Diaspora and Social Movements: how a distant political issue becomes embedded in the local milieu of activism.

Joan Coma Roura – Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Abstract

Violent conflicts over statehood and sovereignty may involve a diaspora engaged with homeland politics from abroad. Even though these conflicts are closely associated with substantial nationalist claims, they also generate numerous foreign sympathisers. The literature on transnational social movements has paid little attention to transnational activism for national liberation struggles. Moreover, transnational mobilisation studies have centred their analysis on diaspora mobilisation, assuming they must have a leading role and omitting somewhat the role of non-diaspora actors. In contrast, this paper shows how non-diaspora actors may actually assume a leading role, putting pressure on diaspora organisations and causing significant changes on their political commitment.

Literature on global movements has tended to focus on their transnational dimension. However, in order to materialize and develop, transnational movements must rely on well-established national or local movements. Political activism, whether transnational or not, takes place in concrete places with concrete activists. So while there is attention to how local initiatives become national and eventually international, there is less understanding of how a distant and broad-based political movement becomes embedded in the local milieu of activism. Drawing on David Harvey’s thesis of Militant Particularism, and in critical discussion with mainstream transnational contention theories of social movement and diaspora studies, the aim of this paper is to explain how a distant political issue became embedded in a local network of activism. This paper argues that the more diaspora and non-diaspora actors made an effort to link their distant political issue with domestic needs, wants, and desires, the more embedded their distant political cause became within the local network of activism. The privileged positionality that non-diaspora actors enjoy in Diaspora’s hostland facilitates them to exercise a leading role within the solidarity movement. This conclusion is somewhat counterintuitive and has been largely omitted within diaspora studies. The interaction across time between mobilized diaspora actors, host-states’ grassroots organizations, social movements and significant political events is one of the key aspects of the paper.

I address these issues through an analysis of the case of the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona. Since 1987 pro-Palestinian groups and mobilisations have steadily increased. Although in Barcelona there is not a very numerous Palestinian community, they have exhibited a significantly high capacity for regular mobilisation. Compared with other analogous cases, such as the Saharawi, the Palestinian solidarity movement has become strongly embedded into the local network of grassroots activism, NGO’s and movements, despite the fairly small number of Palestinian origin activists and organization. The investigation is carried out through an over-time process-tracing analysis. The analysis is based on some of the 30 semi-structured interviews I conducted with diaspora and non-diaspora actors in Barcelona during 2015. This paper presents some initial findings of my research.
Introduction

This paper deals with diaspora and social movements advocating for long-distance national-liberation movements in ongoing violent conflicts over statehood and sovereignty. These conflicts may involve a diaspora engaged with homeland politics from abroad. Even though these conflicts are closely associated with nationalist claims, they also generate numerous foreign sympathisers. However, diaspora and transnational mobilisation studies have centred their analysis on diaspora mobilisation, assuming they have a leading role and omitting somewhat the role of non-diaspora actors. In contrast, this paper shows that non-diaspora actors may actually assume a leading role, putting pressure on diaspora organisations and causing significant changes on their political commitment.

The literature on transnational social movements has paid little attention to transnational activism for national-liberation struggles (Norman, 2009). Indeed transnational social movements research has tended to focus on transnational advocacy movements for global issues such as the environment and human rights. Moreover mainstream literature on global movements such as the Global Justice Movement has tended to underestimate their local dimension somewhat (Sommier & Fillieule, 2013). However, the transnational implies a local dimension by definition. In order to materialize and develop transnational movements must rely on well-established national or local movements (Bandy & Smith, 2005, p. 233). Transnational activism is therefore domestically rooted (Tarrow, 2011, p. 250). Consequently, the embeddedness of transnational movements within particular networks of activist is crucial to mobilise abroad.

Transnational mobilisation and coalition formation intensify when atrocities occur in the homeland. We already know that differences in the institutional structures of different states produce not only different social movement structures but also may encourage different repertoire of contention (Tarrow, 1996b). Still in periods of emergency protest demonstrations abroad against atrocities in the homeland seem to prevail above other forms of contention. For instance, large demonstrations of support for the Palestinians during the Israeli bombings in the Gaza Strip occurred in Barcelona both in 2009 and 2014. On this subject, in order to explain the dynamics of diaspora mobilisation scholars have focused on hostland political context and on homeland and international political opportunities (see for instance Koinova, 2009, 2011). However, the relation between diaspora actors and social movements requires more scholarly attention. In this regard, I contend that it is critical to pay more attention to the social and political context of the hostland by focussing on the relation between diaspora actors and social movements. It is necessary to understand diaspora mobilisation in relation to the wider social reality in which it takes place. According to Calhoun (2013, p. 26): “movements often proceed in alternating phases of intense public action and seeming dormancy, and much of the work that shapes the long term is in fact done during what appear superficially to be mere spaces between waves of activism”. Consequently, the local context and particular conjunctions of protest actions need to be critically taken into account. It is extremely important therefore to analyse what happens in these spaces between waves of activism, in concrete places and communities.

There is a recent tendency in scholarship to pay more attention towards the social and political context of the hostland (see, for instance, Koinova & Karabegovic, 2016; Koinova, 2015). This latest research shows, for instance, how specific hostland contexts can facilitate diaspora mobilization (Koinova & Karabegovic, 2016). It seems reasonable to assume that the presence and strength of organised diaspora and other networks and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and activist groups, and engagement with them can significantly shape both mobilisation capacity abroad and different degrees of transgressivity. Since embeddedness within the local network of activism is crucial to mobilise abroad, what
is worth to ask is how a distant political issue is progressively introduced and embedded into the local network of activism?

I address this main research question through the examination of the successful of the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona. Compared with other analogous cases, such as the Saharawi, the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona has become strongly embedded into the local network of grassroots activism, NGO’s and movements, despite the fairly small Palestinian community in the city. There is evidence that since the 1980s onwards Palestinian solidarity groups and mobilisations have steadily increased in Barcelona. Whereas the first Palestinians arrived in Barcelona in the early 1970s, and the Palestinian Community in Barcelona was created in 1984, the first large solidarity action took place in the outbreak of the First Palestinian Intifada in 1987. It was a concert organised by the Palestinian Community in Barcelona in collaboration with several Catalan leftist and pro-independence organizations. Since then there have been numerous activities in support of the Palestinians in Barcelona. The most crowded has been the demonstration of January 2009 mobilisation, with about 100,000 people mobilised in the streets of Barcelona protesting against the Israeli bombings in the Gaza Strip. Almost 30 years of solidarity movements with the Palestinians in Barcelona, with several activities and mobilisations, are an evidence of continued collective action. What is most significant is how Palestinian solidarity activities have become something almost quotidian in the daily life of a city such as Barcelona.

The investigation is carried out through an over-time process-tracing analysis which allows identifying explanations about specific relationships between actors and contexts in different episodes (George & Bennett, 2005). The analysis is based on some of the 30 semi-structured interviews I conducted with diaspora and non-diaspora actors in Barcelona during 2015. The main purpose of this paper is to present a theoretical framework of analysis and some preliminary findings. Latest research on diaspora mobilisation have introduced a social movement approach on diaspora studies (Koinova & Karabegovic, 2016; Koinova, 2015). My research aims to enhance this line by incorporating David Harvey’s dialectical theory of Militant Particularism. Harvey’s theory strengthens the analysis by involving the interaction of opposites. I hypothesize that a foreign political external issue becomes embedded within the local network of activism by linking the distant political cause with local needs, wants and desires. Conversely, an external political cause will hardly become integrated within local social networks through totally abstract or essentialistic terms. In this regard, it is crucial to focus on the historical formation and evolution of the actors – diaspora and non-diaspora – that have a leading role in the process of translation / theorization between different levels of abstraction.

Diaspora and Social Movements

Diasporas are politically important in numerous ways (see Vertovec, 2005). As compared to other types of diaspora, stateless diaspora communities’ political activity is significantly higher. Especially if they are united around an idea of secession and/or there is a on-going conflict in the homeland (Baser & Swain, 2010). Moreover when a diaspora see their homeland as occupied transnational mobilization seems particularly important (Lyons & Mandaville, 2012). Noticeably diaspora mobilisation has become of increasing interest to scholars of transnational political contention. For instance, whether conflict-generated diasporas are likely to be radical or moderate actors in world politics is a question that is attracting growing scholarly attention especially after September 11, 2001 (Baser & Swain, 2010; Koinova, 2011; Vertovec, 2006). Through externalization domestic actors mobilize against foreign or international actors seeking the assistance of international allies (Tarrow, 2011, pp. 254–255). In this scenario diasporas
can play a significant role in strengthening the support base of the movement’s abroad (Rigby, 2009) not only reporting but also establishing coalitions abroad.

Yet the literature on diaspora politics and contested sovereignty tends to adopt a very essentialistic approach\(^1\). Although most of the scholars acknowledge that diasporas are not unitary actors and consist of different individuals and sub-groups, they nevertheless essentialize diasporas (Koinova & Karabegovic, 2016; Koinova, 2012). The dichotomy either peace-makers or peace-wreckers needs to be problematized since it is unsatisfactory to understand both the role of diaspora in homeland conflicts and the role of other transnational activists. On the one hand, there is vast evidence that migrant political engagement from abroad with their polities of origin does exist. However, this involvement from abroad is far from being homogeneous and socially unbounded. Indeed, it is regularly performed by a small minority and tends to reproduce pre-existing power asymmetries (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003, p. 1211). On the other hand, diaspora studies tend to overlook the role of non-diaspora activists and potential alliances with local and transnational social movements. This may happen because the concept of diaspora “ whilst focusing on transnational processes and commonalities, does so by deploying a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of ‘origin’ in constructing identity and solidarity. In the process it also fails to examine trans-ethnic commonalities and relations and does not adequately pay attention to differences of gender and class” (Anthias, 1998, p. 558). Brubaker (2002) calls “groupism” this tendency to take groups for granted in the study of ethnicity, race and nationhood, in general, and in the study of ethnic, racial and national conflicts in particular. Classic IR theories such as Realism or Liberalism are not well equipped to unpack diaspora since they are not intended “to account for international relations involving ethno-national diversity on levels different than the “group” (Koinova, 2012). This weakness not only occludes within diaspora diversity but it also occludes the ways in which diaspora are linked to wider social realities and consequently hinders the analysis for instance omitting the potential role of non-diaspora actors in expanding the transnational movement abroad. In this regard, the literature on social movements might actually help to analyse and explain diaspora activism in a more systematic way (Baser & Swain, 2010, p. 42). Indeed, leading diaspora scholars such as Fiona B. Adamson (2012) and Maria Koinova (2016; 2015) have already started to offer a social movement perspective on the conditions and mechanism for sustained diaspora mobilization.

However, contemporary social movement’s theories are one-sided in two ways. On the one hand, theories such as the ‘Collective Behaviour’ approach, ‘Resource mobilisation’ theory, the ‘Political Process’ argument, the ‘Dynamics of Contention’ school, the ‘New Social Movement’ theory, or newest ‘multi-institutional’ approaches are on-sided in the sense that they all take elements that researchers find overlooked in existing research “and raise them to the status of the most important thing to explain or most important explanation of social movement action” (Krhinsky, 2014, pp. 105–107). For instance, whereas resource mobilisation theories stresses on movement’s organisational capacities and elite-allies, New Social Movement theory focuses on activists’ collective identities, and the Dynamics of Contention research program and more ‘strategic’ approaches argues for including even diverse, situated actions, and dilemmas in the analysis of social movements (Krhinsky, 2014, p. 107). This does not mean that their insights are not worthy. Rather, the issues they focus on are undoubtedly relevant. The problem is that while they

\(^1\) Important see Koinova 2016, for instance: “We use Adamson and Demetriou’s (2007) definition of ‘diaspora’: ‘a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links’. Diasporas are not unitary actors and can consist of different individuals and sub-groups, among them different migration waves and generations.”
all suggest different and significant facets of movement dynamics, they “do so as if they were unconnected to each other, or imply that their collisions are contingent rather than systematic” (Krinsky, 2014, p. 104). My approach tries to overcome such disconnection.

This problem parallels with David Harvey’s critique on the “postmodern preoccupation with the particularity and singularity of resistance” (Barker, Cox, Krinsky, & Nilsen, 2013b, p. 7). Indeed, “most students of 'social movements' work with a background assumption: that social movements are many, disconnected from each other, and thus capable of being studied in isolation from each other. That assumption has become a kind of taken-for-granted common sense, which structures much important work” (Barker, 2014, p. 50). Whereas Harvey’s critique refers to the parcelling of the research on social movements according the concrete goal-issue of the movement under study, delinking them to wider social realities, Krinsky’s argument points to a similar partition of the social reality, materialised on concrete facets of movement dynamics. Neither compartmentalization helps to fully understand the reality under study. Moreover, the literature on social movements – whether local or transnational – has increasingly ignored the ways in which capitalism shapes social movements (Barker, Cox, Krinsky, & Nilsen, 2013a; della Porta, 2015). The argument is that “class politics” had been supplanted by “identity politics” (Barker et al., 2013b, p. 5). Consequently, the enabling and constraining effects of capitalism alongside its varieties and dynamics have been largely ignored. Under this perspective what is at risk is the ability to unearth “how struggles in different socio-spatial arenas and across spatial scales might link with one another” (Hart, 2002, p. 819). Thus, not only links and embeddedness within activists’ networks is crucial for social movements to mobilize satisfactorily (della Porta & Diani, 2006; Nicholls, 2003, 2009; Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012), as will be shown in the following section, but to understand and explain diasporas they need to be analysed in relation to other social movements, organisations and protests. A part must be examined in relation with the totality in which it occurs. It has been David Harvey who “has argued strongly that the postmodern preoccupation with the particularity and singularity of resistance occludes the ways in which “militant particularisms” are linked to wider social realities” (Barker et al., 2013b, p. 7). In this regard, I consider that David Harvey’s theory of Militant Particularism is particularly useful to analyse the process of embeddedness of the Palestinian solidarity movement in a concrete context.

The importance of becoming embedded

Following Harvey (2001) a relational approach to the human being emphasises upon our porosity in relation to the world. Our understandings are mainly formed by our ordinary activities. This noticeably limits our vision of the possible. It is hard to see much further than the horizon largely defined by our daily positions. This relational conception of the person “highlights how the struggle to think alternatives – to think and act differently – inevitably runs up against the circumstances of, and the consciousness that derives from, a localized daily life and the way the political person gets constructed.” Our embeddedness within larger collectivities limits our capacities to think alternatives because “the norms of behaviour and of belonging that define social solidarities operate as constraints” (Harvey, 2001, pp. 200–202). Consequently it also limits our attention to distant issues. On the other hand, however, it is necessarily within these collectivities where explorations for alternatives occur. For a distant issue movement it is therefore crucial to penetrate within these collectivities in order to resonate abroad.

The introduction of a distant political issue in a particular context faces significantly higher barriers than the spread of a local political claim. Typically, activists are “embedded in strong tie relations with allies in their localities. These strong ties relations provide a distinctive set of resources (emotional, material, and
symbolic) that are essential for successful mobilisations” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 78). Diaspora actors may facilitate ties with distant allies. Diaspora relative autonomy vis-à-vis their homeland and their positionality within the hostland are factors that may significantly shape domestic alliances and mobilisation abroad (Koinova, 2012). One of my working hypothesis is that the less autonomy vis-à-vis their homeland the more difficult will it be for diaspora actors to become embedded within a distant local network of activism. On the other hand, competition and cooperation dynamics between diaspora and non-diaspora actors are key factors. For instance, a leading role of non-diaspora actors within the whole Palestinian solidarity movement may impel political commitment within diaspora organisations. Non-diaspora actors can act easier as brokers between the solidarity movement and local social movements rather than a diaspora community organisation. Moreover, once non-diaspora groups lead the solidarity movement diaspora actors can hardly maintain a dependent position vis-à-vis their homeland political elites if they pretend to participate within the broader movement. In this regard homeland-independent diaspora individuals, such as “political entrepreneurs who have made their professional success without participation in homeland businesses, politics, or academic networks and who enjoy official legal status in another state” (Koinova, 2012), may see this situation as a window of opportunity to occupy leading roles within their communities.

In the case of the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona, non-diaspora organisations provoked significant changes on the political commitment of the Palestinian community in Barcelona in the early 2000. The dispute between non-diaspora actors (mainly grassroots movements) and diaspora organisation in the early 2000 signified a turning point (MJ. Xarxa d’Enllaç amb Palestina. Interview. 03 June 2015). Non-diaspora actors’ exhibited a major mobilisation capacity during the Israeli offensive in the West Bank (2002) and since then they progressively assumed a leading role within the Palestinian solidarity movement which prompted its embeddedness within the network of activism in Barcelona. At the same time, there were also changes within the Palestinian Community. On the one hand, powerful individuals with higher autonomy vis-à-vis homeland political elites and official diaspora organisation assumed a leading role within the diaspora organisation. On the other hand, the Palestinian Community diminished its organising role within the Palestinian solidarity movement actions. The exceptions are the more commemorative events such as the Palestinian Nakba. Indeed these kinds of events are strongly defended by diaspora members as their property (SA. Comunitat Palestina. Interview. 14 May 2015). These changes not only reflected the proliferation of non-diaspora organisations advocating for the Palestinians in Barcelona, and their leading role within the Palestinian solidarity movement, but also the increasing autonomy of Diaspora Community concerning their homeland political elites. This increased autonomy is reflected with the growing split between the Palestinian Community in Barcelona and the Palestinian Community in Madrid which enjoys of considerably less autonomy vis-à-vis homeland political elites.

To become embedded within larger collectivities abroad it is crucial to enhance mobilizations beyond their borders. Research on social movement has shown that networks play a chief role in mobilizations, especially coordinating principal activities and tasks (Routledge 2003; Diani 2005; Diani and Bison 2004; Tarrow and McAdam 2005 mentioned in Nicholls, 2009, p. 78; Uitermark & Nicholls, 2012). In my research I contend that the ability to cope with challenges and magnify their resonance of Palestinian solidarity movements largely depends on how Palestinian solidarity movements are connected between them, to transnational activist networks and especially on their ability to connect with local political activism. In this regard, the leading role of non-diaspora actors, not only with easier connections with local organisations but also with significant transnational connections, facilitated a significant grown of the pro-Palestinian movement in Barcelona during the 2000s, with considerably more regular and bigger mobilisation capacity. Furthermore, activist’s connections with the Anti-War Movement had a clear multiplier effect from 2003 onwards.
To sum up, repeated collaborations between different organisations heighten capacities to mobilise significant resources to various collectives efforts (Nicholls, 2003, 2009). Moreover, embeddedness in social networks not only facilitates recruitment but also help maintaining commitment (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 118). All this points to the importance of becoming embedded in the local activists’ milieu in order to mobilize satisfactorily abroad. However, this does not mean that activists and organisations advocating for different issues became bound to one another in constant coalitions of struggle. These ties are especially important in critical situations because they allow different organisations “to draw on norms, trust, frames and solidarities to quickly re-group and fight another battle”. Furthermore, embeddedness also functions “as a bridge between specific campaigns and cycles of resistance” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 84). An example of this process was seen in the demonstration of January 2009, against the Israeli bombings in Gaza, which took to the streets of Barcelona about 100,000 people.

Through the examination of a successful case such as the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona – which have become strongly embedded into the local network of activism – we can detect some of the major barriers as well as windows of opportunity in order to construct local solidarities and political cohesion. Examining how activist have intended to overcome such difficulties and how actors try to take advantage of opportunities, and the expected power struggles that any process of this kind contain, can unveil some clues and possibilities of insurgent forms of change and the quest for social justice (Harvey, 2001, p. 192). Besides the importance of this process, transnational social movements’ scholars have mainly focused on the process of generalization of contentious politics from the local to national and transnational level. The literature has largely ignored the obverse process: the scaling down from the global to a multitude of national, regional, and local settings. In the following sections I claim the need to pay more attention to this process and purpose David Harvey’s Militant Particularism theory as a necessary dialectical device to incorporate in the analysis of diaspora and social movements.

**Downward Scale Shift and Militant Particularism**

Transnational social movements’ scholars have mainly focused on the process of generalization of contentious politics from the local to national and transnational level. From Keck and Sikkink (1998) work on transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics to the Dynamics of Contention (DOC) research program on transnational social movements of the late Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam (see, for instance, Doug McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2004, 2008; Tarrow & McAdam, 2005; Tarrow, 1996a, 2005, 2010), scholars have mainly focussed on the process of generalisation from the concrete to the global. Whereas Keck and Sikkink called this process “boomerang pattern”, DOC program use the term “scale shift” to describe a very similar process. DOC distinguishes two kinds of scale shift: upward and downward scale shift.

In *Dynamics of Contention* Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly defined the process of scale shift as “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious action leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (Doug McAdam et al., 2004, p. 331). It is critical to note that “shifts in scale are not simply the reproduction, at a different level, of the claims, targets, and constituencies of the sites where contention begins; they produce new alliances, new targets, and changes in the foci of claims and perhaps even new identities” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 121). In the same line, Soule (2013) defines scale shift as “the process by which issues that are important to certain localities resonate with, and are adopted by, others in places situated either above or below the origin” (Soule, 2013). In this regard, mainstream authors essentially analysed cases of upward scale shift: instances
in which local contentious episodes expand outward and upward from the local level to the state, federal, or transnational (Soule, 2013). However, scholars have also developed the notion of downward scale shift to refer to the obverse process: the scaling down from the global to a multitude of national, regional, and local settings, that is, the adoption of a global or national practice at a lower level (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005, p. 125).

Downward scale shift has not been the main concern of transnational politics scholars. One of the few examples that DOC program has examined is that of the spread of the World Social Forum from Porto Alegre in 2001 to several Western cities (See Hadden & Tarrow, 2007; Tarrow, 2005). According to Tarrow and McAdam (2005, in McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2008: 311) “precisely because the expansion of transnational contention in recent decades has fascinated students of contentious politics, we know much more about upward than downward scale shift”. This argument points directly to the parcelling out of almost everything in the study of the social reality (Barker et al., 2013a) which splits processes such as transnational contention in disconnected parts. On the contrary, I contend that although externalisation and internalization processes are distinctive moments within our conceptual operations and practical engagements then neither can be separated from the other. Consequently this research assumes that externalisation is not fully accomplished without its process of internalization, namely, upward scale shift is not fully explained without its process of downward scale shift. The puzzle is to explain how a particular movement is introduced in a distant polity.

Authors tend to situate scale shift alongside a vertical axis the displacement of a political issue, either above (upward) or below (downward). Tarrow (2005, p. 121), for instance, considers that “at the core of scale shift is the process of diffusion (...) but where ordinary diffusion is horizontal and has an initiator and an adopter, scale shift involves the coordination of episodes of contention on the part of larger collectivities against broader targets, new actors, and institutions at new levels of interaction”. Soule argues that “scale shift is thus a specific kind of diffusion; it is vertical rather than horizontal” (Soule, 2013). However, in The New Transnational Activism, Tarrow (2005, p. 122) assures that “to come into effect internationally, scale shift must cross two distinct dimensions: the horizontal spatial divide between different political cultures and the vertical gaps between levels of the international system”. Thus, to come into effect internationally, scale shift actually includes both vertical and horizontal displacements. Structural changes such as technological innovations have facilitated transnational scale shift but to come into effect scale shift the work of activists is indispensable (Tarrow, 2005, pp. 122–124). It is therefore crucial to identify actors and analyse their actions and roles, and it is equally important to employ the double dimension – vertical and horizontal – in the analysis.

In order to solve the puzzle of how a particular movement is introduced in a distant polity through diaspora and non-diaspora actors, I consider that it is necessary but not sufficient to bring a social movement approach into diaspora studies. The theoretical framework of analysis must include a perspective which allows us to analyses the externalisation – internalisation process in a dialectic way. In this regard, from a significantly different perspective, David Harvey has also paid attention to this process through the theory of Militant Particularism. However, Harvey’s insights have been employed neither within diaspora studies nor with mainstream social movements’ literature. The introduction of David Harvey’s theory in diaspora and social movement studies is one of the main contributions of my research.

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Militant Particularism

Following the Welsh academic Raymond Williams, David Harvey is strongly attached to the thesis of Militant Particularism. This theory holds that “all politics (of no matter what sort and no matter whether it is local, urban, regional, national or global in focus) have their origins in the collective development of a particular political vision on the part of particular persons in particular places at particular times” (Harvey, 2001, p. 190). Since “politics is always embedded in ‘ways of life’ and ‘structures of feeling’ peculiar to places and communities” (Harvey, 2000, p. 55), generalized and universalized principles unavoidably emerge from the affirmative experience in concrete places. Thus social and political engagements are grounded on some kind of militant particularism (Harvey, 1996, p. 32).

In the social world there are multiple and somewhat disconnected political struggles and social movements. In the light of this variety militant particularism theory presumes that “an undercurrent of grassroots ferment is omnipresent in all places and localities, though its interests, objectives and organizational forms are typically fragmented, multiple and of varying intensity” (Harvey, 2001, p. 190). Accordingly in order to arrive at some conception of a more global if not universal politics one of the main challenges that localized and particularistic struggles face is to be able to transcend their own particularities (Harvey, 2001, p. 193). For Harvey to overcome this challenge “requires a common language, a coherent politicised discourse” capable to go beyond particularities, overcome fragmentation, and build a broader movement with more universal impact (Harvey, 2001, p. 197). Conversely, I hypothesize that for a distant political cause to be introduced into a fragmented heterogeneity of grassroots movements it requires a capacity to fragment its discourse. Similar mechanisms of those identified by Mische (2008) in a study of Brazilian social movements are to be found. Sometimes activist may merge identities highlighting the “common ground” that make it possible to fuse diverse identities together whereas other times activists may carefully segment their identities in order to narrow the scope of identification. With these processes activists are activating and deactivating distinct networks of relations (Mische, 2008, p. 48). Throughout my case study I expect to find an effort to multiply the range of identities in order to insert a foreign political issue into the fragmented social life of a concrete place. Indeed, in many of the interviewed actors we can see how they focus on different aspects in function of the targeted audience. For instance, feminist organisations participating in the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona focus on the situation of women under the Israeli occupation. They link their cause with that of the Palestinians as a way to reach non-previously-committed people (MP. Dones x Dones. Interview. 25 March 2015). BDS activists focus on nationalism, international law and human rights, or internationalism and anti-imperialism in function of the expected audience (MM. BDS. Interview. 13 March 2015). The dialectics between “compartmentalizing strategies” which “narrow the scope of identification” and “conflation strategies” that “highlight the “common ground” that make it possible to fuse diverse identities together” (Felleti & Lynch, 2008) is crucial to understand how a distant political issue has been progressively introduced within a particular social environment.

Regarding localized and particularistic struggles, Harvey (2001, p. 190) maintains that the question is to know how and when these struggles “become internally coherent enough and ultimately embedded in or metamorphosed into a broader politics” (Harvey, 2001, p. 190). In this regard, he contends that the universalism to which socio-political projects such as socialism aspire has to be built “by negotiation between different place-specific demands, concerns, and aspirations” (Harvey, 2000, p. 55). Since there are many different place-specific demands, concerns, and aspirations in the world, there cannot only be one but several socialisms. The same reasoning works for any political idea forget out of the affirmative experience in a concrete place that gets generalised and spreads beyond its originating confines. In order to spread abroad political projects need to be adapted to broad geographic diversity and deep cultural
differences around the world. In my case study, ideas forget out of the affirmative experience in Palestine need to be adapted in Barcelona, a distant militant particularism context. This move from one place to another implies, on the one hand, an abstraction process from particular instances and circumstances (generalisation, universalization) and, on the other, a materialisation process through particular actions in particular circumstances (localisation). These two moments need to be analysed and understood dialectically.

Universals can only exist in relation to particular persons in concrete places in particular historical moments. Although universals appear under the guise of abstract principles “they are not free standing nor do they function as abstracted absolutes that can be brought to bear upon human affairs for all times and places”. Straightforwardly universals do not exist “outside the political persons who hold to them and act upon them” (Harvey, 2000, p. 247). Indeed “universality always exists in relation to particularity: neither can be separated from the other even though they are distinctive moments within our conceptual operations and practical engagements” (Harvey, 2001, p. 194). Harvey puts the example of social justice, which “acquires universality through a process of abstraction from particular instances and circumstances, but, once established as a generally accepted principle or norm, becomes particular again as it is actualized through particular actions in particular circumstances” (Harvey, 2001, p. 194). This is the process analysed in my research through the successful development of a Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona since the early seventies to the present days. The Palestinian cause has become progressively particular again in Barcelona as it has been actualized through particular actions. In other words, the Palestinian cause has been gradually actualized in Barcelona as it has become embedded within several particularistic and localized struggles. What is worth to ask is how a distant political issue has been progressively introduced and embedded into the local network of activism? To answer this question we need to look at through the other end of the analytical telescope.

Viewed through the other end of the analytical telescope militant particularism and grassroots activism is understood as “a particular kind of collective expression of personal and individual needs, wants and desires” (Harvey, 2001, p. 200). It is fundamental “to see urban social movements as mediators and militant particularism as a translation from the personal to a broader terrain of politics” (Harvey, 2001, p. 207). At this level we can see a different kind of dialectic at work which helps us to analyse, understand and explain how a distant issue is introduced into the local network of activism. Such as socialism or liberalism, the universalism to which an external political issue aspires has to be built by negotiation between different place-specific demands, concerns, and aspirations. Consequently an external political cause will hardly become integrated within indigenous social networks through totally abstract or essentialistic terms. On the contrary, I hypothesize that the more diaspora and non-diaspora actors make an effort to link their distant political issue with domestic needs, wants, and desires, the more embedded their distant political cause will become within the local network of activism. In this line, abstractions also need to be easily linked with domestic needs, wants, and desires in order to work. By the same token, the embeddedness of a distant political movement within a particular context will also be reflected in the issues, practices, skills, idioms and imaginaries deployed in their actions (Nilsen & Cox, 2014). It is therefore crucial to focus on the historical formation and evolution of actors that can mediate the dialectic between particularity and universality, namely, the process of translation (Harvey, 2001) or theorization (Tarrow, 2005) between different levels of abstraction.
Mediating Institutions: diaspora and non-diaspora actors

The process of translation between different levels of abstraction (between particularities and universals) is carried out through several mediating institutions. Within the current capitalist system the state and all its institutions are the primary mediators. However, other institutions such as non-governmental and civic organizations, grassroots movements, and also powerful individuals with particular interests, do play this mediating role. Mediating institutions not only intervene between particular and universal principles but they also act as protectors and arbiters of their application. As such they became centres of power that can favour certain particularities over other and promote a particular kind of universal. Their historical formation is of crucial importance (Harvey, 2001, pp. 194–195). Furthermore it is fundamental to bear in mind that in this process of translation between different levels of abstraction something may be altered. The move from one conceptual world, attached to place, to another, attached to another place, can actually transform the popular purpose and principles that ground the militant particularism achieved in particular places (Harvey, 1996, p. 33). Scale shifts may produce “new alliances, new targets, and changes in the foci of claims and perhaps even new identities” (Tarrow, 2005, p. 121). In order to explain the historical formation of Palestinian solidarity mediating institutions in Barcelona, alongside the process of localisation that they are involved in, process tracing analysis allows identifying explanations about specific relationships between actors and contexts in different episodes (George & Bennett, 2005).

Under this perspective in order to understand the introduction of a distant issue within a particular milieu it is necessary to explain the progressive formation of such mediating institutions. These mediating institutions are not “free-floating or outside of the process-thing dialectic of the social process as a whole”. On the contrary, we can identify “layers of mediating institutions, often organized into some rough hierarchy, operating as transmission centers through which social processes unevenly flow” (Harvey, 2001, pp. 195–196). In the case of the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona the opposition, for instance, between the Catalan Government (historically in the hands of the right and significantly pro-Israel) and the Barcelona Council (historically in the hands of the left and significantly pro-Palestinian) may have acted as a mechanism for the formation and growth of the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona. Harvey (2001, p. 196) contends that local governments not only can act as “a mediator to impose upon grassroots movements a logic derived from, say, competitive globalization” but they can also act “as an oppositional rather than a compliant force in relation to, say, neoliberal market forces”. Whereas Harvey puts the example of Porto Alegre, which organised the First World Social Forum in 2001 that has become a noteworthy seedbed for some alternative at the grassroots level, the Barcelona government has deliberately incentivised the formation of a Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona since the mid of the Oslo Process in the nineties and especially with the outbreak of the Second Intifada in the 2000s through several initiatives such as the “Barcelona per Palestina” solidarity program in 2002 (P. Barcelona City Council. Interview. 22 December 2015). The interaction between public institutions and movements play a significant role in all this process (Tarrow, 2010). Indeed, the empowerment of the Palestinian solidarity movement to a certain extent prompted by the Barcelona government through specific programs and financial aid also facilitated the shift in the leadership of the Palestinian solidarity movement, from the Palestinian Community to non-diaspora actors.

Likewise it is also crucial to identify how these different actors translate the same political issue from one conceptual world – Palestine – to another such as Barcelona. Any political issue that intends to shift in scale “has to find a way to cross that problematic divide between action that is deeply embedded in place, in local experience, power conditions and social relations to a much more general movement” (Harvey, 1996, p. 399). This also means that distant-issue activists need to translate their distant claims in a way that
echoes in a concrete *place*, with its particular local experience, actors, power conditions and social relations. This is the process that explains the localisation of a foreign political cause in a particular context. This is actually what has happened in Barcelona since the arrival of the first Palestinians, in the early 1970s, until current days. A significant set of institutions, mainly non-governmental and civic organizations, as well as significant individuals (diaspora entrepreneurs, for instance), have been progressively established in Barcelona. Both competition and cooperation between diaspora and non-diaspora Palestinian solidarity actors, and their relations with the local and transnational activism\(^3\), is crucial to understand the historical formation of a significant and sustained pro-Palestinian movement in Barcelona. Furthermore, their development is also shaped by the broader social contexts of which they are part.

The theory of militant particularism also underscores how grassroots movements internalize political, economic and ideological effects from the broader social context of which they are a part (Harvey, 2001, p. 205). This indispensable observation helps to shed some more light in the analysis. The historical formation of Palestinian solidarity mediating institutions in Barcelona and the introduction of this distant political cause within this context also needs to be analysed in relation with other international political events such as the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001) and the Iraq War (2003-2011) and the solidarity and protest movements they fostered alongside the activity in Barcelona of other global social movements such as the Global Justice Movement in the 1990s or the Anti-globalization movement in the early 2000s. For instance, whereas the institutional initiatives that the Barcelona City Council took in the nineties to strengthen solidarity with Sarajevo served as a precedent in the early 2000s to promote (from above) grassroots solidarity with the Palestinian people under siege in the West Bank (FF. Barcelona City Council. Interview. 22 December 2015), the 2003 anti-Iraq War movements and protests acted as a window of opportunity for the Palestinian solidarity organisations (JMN & TB. SODEPAU. Interview. 31 March 2015). In this context the Palestinian cause received significant interest from other grassroots movements and organisations also involved within the Anti-War platform. Palestinian solidarity activists and organisations took advantage of such window of opportunity and experienced a significant growth in the first decade of the 21st century. These protest events became “contact points”: places where diverse activists can interact in a non-competitive environment that creates opportunities for further cooperation (Nicholls, 2009). This receptivity and cooperation was explicitly reflected, for instance, in the first Mediterranean Social Forum that was held in Barcelona on June 16-18 2005, attracting between 4,500 and 5,000 participants, which counted on the presence of several organizations and activities in support of the Palestinian people.

Militant particularism theory is therefore particularly useful in order to analyze what happens in a particular context in relation with the totality. This is particularly valuable since activists tend to concentrate their actions to their immediate environments rather than on distant ones. This does not mean to ignore the transnational dimension. In this regard, Kathryn Sikkink (2005), following a line of research that began with her important collaborative work with Margaret Keck in the 1990s (Keck and Sikkink 1998), contends that “domestic political change is closer to home and more directly addresses the problems activists face, so they will concentrate their attention there” (Sikkink, 2005, p. 165). When struggling for a rather distant political issue transnational activist have multiple and compelling pragmatic reasons to focus on domestic structures rather than on foreign ones. They may see more fruitful to concentrate their efforts at home because they reasonably consider that they have more knowledge of their own political environment or simply because it is cheaper in general terms. Moreover they may also see local activism less risky than activism abroad. Partisanship activism employing civil disobedience tactics may backfire since it can be easily framed as an aggression by the repressive state (Coy, 2012, p. 15). Besides the role of

\(^3\) The relations between mediating institutions such as for instance NGO’s, cultural organisations, and grassroots movements may be, for instance, highly conditioned by the kind of universal they seek to achieve.
transnational activist may cause divergences within nonviolent resistance groups (Norman, 2009, p. 210). Moreover distant activists may encourage inappropriate agendas (Bob, 2005, p. 184). All these compelling reasons to act at home do not mean that solidarity groups refuse international institutions or transnational channels when advocating. On the contrary “activists which have learned how to use international institutions in an earlier boomerang phase will keep this avenue open in case of need”. Sikkink expects that in insider-outsider coalitions domestic activists will “privilege domestic political opportunities, but will keep international activism as a complementary and compensatory option” (Sikkink, 2005, p. 165). In this regard, many of the Palestinian solidarity movements in Barcelona privilege domestic political opportunities rather than international avenues. Besides pragmatic reasons mentioned above this is actually expectable because they main role is to put pressure on domestic actors in order to cut their relations with external actors and consequently empowering the leverage of the oppressed in the homeland (boomerang pattern). By the same token, the prevailing of domestic political opportunities also gives some advantage to non-diaspora actors. Their privileged positionality within their homeland – Diaspora’s hostland – facilitates them to exercise a leading role. This conclusion is somewhat counterintuitive and has been largely omitted within diaspora studies. However, both diaspora actors and transnational activism are also crucial in localising a foreign political cause.

On the one hand, diaspora qualifies actions carried out by mostly non-diaspora activists. The whole interviewees highlight the importance of diaspora actors’ presence in their organised events in order to increase legitimacy. Moreover, diaspora enjoy of direct ties with Palestinians in their homeland. It is very recurrent, for instance, to invite Palestinian activists in Barcelona to give a talk about their situation. On the other hand, transnational activism appears to be crucial in order to generate new activists. This can be seen, for instance, with the case of the Xarxa d’Enllaç amb Palestina (XEP). The main goal of this grassroots organisation, established in Barcelona in 2002, was to promote reciprocal solidarity and knowledge between the Catalan and the Palestinian people mostly through sensitivity activities in Barcelona and facilitating international mobility to Palestine. Between 2003 and 2009 more than 250 Catalans visited the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) through this organisation (Pardo, 2009). Della Porta and Tarrow (2005) argue that cognitive change within and relational changes between actors are fundamental to enhance transnational collective action. One of the relational mechanisms that can bring together national actors in transnational coalitions is the increasing interaction among activists since interaction facilitates the growth of common identity thus diminishing national parochialisms. Particularism can be reduced through mediated interactions, facilitated by the emergence of new media and media technologies, or face-to-face interactions in conferences or via solidarity journeys, for instance. Thörn (2006) shows that both kind of interaction were crucial elements in the making of the transnational movement against South-Africa apartheid system as a sustained network of transnational activists. According to his research not all people who participated in the transnational anti-apartheid movement travelled, but amongst those who did were many key activists. Several activists became committed to the struggle as a result of their personal experience in the apartheid system. Yet the ties created between exile activists and solidarity advocators were the more important factor in the making of the transnational network against the South-African apartheid system (Thörn, 2006, pp. 297–298). In The New Transnational Activism Sidney Tarrow employs the term “rooted cosmopolitans” to refer to those activists – either individuals or groups – that participate in demonstrations abroad and once back at home again they bring back their learning to their own societies alongside the ties they have established with other individuals and organisations beyond their own borders (Tarrow, 2005, p. 56). In other words, these activists and groups facilitate the introduction of the global in
the local. Indeed many of the sensitivity activities organised by Palestinian solidarity movements in Barcelona were conducted by people that have visited Israel and the OPT through the XEP (MJ. Xarxa d’Enllaç amb Palestina. Interview. 03 June 2015). As with the case of South-Africa anti-Apartheid movement explained by Thörn (2006) those who have travelled in the OPT became a kind of ambassadors for the Palestinian cause in Barcelona. This socialisation process in the OPT and the ties they have established with other individuals and organisations there, together with their knowledge of the local political structures and opportunities converts these non-diaspora activists and groups as key actors in introducing a distant political issue within their local network of activism.

According with the insights learned through militant particularism theory, I contend that when privileging domestic structures, the more actors make an effort to link their distant political issue with domestic needs, wants, and desires, the more embedded their distant political cause will become within the local network of activism. Indeed this is a strategy directly suggested by Palestinian actors such as the Palestinian Boycott National Committee (BNC) to international Palestinian solidarity movements. Interviewing Omar Barghouti in Ramallah (July 2015), co-founder and one of the main leaders of the BDS movement in Palestine, he plainly argued for building coalitions with local social movements and connect their particularistic struggles with that of the Palestinian solidarity activists. He suggested that Palestinian solidarity actors abroad should try to build cross-movement coalitions with local movements in order to spread and mutually strengthen their causes. Since the expansion of the Palestinian solidarity movement in Barcelona in the 2000s, there have been numerous and successful examples of this strategy. The embeddedness of this distant political issue within the Barcelona context have been reflected in the issues, practices, skills, idioms and imaginaries deployed in their actions. Thus the more introduced the more examples of this strategy we can find. For instance, in 2013 several Palestinian solidarity organisations in Barcelona linked the repression exercised by Catalan police against grassroots activism with the technological development of arms within the OPT. In 2014 the BDS movement emitted a statement of support of the Catalan right to self-determination. In 2015, Palestinian solidarity activists together with ecologists constituted a platform to campaign against the exploitation of natural resources by an Israeli company in Catalonia.

Conclusions

Fiona Adamson (2012) suggests that a continuum exists of different kinds of transnationalism. She purposes to classify transnationalism “according to the extent that they are defined by a particularistic identity or a more universal ideology” (Adamson, 2012, p. 41). In a way, we can see a very similar continuum at work when analysing how a distant political issue is progressively introduced and embedded into a particular network of activism. My research shows that in order to introduce a distant political issue diaspora and non-diaspora actors need to translate the distant political issue in a way that echoes in the context they are advocating. This move from one place to another implies an abstraction process from particular instances and circumstances (generalisation, universalization), and a materialisation process through particular actions in particular circumstances (localisation). These two moments need to be analysed and understood dialectically. It is a round trip through Adamson’s continuum but ending in a distant particularistic context (particular0 – universal – particular1).

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4 Not surprisingly Israel is increasingly introducing restrictions to internationals that want to visit the OPT. See, for instance, “Israel Seeking to Deport Foreign Pro-Boycott Activists” (Barak Ravid, Haaretz, 7th August 2016).
The incorporation of a social movement approach and militant particularism theory on the study of diaspora mobilisation forces us to pay more attention to the social and political context of the hostland without forgetting the transnational dimension. It also compels us to do not study a particular movement in isolation from the rest of social movements but in constant relation with them. Through the purposed perspective we can see that non-diaspora actors may actually assume a leading role, put pressure on diaspora organisations and eventually boost significant changes on their political commitment. This is what happened in Barcelona in the early 2000s and from then onwards the Palestinian solidarity movement experimented a significant growth. According to my initial findings the growing embeddedness of the Palestinian cause within the Barcelona network of activism occurred because the Palestinian solidarity organisations have increasingly connected their distant political cause with the local reality. The more diaspora and non-diaspora actors made an effort to link their distant political issue with domestic needs, wants, and desires, the more embedded their distant political cause became within the local network of activism. Furthermore, as Nilsen and Cox (2013) suggested, the embeddedness within a particular context is progressively reflected in the issues, practices, skills, idioms and imaginaries that they deploy in their actions. This is why the more the distant political issue has been introduced in Barcelona the more their campaigns and actions link the distant issue with several local needs, wants, and desires.

The relational character of the human being and our porosity in relation to the world converts our particulars contexts in our main source of political motivation. This is at the same time the why and the how. On the one hand, this is why it is essential for a distant political issue to become embedded within the local network of activism in order to mobilise abroad. On the other hand, this also explains how distant political issues become embedded: by establishing links the local needs, wants and desires. I sustain that these insights are worth to be taken into account when analysing diaspora mobilisation. Conflicts over statehood and sovereignty may involve a diaspora engaged with homeland politics from abroad. However, although these conflicts are closely associated with nationalist claims, they also generate numerous foreign sympathisers. The privileged positionality that non-diaspora actors may enjoy within the hostland activist environment may facilitate them to exercise a leading role in introducing Diaspora’s political cause in a particular context. However, both diaspora actors and transnational activism are also crucial in localising a foreign political cause.

Whereas atrocities in the homeland do have a clear impact on when diaspora mobilise more they explain neither how they mobilise nor their capacity to mobilise abroad. Large demonstrations supporting the Palestinian people such as those occurred in Barcelona both in 2009 during the Israeli bombings of the Gaza strip need to be explained in relation to previous activism done within the social and political context of the hostland. Following Calhoun (2013, p. 26) “movements often proceed in alternating phases of intense public action and seeming dormancy, and much of the work that shapes the long term is in fact done during what appear superficially to be mere spaces between waves of activism”. The ties created during phases of seeming dormancy are crucial in critical situations because they allow actors “to draw on to draw on norms, trust, frames and solidarities to quickly re-group and fight another battle” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 84).

Consequently, the local context and particular conjunctions of protest actions need to be taken into account. It is particularly important therefore to analyze what happens in these spaces between waves of activism, in concrete places and communities in order to explain diaspora mobilisation abroad.
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