RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE 18-O CHILEAN UPRISING AND THE MAKING OF TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT:

This work focuses on the Chilean uprising of October 2019, and briefly characterizes its events. However, the core interest is to observe and question the international impact and everyday transnational features of this movement. Drawing on G. Schiller's thoughts and combining them with transnational social movements' scholarship, the analysis develops around two key axes. On the one hand, it charts mainly indirect diffusion through the spread of ideas and practices that travelled from Chile (and from Latin America) and grew to become embedded in social movements worldwide. On the other hand, it offers an ethnographic account of the transnational networks that have mobilized in support of this struggle in Italy, with particular attention paid to Chileans abroad. In this way, our work highlights the parallel movement from everyday transnational experiences to the formation of transnational political identities, and from shared political identities to transnational daily interactions. By exploring the interplay between different diffusion mechanisms, this case study contributes to the discussion of the role of political agency in shaping diffusion dynamics, and offers new insights into the construction of transnational collective identities.

KEYWORDS:

Chile, Diffusion, Engaged Research, October 2019 Uprising, Social Movements, Transnationalism.

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1. Introduction

For decades, Chile has been described as a successful example of neoliberalization, but in October 2019, a massive social uprising shattered this mainstream narrative. The deep inequalities rooted in the country's political and economic systems triggered a broad politicization of society, which increasingly engaged in contentious political action. Simultaneously, the international public sphere became aware of the contradictions existing within the "*Latin American oasis of peace and wellbeing*."[1] The so-called 18 October (18-O) movement is therefore a subject of high sociological interest. However, the core intent of this work is to question this struggle from a specific point of view, namely its international impact and its everyday transnational features. This research focuses on: the factors fostering the transnationalization of this movement, the dynamics contributing to create or to reinforce transnational fields of social interaction, and the entanglement between transnational lived experiences and political identifications. More specifically, it aims to contribute to the discussion about the cultural and symbolic construction of collective identities by exploring the interplay between different diffusion mechanisms.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 reports the main events that characterized the uprising, and the structural causes underlying its claims for the re-foundation of the state. Section 3 reviews transnationalism and transnational social movements theories. It combines G. Schiller's argument about the formation of transnational social fields with the analysis of transnationalization mechanisms within and across social movements. Section 4 describes the methodology; because the author is herself part of the 18-O relational and political network in Italy, the implications of engaged research are discussed. In the second part, the analysis develops around two key axes. Section 5 moves from the observation of indirect diffusion dynamics to the spread of ideas and practices from the Chilean (and the Latin American) context to social movements worldwide. It selects feminism as paradigmatic example of creative adaptation and meaningful entanglement between global and local claims. Section 6 investigates relational mechanisms of transnationalization by providing an ethnographic account for the Italian nodes of the 18-O international network. It focuses on the actors involved, their objectives and self-representations, and their uneven transnational experiences. Section 7 identifies suggestions for further research, and draws conclusive considerations that help us to understand how the interplay of different diffusion mechanisms sustains and is sustained by transnational activism.

2. The Chilean uprising

Since Pinochet's golpe (11/9/1973), Chile has represented an experiment for the implementation of neoliberal policies, later exported worldwide. The implications are still very visible today (Ruiz Encina 2019): Chile generally performs well in terms of growth and financial stability,[2] yet increasing inequalities and unsustainable living costs are everyday realities for its residents (Durán and Kremerman 2020). The uprising took place in this context, and was initiated by students in October 2019, after a rise in the capital city's subway fare was announced. As protests grew exponentially in size and scope, President Piñera declared a national state of emergency and established a curfew. These measures have strong symbolic connotations, for they marked the beginning of the military regime and have never been used in democratic times. For a short time, the nightmare of the dictatorship seemed to have returned. Security forces employed a systematic strategy of human rights violations, including killings, extrajudicial detentions, torture and sex violence (INDH, 2020).

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[1] This is a statement made by the Chilean President just before the uprising.

[2] Chile is the only OCSE country in Latin America.

The use of force to contain the demonstrations did not, however, bear the intended results. As in other recent social mobilizations, indignation was initially triggered by a specific event, but was sustained by the repeated use of repression for shoring the weak legitimacy of national institutions (Bringel and Pleyers 2017). The 18-O movement was characterized by decentralization, with contentious collective actions initiated by plural and horizontal groups of demonstrators (Ruiz Encina 2020). Ideas of empowerment, justice and dignity led the protests, which embraced inclusiveness not only as a normative value, but also as a relational and affective practice (Santos 2020). This materialized in truly participatory, pre-figurative (della Porta and Mattoni 2014) and solidarity-oriented organizations, such as deliberative territorial assemblies (*Cabildos*) and collective defense groups (*Primera Línea*). In the protesters' perceptions (NUDESOC, 2020), the critique of neoliberalism merged with issues such as trans-feminism, working rights, decolonialism, indigenous rights, environmental justice, and social and human rights. Different claims coalesced, ultimately pushing for broad changes at the institutional, socio-economic and cultural levels. Moreover, the necessity to put an end to the legacies of the dictatorship, by replacing the Constitution written during the regime, allowed the movement to maintain very practical goals, with the ambition for a re-foundation of the state. On November 15, 2019, the main political parties agreed on two referendums to decide whether and how to modify the Constitution. This move was strongly criticized by social movements, which interpreted it as a strategy to postpone any real change. With the first referendum (25/10/2020), 78.25% of the voters were in favor of a new Constitution; among them, 79% wanted it to be written by a directly elected organism (*Convención Constituyente*), whose 155 members had been elected on May 15, 2021. This election was marked by a sweeping victory of independent and left-wing candidates.[3] Their work would last approximately one year, and is scheduled to be ratified in a second referendum in 2022.

3. Transnationalism and social movements

Transnationalism studies had gained momentum as a consequence of the acceleration of globalization. Early scholarship (Portes et al. 1999) distinguished between globalization 'from above' and transnationalism 'from below.' They defined the latter as the diversified set of practices carried out by migrants that requires sustained social contacts across national borders, with consequences in both the sending and receiving countries. Although transnationalization is most often triggered by economic reasons (such as remittances or entrepreneurial activities), it tends to expand to other spheres of social life. G. Schiller has likewise investigated the simultaneous embeddedness of migrants in different territorial contexts or, in other words, how people maintain connections across borders. The author devises a useful categorization that helps to operationalize the concept of transnationalism (2004). She distinguishes between transnational processes of communication, which do not depend on direct people-to-people relationships, but can have profound influences on daily practices and ethical values, and transnational social fields. The latter stems from the individual and his or her interpersonal behaviors and networks. It is important to recognize that traveling or migrating is not a necessary condition in order to be part of cross-border networks of social relations. The cumulative power of these networks shapes what the author defines as transnational social fields or, in other words, the sum of "*indirect connections between disparate individuals who do not know each other or even know of each other, yet are shaped by and shape each other*" (2004, 457-8). G. Schiller also reflects on the difference between transnational ways of being and belonging. The former describes daily practices that make people part of a

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[3] The country also underwent a Presidential election. On the ballot (19/12/2021), Gabriel Boric, candidate of the leftist coalition *Apruebo Dignidad* and former leader of the students' movement in 2011, won against the radical-right candidate, Jose Antonio Kast.

transnational social field, for example, sending remittances to the family or being engaged in cross-border personal relationships. This is an observable phenomenon, but it does not help us understand how people represent their identity or membership. Transnational ways of belonging specifically addresses this second issue and helps us chart cultural representations related to nationhood and history, as well as emotional connections among territorially dispersed people (Cohen 1997).

Diasporas are collective identities shared among a disperse population, generated by a thick bond with the homeland and the collective experience of displacement. Because they are usually unwilling to fully integrate into the host society, diasporas are both a symbol of transnational belonging and of (nationalistic) political struggles. Clifford (1994) notes that diasporic identities can be constructed through identification with historical socio-political forces, such as Allende's democratic socialism, or through adaptive skills, which often entail critical cosmopolitanism and a vision of renewal that goes beyond the limits of the nation state. These identities enable the coexistence of transnational ways of being and belonging, and contribute to the creation of transnational (or global) practices of citizenship (G. Schiller 2004, 463). Finally, it is worth noting that transnationalism involves multiple ties and interactions linking people, organizations and institutions across national borders (Faist, 2000). Therefore, it does not forecast the end of the national and local space, but rather engages with the transformation and re-configuration of both (de Jong and Dannecker, 2018).

Transnationalization has assumed a growing importance in the study of social movements, for it affects their organizational structures, ideational and identitarian frames, target groups and repertoires of action. Following della Porta and Tarrow (2005), the main mechanisms sustaining the transnationalization of social movements are: 1) scale-shifts (or vertical diffusion), i.e. the internalization or the externalization of conflicts across territorial scales; 2) supra-national framing and the emergence of transnational collective action, such as international campaigns or coalitions; and 3) the cross-border (horizontal) diffusion of ideas and practices, which are adopted in contexts other than those of origin. International solidarity is commonly associated with a scale-shift that involves either the internationalization of other people's grievances, or the ability for a local movement to bring its claims to the transnational arena. Featherstone (2012) observes that solidarity and perceptions of similarity are not simply a way in which groups are connected. On the contrary, they have a transformative and strategic function, for collective identifications are intrinsically related to power struggles and politicization (Zschache et al., 2020). Transnational solidarity has been characterized by deep power asymmetries between the North and South, whereas today, a more reciprocal understanding of solidarity is growing. Ataç et al. (2016) point out the role that international solidarity plays in the re-configuration of subjective identities and political communities in a way that challenges the very nature of national citizenships.

The debate over diffusion mechanisms evolved toward less structural and more dialogic and relational approaches (Soule 2004; Chabot 2012). Focusing on the objects and channels of diffusion, Romanos (2016) argues that ideational elements (such as moral indignation) are more easily transmitted through indirect channels, whereas behavioral innovations require face-to-face contacts, hence direct or mediated diffusion. The latter are generally triggered by brokers or, in other words, by the presence of actors that are personally engaged in cross-border relations and can facilitate processes of cultural and linguistic translation (Santos, 2002). The literature distinguishes between two main typologies of brokers: the 'rooted cosmopolitans' (Tarrow 2005), such as intellectuals that consider the mutual intelligibility of different struggles an end in itself; and the 'rootless or diasporic activists', such as migrants that seek to enhance mutualistic practices between the host and the home territories (Bringel and Marques 2021). This distinction is relevant for our research, since it helps focus our attention on the diversified range of actors involved in diffusion dynamics.

In order to understand the symbolic and identitarian dimension of contentious collective action (for instance, Melucci 1989), it is important to observe how diffusion happens across different territories, but also across different moments in time. The "*ability to perceive duration*" is an important feature of social movements, which helps produce new meanings and relationships "*by integrating the past and emerging elements of the*

present into the unity and continuity of a collective actor" (Melucci 1995, 49). As Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue, the creation or reinforcement of a common identification works as a mobilizing factor, sustains solidarity and commitment, informs strategic choices, and can constitute a relevant outcome in itself. This is because political identities spill over from one movement to another, may be embedded in broader popular cultures, and may even impact the institutional field. Transnational diachronic diffusion encompasses collective learning mechanisms, comparing present and past protests, reinforcing cultural affinities and solidarity, tying together traditions, and building long-term common visions (della Porta and Mattoni 2014). Moreover, the succession between visibility and latency is a constitutive feature of social movements, and the latter continues working in moments of abeyance, reproducing their collective identities (Fominaya 2015) and carrying out memory work (Zamponi and Daphi 2014). Overall, we can understand the cultural components of collective identities only by analyzing "*contentious politics as accumulative processes in which every new cycle is partially shaped by previous movement activities*" (Zamponi 2018, 301). Following this reasoning, a growing corpus of literature invites us to look at social movements in terms of cultural and historical continuity (Haydu, 2020). Finally, the focus on continuity and the cultural dimension of collective action challenges the explanations for the diffusion of contemporary social movements that rely solely on the unqualified role of communication technologies as an explanatory variable. Social media facilitates intra- and inter-group communication and dissemination, leading to less linear diffusion, and blurring the difference between indirect and direct mechanisms (della Porta and Mattoni 2014). But it cannot be the main and only cause for the success of a social movement (Fominaya and Gillan 2017).

Bridging together social movements and transnationalism scholarship helps us to investigate the impact of the 18-O movement on the construction of collective identities. In particular, we look at: the factors fostering its transnationalization, the dynamics contributing to create or reinforce transnational social fields, and the entanglement between transnational lived experiences and political identities. Diffusion has been used extensively for the study of social movements. However, the ways in which different mechanisms interplay in the cross-border diffusion of a specific movement (Sageman 2004) remains an under-researched topic. By addressing this issue, this case study contributes to the discussion of the role of political agency in shaping diffusion mechanisms (Kolins Givan et al. 2010, 3) and offers new insights into the cultural and symbolic construction of collective identities.

4. Methodology

Here, we present the results of an exploratory case study whose main interest is to scrutinize the self-representations and meanings that social actors attach to their experiences (Morowska 2018); it thus follows an interpretivist approach and relies on an ethnographic methodology. Ethnography is a qualitative research method whose aim is to gain a better understanding of a particular socio-cultural group by participating in its activities (Allen 2017). The application of a reflexive and engaged epistemology further challenges this methodological approach. Because it is impossible to provide an exhaustive overview of these trajectories, I can only sketch out how they guided the development of the research. Reflexivity and the idea of partial and situated knowledge (for instance, Haraway 1988) derive from feminist and decolonial theories. It helps to re-define scientific investigation, taking seriously the researcher's embeddedness within the researched phenomenon. It is thereby crucial to define the positioning of the researcher within the social context of the study, for embeddedness is a condition that comes before, and can legitimately shape, the research's design and objectives. This epistemological posture helped give methodological consistency to a way of proceeding that was largely spontaneous. When the 18-O revolt started, I found myself emotionally and personally

involved due to a strong proximity with Chilean matters, even if I am an Italian citizen. The decision to join in the actions of solidarity carried out in my city was therefore taken independently from any research interest.

This stratified involvement in the field leads us to discuss the concept of engagement. Boni et al. (2020) reflect on its political implications, and identify an increasing common sensibility between qualitative social scientists and political activists, whose shared objective is to understand and problematize late-modernity phenomena. In the authors' words, these works are characterized by "*a thick intertwining of political positioning in the relationship between the ethnographer and the context of study*" (2020, 65). The main elements of novelty of this approach are: stressing the researcher's practical – and not only ideational – political involvement in the field, the transformative objectives, and the effort to produce research questions that speak to the social movement's political goals. Hence, the ethnographer's highly politicized engagement leads to a radical reconfiguration of the ethnographic practice in epistemological, methodological and ethical terms. The fact that I assumed an 'activist's perspective' early on might be a reason why my work was immediately welcomed by other activists. They are mainly young Chileans living in Italy, or older political refugees who escaped the Pinochet regime. Leaving aside the difficulties associated with the migratory experience – a condition which is especially true for the latter group – my gender, class and professional background position me close to the bulk of the activists. The fact that we share common political values – I was able to demonstrate good knowledge and sensibility toward the Chilean national context – has further contributed to reciprocal understanding.

Undoubtedly, this approach presents several shortcomings, which I try to briefly and transparently report here. At the epistemological level, a first concern entails the risk of 'going native' and losing the necessary balance between observation and participation. My political involvement in the 18-O is a structural condition that I cannot remove. What I can do is acknowledge it, and be reflexive about "*the impact of this position on the kinds of data collected and the sort of analysis that is possible*" (Boccagni and Schrooten 2018, 209). A second concern entails the overlapping of ethnographic data and interpretation; the former never reflect a 'reality' and are always the result of circumstances and personal choices. Although I believe most social research carries the same risk, it is of course higher when we apply an engaged and ethnographic approach. More practically, the researcher's high degree of proximity can affect selection and sampling. I tried to mitigate this effect and cover the diversity of opinions and experiences present in the empirical field by means of purposive sampling. This technique allows one to carry out the selection in a circular process, in which data collection and analysis are key for the identification of further relevant cases (Barglowski 2018).

A last consideration about my personal positioning concerns the fluidity of solidarity networks, and the temporary and non-exclusive character of contemporary political affiliations. Support actions for the 18-O in Italy have been carried out by a network of diverse actors that have come together for specific and somehow contingent objectives. As Boni et al. note, this makes it easier for any involved subject to simultaneously step inside and outside of a group, and to shift positions more easily than in the past (2020, 79). This is one main reason why this article does not name the organizations or the individual political affiliation of the 'investigated actors.' The second reason depends on the decision not to describe the internal configuration of such a diverse movement. Because the 'organizational connectivity' tying together social movements entails strategic decisions taken by collective subjects, it is my belief that the latter should be the ones to report on these issues in the public debate.

A first set of data was collected by means of participatory observations during my experience as an activist. At the same time, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the political claims of the uprising by exploring digital communication tools. The territorial activities developed in the city of Rome, where I live, are not the only focus of the observations, because social media allowed me to expand the scope of the observations. The timeframe for these activities lasted from October 2019 to March 2020, as the Covid-19 outbreak substantially

reduced the space for political action.[4] In the second phase, carried out during the Italian lockdown (March 2020 – June 2020), I developed a proper 'researcher's perspective.' The imposed distance helped me to identify a specific analytical focus, partially shaped by the desire to match scientific and personal interests. During the summer of 2020, the collected material was complemented with 15 in-depth interviews with activists, all of them conducted remotely. The interviewees were Chileans living in Italy or in other EU countries, and Italians who supported the 18-O. It is important to note that this work makes particular reference to the Chilean-Italian grassroots social relations: the transnational support activities for and the international impact of the movement are therefore observed from this specific position.

Table 1 - Interview List[5]

Quotation reference	Contact	Nationality	Country of residence	Gender	Age proxy
1	Direct	Italian	Italy	Male	25
2	Mediated	Chilean	Italy	Female	40
3	Direct	Chilean	Italy (temporary)	Female	30
4	Mediated	Italian	Italy	Male	30
5	Direct	Chilean	Italy	Male	65
6	Mediated	Chilean	Germany	Female	40
7	Mediated	Italian	Italy	Female	30
8	Mediated	Italian	Italy	Female	25
9	Direct	Chilean	Italy	Female	70
10	Mediated	Chilean	Italy (temporary)	Female	30
11	Mediated	Chilean	Italy	Female	35
12	Direct	Chilean	Spain	Male	40
13	Direct	Chilean	Italy (temporary)	Male	25
14	Direct	Italian	Italy	Male	50
15	Mediated	Italian	Italy	Female	40

5. International resonance

[4] Grassroots movements' re-organization strategies during the Covid-19 lockdowns are, in light of further political developments, topics that go beyond the aim of this research.

[5] Direct = people I personally know; Mediated = people I reached by indirect contacts. The table does not keep track of second citizenships' acquisitions.

The 18-O has had high international resonance. Despite not having quantitative data regarding media reporting on the movement, we can detail at least three important dimensions. First, a composite and geographically scattered network of activists has expressed international solidarity. Second, the symbolic position of Chile and its neoliberal Constitution in worldwide leftist traditions helped attract international attention, at least among people sharing a counter-hegemonic vision. Third, many of its distinctive items became the object of indirect diffusion processes, in which the recognition of similarity led other activists to imitate the repertoires of action (Soule 2004) of the Chilean uprising. In November 2019, U.S. students jumped subway barriers to protest police violence. In many Latin American countries, citizens were inspired to take the streets, using slogans such as "*Now Chile Truly Is A Model*."[6] These two examples show the importance of decentralized, indirect and technologically mediated contacts in the transnationalization of movements' practices. The flow of images, videos and information enabled spontaneous adaptation and creative translation of both slogans and repertoires of action, which proved to be meaningful in other territorial contexts. Indeed, the most famous case is the performance, *Un Violador En Tu Camino*, by the feminist art collective *Las Tesis*, which went viral in a few days and truly became a global feminist symbol.

5.1 The feminist entanglement: from transnational identification to direct interactions

The choice to select feminism as the main example for the indirect transnationalization of contentious frames is due to several reasons, not limited to the popularity of the earlier-mentioned performance. Feminism shows how ideas and experiences from the global South are becoming central to grassroots politics, contributing to the renovation of activism in general. An issue recognized by many Italian activists, especially those who have a strong transnational orientation:

"*The cultural changes in Latin America, not only feminism, but also indigenous and nature rights, can help us re-define social movements' strategies and objectives in Italy and in the North. In my opinion, climate justice claims are an important example of the rise and the unification of previously marginalized struggles, in which a dialogue between South and North perspectives has been fruitfully established.*" [14]

Latin American feminisms have proved to be the most powerful subject for women's struggles globally, gaining high international visibility in the last years. Specific claims and legal battles – such as femicide, domestic violence and abortion rights – play an important role in its appreciation. Third-wave feminism also aims at triggering broad processes of cultural transformation by questioning the very foundations of structural violence deployed by the patriarchal power against all subaltern subjects (Segato 2003; Follegati and Ferretti 2020). Following Gago et al. (2018), the very act of questioning violence from a situated position, but with openness for care and recognition, enables the movement to perform actions, display coordination and draft resonance at the global scale. Local tactics have been appropriated, replicated and re-elaborated worldwide by feminists, whose frames have become truly cosmopolitan without suffering from de-territorialization. Overall, the performance, *Un Violador En Tu Camino*, has been successful not only in identifying a grievance experienced by women in very different local and national contexts, but also in expressing this concept in simple and effective words. Interestingly, the creative linguistic translation of the performance shows the need to make understandable and to appropriate its content. For example, in Rome, a specific line was added by *Non Una Di Meno* activists, saying: "*the fault is not mine, nor in the house, nor in the street*," addressing the enormous number of femicides committed by partners or ex-partners in Italy.

Sharing experiences on the internet is a key factor for this diffusion to take place, but adaptation also opens up political space for brokers, hence for direct diffusion. In line with the literature, we can identify two different

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[6] Notably, the Colombian general strike (21/11/2019).

typologies of actors that greatly contribute to the shift from indirect to relational diffusion; they are the diasporic and the cosmopolitan activists. On the one hand, the very fact that Southern perspectives are increasingly adopted and adapted in the North allows 'marginalized' actors, the diasporic or rootless activists, to express political agency on their own terms, inside and outside of the territorial contexts from which they come. A Chilean student, participating in a feminist art collective working on self-care and formed by Latin-American women living in Italy, put it this way:

"*Feminism gave me the power to defend my opinions. I think Latin American feminisms can contribute a lot to Italian movements by spreading ideas such as sisterhood, cooperation between women, and support to the new generations. My political group aims at being part of this cultural change. This is why we would like to increase the participation of Italian women in our activities.*" [11]

On the other hand, an important role is played by rooted cosmopolitans, such as long-term transnational activists and intellectuals, in bridging different political cultures. For this second typology, many examples are available. Observations in the city of Rome showed how feminism was a characterizing feature of the 18-O network, especially in terms of outsiders' perceptions. In other words, the 18-O activists' position in local grassroots politics was positively influenced by the fact that they were identified as part of the Latin American feminist struggle. Local organizations' (such as squats, cultural associations, unions, students' organizations, etc.) desire to improve their understanding of the former enhanced interactions and exchanges between local and transnational activists. Furthermore, many publications and talks aim at fostering dialogue and drawing connections among territorially dislocated feminisms.[7] These activities contribute to create new networks of activism, and foster the creative re-elaboration of Latin American feminist frames, which provide the Italian-based activists with fertile ground for the development of autonomous initiatives. In the summer of 2020, an exhibit took place across Italy, in which an Italian photographer and activist exposed images of the 18-O protests and invited Chilean activists to engage in a virtual debate with the Italian groups that hosted the events. Lastly, organizations with a strong tradition in the realization of solidarity-oriented trips[8] visited Chile during the uprising. An Italian activist who participated in this trip told me:

"*Our main objective was to learn from the Chilean movement, because we found there what we would like to achieve here. The aim of our trip was to create a bridge between Chile and Italy. In other words, we reported abroad about human right violations and unbearable living conditions, but we also described their methods of contentions and their organizational strategies. In this way, we offered solidarity, while also stimulating people in Italy to take action.*" [8]

Taken together, indirect diffusion fosters the emergence of common cultural and political frames; as a consequence, stratified forms of attachment and self-representation are produced, in which global, national and local narratives interplay. The case of feminism elucidates the crucial role that creative adaptation and common imagination play in the shift from identification between actors that do not have a direct connection to the establishment of people-to-people networks. This process is enhanced by digital communication, but is sustained by specific actors, namely the diasporic and the cosmopolitan activists (Bringel and Marques 2021). In this way, the usual distinction between indirect and direct diffusion mechanisms is blurred (della Porta and Mattoni 2014). In conclusion, feminism represents a successful case in which primary indirect diffusion makes possible both scale-shift and supranational framing. Although the main goal of this movement is to renew the cultural and symbolic frames for feminist contentious action at the global level, specific repertoires of action are also objects of diffusion.

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[7] For example, the publication: Costellazione Femminista (2020), *La Luna Che Muove Le Maree*, Milan: Agenzia X.

[8] Among their trips, there are visits to the independent Kurdish region of Rojava and to the Zapatista communities in Mexico, and the organization of a caravan in solidarity with the migrants on the Balkan route.

6. Transnationalism in everyday lives

This section examines the networks that supported the 18-O from abroad, especially from Italy. As highlighted by the literature, migration and diaspora play a crucial role in the transnationalization of everyday life. The migrants' transnational networks not only include those 'who stay behind' in the society of origin, but also families and friends in the host societies and fellow migrants from other countries. In the context of this movement, various transnational networks connected with one another, influenced each other, and opened up what we have defined as a transnational social field. The previous section focused on a process that proceeds from transnational communication and leads to transnational everyday experiences. Here, the attention shifts toward social interactions almost entirely, even if the two topics can be disarticulated only for theoretical purposes. Section 6.1 charts the trajectories of the 18-O in the transnational arena and in Italy, Section 6.2 describes the movement's ability to foster a meaningful dialogue across different groups, which facilitates the emergence of common political identifications.

6.1 The 18-O network in Italy

In its early days, the uprising clearly prompted emotive reactions among all the people concerned about Chilean matters. We were inundated with confusing news, images of violence, and messages from loved ones asking us to collect and share evidence of violent repression, torture, and missing people. In short, this triggered an outbreak of rage and indignation across the world, feelings that have primarily touched Chileans living abroad.

> I felt powerless and frustrated about not being there, and I wanted to know how I could help from Italy." [11] We could not accept being silent observers anymore. The bigger problem was isolation… but we eventually managed to find each other [6]

People with different personal and migratory backgrounds, as different as exiles and exchange students can be, including the so-called second generations, met up. On the one hand, well-established Chilean civil society and political organizations mobilized,[9] activating their transnational political networks. On the other hand, the uprising triggered the politicization of individuals who did not have any previous involvement in politics. We will latter examine the implications of these uneven transnational experiences and stratified forms of belonging for the social movement. For now, it is sufficient to highlight that the uprising prompted a crisis that was both political and emotional, which allowed for the interaction of many subjects with no previous political connection, or any interaction at all in the host country.

> Soon after the uprising, we [the Chileans in Italy] met up spontaneously… It was an emotional need. When I was a teen, I had plenty of contacts with the diaspora because my parents are exiles, but now it's different. In October, I just wrote a post on Facebook saying that we should have organized something… It was impressive how many people the post reached, both Italians and Chileans. So we started organizing solidarity actions… Despite the oceanic distance, it was like being back in Chile. [2]

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[9] In Italy, there are a few Chilean civil society organizations that have an explicit political aim. Furthermore, after the Pinochet's golpe, the exiles reorganized their political activities in the diaspora. Although these organizations do not exist anymore, many of the participants are still in contact, and can rely on the transnational networks and relationships built at that time.

Public protests were organized in many Italian cities. In Rome and Milan, activists gathered in front of the Chilean Embassy and Consulate. These events were organized thanks to the mobilization of civil society organizations, individual based networks, and social media pages and chats. In this way, many political and personal networks became aware of each other, and soon rallied around a common identification and agency. In the city of Rome, tens of activists (including a few Italians) met up regularly and organized several events, most notably: a sit-in in central *Piazza del Popolo*, which gathered hundreds of people; a public debate at the Basso Foundation;[10] and a fundraising event organized in collaboration with other Latin American collectives at the occupied *Cinema Palazzo*. The participation of political groups was allowed only on an individual basis, but the Chilean activists decided to accept invitations from groups that wanted to hold a public event about the situation in Chile. In this way, an affinity with both local autonomous groups (which often provided meeting places for the activists) and leftist or communist parties was soon acknowledged. In Rome, the 18-O activists participated in a demonstration organized by social centers and independent unions in November 2019, organizing a flash mob, in which they sang the popular song, "*El Derecho de Vivir en Paz.*" They also collaborated with local feminist activists in the organization of the performance, "*Un Violador en tu Camino,*" in front of the National Courthouse. Similar activities took place in many other Italian cities.[11]

At this point, the movement in Italy was able to gather organizations and individuals with diverse ideological stances, although previous political affiliations remained mostly implicit at the beginning. Individuals from a more institutionalized leftist background (social-democratic, socialist or communist), and personally tied to the Italian leftist parties and traditional unions, focused on raising public awareness, promoting online petitions, and seeking the involvement of Italian public figures. They were already participating in the transnational political networks of the Chilean diaspora. [12] Individuals from more radical and less institutionalized political groups collaborated more frequently with the Italian autonomous and anarchist collectives,[13] organizing fundraising activities in squats and pushing for participation in public protests. Furthermore, individuals typically more interested in civic and cultural activism, rather than political action, were also involved and contributed to the organization of solidarity events. Lastly, it is important to mention the participation of newly arrived Chilean migrants, especially students, who were not aware of the Italian political landscape, and of individuals who stressed the importance of being independent from any political and ideological discourse.[14] All in all, several territorial autonomous groups were formed, in which different positions coexisted; they coordinated via a national committee (*Chile Despertó Italia*), and worked in collaboration with many other committees[15] at the international level.

The digital environment, in which transnational support activities coordinate and take place, not only facilitates the communication among territorial groups and the organization of international 'days of protest,' it also constitutes a place in which social interactions and personal networks are maintained and expanded. As we observed through the example of feminism, digitally-mediated relations enable connections among a wide range of actors whose transnational backgrounds are deeply uneven. Interestingly, younger and temporary

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[10] An organization with long-lasting relations with the Chilean and Latin-American diaspora, see Monina A. (2021), *Diritti Umani e Diritti dei Popoli*, Rome: Carocci Editore.

[11] Activities conducted before the national lockdown beginning in March 2020.

[12] Such as the *Red Europea de Los Chilenos por los los Derechos Cívicos y Politicos*.

[13] Among these actors, it is important to mention the Mapuche solidarity groups, who have always kept some distance from the solidarity network and its activities.

[14] This idea of 'political neutrality' was, however, soon abandoned by the network.

[15] The committees' characteristics are not homogenous and greatly depend upon the local context.

migrants have had a leading role in the international coordination. This is the story of a woman who took part in these activities:

> Our working space is the entire world. This has important consequences because we have different time-zones; we work together, but we don't know each other… At the beginning, we used nicknames and the cameras were off for a security matter… Later, we began to be more confident to speak about personal issues; sometimes, we even became friends and met in person [6]

The transnational movement first focused on raising international attention about the impressive amount of human rights violations suffered by protestors in Chile. This represented an important scale-shift for the 18-O, which allowed local activists to gain visibility and consensus abroad. Human rights are a key strategy for many transnational grassroots organizations, for they represent a solid supranational frame. Moreover, these campaigns enable activists to access differentiated forms of participation depending on the territory where each is located. In practical terms, transnational activists brought their reports to the attention of host countries' governments and the EU parliament, collaborated with international human rights NGOs, and managed to present an accusation against Piñera to the International Criminal Court (ICC) of The Hague.

> "At the beginning, we focused on collecting evidence of violations, looking for lawyers, contacting international organizations and governments… It was the most important thing to do, and it was also easier to get foreign nationals' attention and participation on this issue." [3]

Since the decision making for the new Constitution began, the Chilean transnational activists have focused on the right to vote from abroad. Only since 2016, non-resident Chilean citizens can exercise voting rights for presidential elections and referendums, but they still cannot vote in parliamentary elections.[16] Within the trajectory of the 18-O, the voting rights of non-resident citizens have been, and still are, a truly transnational item of contention. An international campaign, carried out by almost 100 grassroots organizations from all around the world,[17] produced several law proposals for the creation of international electoral districts, all of which were rejected.

> "*We want to be part of the entire process, we are not satisfied with just expressing a yes or no at the end, when the Constitution will be already written.*" [3] "*We ended up excluded […], but we will work in order to have this right [to vote for non-resident citizens] in the new Constitution. We live abroad… Fair enough… But this doesn't mean that things happening in Chile do not affect us anymore or that we cease to be nationals!*" [10]

This campaign helped to consolidate the movement at the supranational level, but it also decreased its impact in terms of transnational (ideational and identitarian) framing. In other words, this specific claim determined a partial re-internalization of the struggle, because voting rights is an issue that matters greatly for the Chileans abroad, but it hardly mobilizes foreign activists and public opinion.

6.2 Dialogue across generations and national societies

To understand the reception of the 18-O in Italy, an premise is necessary regarding the political diaspora caused by the dictatorship. As Simalchik puts it: "*Chileans had arrived in exile with little more than memories of their political project in their bags, and these memories were among the first belongings to be laid open*" (2006, 97). They replicated the content and form of their political and commemorative practices abroad and,

[16] The election of the *Convención Constituyente*'s members followed the procedures of a parliamentary election.

[17] https://media.elmostrador.cl/2021/07/CARTA-ABIERTA-A-CONSTITUYENTES-DESDE-EL-EXTERIOR.pdf

by doing so, contributed to the material and symbolic culture of social movements in the receiving countries. In this way, the exiles truly became political brokers on both sides of the ocean, contributing to the socio-cultural development of the host societies, while also fighting for freedom and democracy at home.

> Political activism was our life in Chile… Hence, it was our life in Italy too. Each of us found his or her place, both in terms of work and politics. We have been helped in rebuilding our existence, but we also gave an important contribution to the Italian society, thanks to our socio-political participation. [9]

Due to reasons we cannot examine in detail (Nocera and Rolle Cruz 2010; Quirico and Lomellini 2014), the connection between the Italian and Chilean societies was particularly influential at that time. This facilitated both the horizontal and vertical diffusion of Chilean political practices in Italy. Horizontal, because many cultural elements of this struggle became embedded in the Italian context; vertical, because the Italian civil society showed great solidarity and support. Furthermore, the Chilean socialist experience, and its dramatic end, was largely celebrated by local leftist organizations and parties, and still belongs to those groups' collective memories and identities. From ethnographic observations, informal conversations and interviews with Chileans living in countries other than Italy, it was suggested that Italians participated in the 18-O solidarity network in a way that did not find parallels in other European countries. Drawing on Zamponi (2018), we can argue that the familiar reference to the Chilean context has influenced the reception of the 18-O uprising in Italy, increasing the legitimacy and the space of action for the movement. Overall, the engagement shown by older Italian activists is mainly a consequence of diachronic diffusion. Instead, among Italian younger generations, relevant is the participation of individuals who have had mobility experiences in Chile or in other Latin American countries whose engagement is driven by feelings of affection that are both personal and political. These temporary transnational experiences enable the identification of important similarities between the two territorial contexts, a process that leads to the internalization of the Chilean struggle within their own political and identitarian frames.

> We are aware this is not our own fight. But in Chile, we can see problems, such as the privatization and the commodification of social rights, which will matter a lot in the future of Europe. Here, social movements still discuss these issues in theoretical terms, while in Chile, they are everyday compelling problems. Now that I moved back to Italy [after having lived in Chile], my role is to help the movement gain visibility, and to be a bridge between different political cultures. [7]

As Zamponi argues, "*conducting collective action in a field populated by ghosts of the past*" (2018, 310) poses both challenges to and opportunities for the activists' work. In the early days of the uprising, the Chilean younger generations – born into democracy and here because of voluntary migration – felt astonishment and rage, while older generations experienced complex feelings triggered by embedded memories of the coup. During the entire fieldwork, it was possible to observe a difference between older generations' emphasis on memory and history, and a 'fearless' youth who pointed out the inadequacy of ideology-based politics.

> Dark times of repression are coming back, not only in Chile… Now we live better, so young people take rights for granted; they don't recognize they are the result of the sacrifice of previous generations… We have to fight for our rights, also by keeping the memory alive. [5]

> In Chile, young people don't want to talk about the dictatorship anymore; all my friends are kind of sick of traditional political ideologies […]. Something similar happens in Italy; the media talk about either the dictatorship or the uprising. They never try to put together the entire story, or to understand the medium-term causes of the revolt. [4]

These different perspectives sometimes resulted in minor conflicts related to organizational and communicational choices, but the objectives of the two groups most often converged. In general terms, older activists focused more on the legacy of the dictatorship on the neoliberal and elitist design of the Chilean state, while younger activists highlighted the same problem, putting more emphasis on socio-cultural and identitarian issues. The two perspectives are far from being mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they reinforced each other and together contributed to the broad mobilization of Chileans in Italy. In the opinion of many activists, sharing experiences and practices across generations is one of the most notable outcomes of the 18-O abroad, which brought about renewed and intense feelings of proximity with the home country and the co-nationals.

> We start having a different perspective about our own position in the host country. Generally speaking, we don't share many of the problems that affect the most disadvantaged immigrants, but with the uprising, we became more conscious of our migratory background. [13]

Overall, the Chilean population abroad (exiles, second generations, voluntary migrants, etc.) somehow discovered a shared history and identity thanks to the uprising. We can tentatively define this process of influence as a cross-generational diffusion, in which no clear distinction between transmitters and receivers can be made, because both older and younger activists assimilated elements stemming from the other group in an highly creative and innovative way.

7. Conclusions

Section 5 examined the relationship between indirect diffusion, communication processes, and the emergence of transnational social fields. We dwelled on feminism, because it elucidates the meaningful entanglement between local and global struggles, and the possible outcomes of shifting from symbolic to relational proximity. Communication technologies have been the main trigger for scale-shift and supranational framing, yet the agency of brokers has been equally important in sustaining the process. The sum of mediated interactions and everyday online and onsite relations has gained momentum, reaching a critical point at which those networks are able to influence each other, even without developing an everyday connection. In this way, indirect diffusion grows to impact not only ideational and identitarian frames (Romanos 2016), but also the repertoires of action and the organizational strategies of feminists worldwide.

Section 6 charted a transnational network of activism that proceeds from a complex array of cross-border connections, with national belonging as an important, but not exclusive, driver for activation. The 18-O revolt has primarily fostered the formation and reinforcement of transnational political identities among people with strong transnational personal experiences. Unsurprisingly, activists of Chilean origin have guided and sustained the process of transnationalization. They have been motivated by concerns about human rights violations, and the desire to contribute to institutional change in Chile. Despite the transversal character of their objectives, nuanced distinctions can be drawn about the frames that have informed the political actions of different generations of activists. Individuals and groups of non-Chilean origin have also contributed to the 18-O movement abroad; their participation was driven mainly by ideational and identitarian motivations. They entail feelings of solidarity and transnational belonging strengthened in previous cycles of protests; and a more spontaneous attribution of similarities driven by personal transnational experiences and/or common political frames. Italian activists have also pursued the strategic objective of enhancing collective learning, as we saw in the case of feminism.

Overall, relational and mediated diffusion – driven by migration and brokerage, with youth mobility both from and toward Chile playing an increasingly relevant role – remains the main mechanism for the creation of transnational social fields. However, we also recognize a complementary movement from transnational

political identities to transnational daily interactions. In other words, indirect vertical and horizontal diffusion, attributions of similarity, and solidarity-oriented activities importantly contribute to the establishment of cross-border relationships among people that had not previously know each other. The dual process depicted so far makes more nuanced the traditional divide between different mechanisms of cross-border diffusion. Following G. Schiller once more, we observe a "*growing overlap between transnational connections on the ground and conditions under which ideologies of connection emerge*" (2004, 462). Matching a more structured view on social movements with an ethnographic exploration of transnational practices has proved useful to understand how the interplay of different diffusion mechanisms sustains transnational activism, and to account for the specific role of different typologies of actors. Further research might provide a more systematic account for these dynamics, exploring in greater detail their impacts on the cultural and symbolic features of transnational activism, especially focusing on: 1) the entanglement between digitally-mediated relationships and personal interactions, and its stratified influence on political identities and agency; 2) the role that diachronic diffusion plays in bridging different geographical contexts and political cultures; and 3) the impact of increasingly complex mobility experiences on social movements.

In conclusion, the growing coexistence of transnational ways of being and belonging strengthens and expands the transformative power of social movements in the transnational arena. The 18-O represents a prime example for understanding how the entanglement of different diffusion mechanisms facilitates the recognition of and identification with this struggle by a wide range of (non-Chileans) activists: the symbolic position attributed to Chile in counter-hegemonic politics worldwide; the fact that the 18-O has accomplished the objective of a deep institutional renewal; the agency of exiles as political brokers; and more recent diffusion processes led by the youth.[18] I am aware that this work captures a specific moment in time characterized by high and visible mobilization.[19] This notwithstanding, we follow the assumption that social movements continue working in periods of latency, influencing the next cycles of protests and impacting broader political cultures (Fominaya 2015). Thereby, I believe that by empowering a wide range of cross-border connections, transnational social movements like the 18-O may lead us to a more inclusive understanding of cultural and identity politics at all levels of social interaction.

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[18] Not just feminism, but also the Chilean educational movements (2006 and 2011) not discussed in this paper.

[19] The situation has already changed a few months later, as I write the final draft of this paper.

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