!

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