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COMMENTARY



For a global sociology of social movements. Beyond methodological globalism and extractivism

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ABSTRACT

The rising influence of actors and worldviews from the Global South in contemporary movements calls for renewed approach, method and epistemology in social movement studies. It raises practical, theoretical, methodological and epistemological challenges. How to study global movements without ceding to the pitfalls of methodological globalism and epistemic extractivism? How to conciliate the diversity of struggles with the global dimensions of a movement? This reflexive paper draws on the author's previous research on global movements since 1999 to discuss these challenges and propose an approach built on four pillars: multi-site research, transnational analytical tools, dialogues with local actors and researchers, and an ethic oriented towards intercultural dialogues. Under these premises, global sociology becomes a collective project that combines researchers' and actors' reflexivities in a common quest for a better understanding of our world and the actors who seek to transform it.

KEYWORDS

Global sociology; global movements; social movements; qualitative methodology; intercultural dialogue; multi-sited fieldwork

1. Why to study global movements?¹

Since the start of the Tunisian revolution in November 2010, at least one massive popular mobilization has arisen somewhere in the world every couple of months without interruption. Like 2011 and 2013, 2019 was an intense year of citizen protests. Thousands of people took to the streets in Iraq, Sudan, India, Hong Kong, Haiti, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Algeria and France, among many other countries. The pandemic has not stopped the protests. Black Live Matter spread to dozens of countries, and massive movements have risen as soon as the lockdowns eased in 2020. In 2021 and 2022, protests and movements rose again worldwide, from Sudan to Iran and even China, for climate justice, women's rights, or against authoritarian regimes.

Most research dedicated to these protests focuses on a national framework. Some scholars even challenge the very existence of 'Arab revolutions' by pointing to the specific social dynamic and structures of political opportunities in each Arab country in the years before the uprisings (Bennani-Chraïbi & Fillieule, 2012). These analyses are relevant to understand some roots, features and dynamics of these movements. They confirm the argument that since the 2008 financial crisis, most protests have targeted national governments (Della Porta, 2015; Glasius & Pleyers, 2013) rather than regional or global institutions as in the previous decade. However, establishing that contemporary citizens' mobilizations target their national government and organize at the national

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scale is not contradictory to maintaining that they also have local, regional and global dimensions and should also be studied at these levels.

Four arguments support analyses of recent citizens' mobilizations for democracy as part of 'global movements' or a 'global wave of movements'. The first one is *empirical*. Citizens' revolts in different countries inspire each others. Slogans, successful elements of their action repertoire and new tactics circulate from one uprising to another. Citizens and social actors move in political contexts that are both national and international. Movements that occupied squares in city centres in the 2010s showed shared global features and practices, notably in the organization of their assemblies and the reconceptualization of values of democracy, dignity and social justice (Glasius & Pleyers, 2013). They shared tactics as soon as they proved efficient in a city, whether against repression (such as using lasers against police drones) or specific features and images in socio-digital media.

The second reason is *analytical*. Contemporary activists get inspired by actors from different regions of the world and increasingly from the Global South. One cannot understand the global justice movement, even in Western Europe, without the contributions of the Zapatista movement, led by indigenous people in Mexico. The climate justice movement as we know it and the way it connects to nature owes much to the worldviews ('cosmovisions') of indigenous movements in Latin America and decisive global meetings that took place in the Global South (Pleyers, 2015), notably in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007. Understanding these movements requires combining research and analyses in the Global North and the Global South. Most researchers do it by reading news, analyses, texts and manifestoes by actors and scholars who circulate globally or through occasional encounters with actors from different continents. Other focus on ethnographic research at global events (social movements and civil society meetings around the COP gatherings, World Social Forums ...). However, the 'global' is not only produced at the global scale. Local actors in the Global South have made decisive contributions to the global justice, feminist and climate justice movements.

The third argument is *epistemological*. The well-established concept of 'methodological nationalism' points to the fact that social sciences generally take the nation-state as the main framework of analysis and the unit of comparison, while categories of analysis at other scales (local or transnational) may be more relevant (Beck, 1998). Global sociology should also avoid the opposite shortcut, which I refer to as 'methodological globalism', the tendency to consider that the main explanatory factors of most social phenomena lie at the global scale. It focuses on global mechanisms implemented similarly in different countries, with slight variations due to national contexts. For too long, 'global scholars' have based their analyses on global newspapers and international institutions' reports, most of which do not address local people but global players, cosmopolitan academics and experts in international institutions (Seckinelgin, 2007). Rather than 'invisibilising' local and national actors and knowledge behind a 'monoculture of the universal and the global' that produces the local as non-existent' (Sousa Santos, 2019), a genuinely global sociology requires articulating scales of actions, analyses and research. The 'global' is not a space floating above the local, nor are local spaces isolated from global forces. A global movement can neither be reduced to its global expressions nor a juxtaposition of local and national protests.

'Inter-national' comparative research, methodological nationalism and globalism entail similar biases for social movement studies. For instance, they often overemphasise the claims addressed to institutions, the organizational dimension of the movements and actors in the country's capital or major cities. They privilege urban and more media-savvy activists over rural movements and actors, the former being much closer to the journalist or researcher's cosmopolitan background,

easier to reach, and ideally speak English. Youssef El Chazli's (2015) empirical research in Egypt shows that the dynamics of protests and the challenges faced by citizens mobilized in 2011 in Alexandria differed greatly from the capital city. Similarly, most analyses of the June 2013 protests in Brazil focused on São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, while mobilizations in other cities had different focuses and led to some of the main outcomes of the movement (Bringel & Pleyers, 2015).

The fourth reason is axiological. It lies in the conviction that research is rooted in mutual learning processes and shared reflections among researchers and movement participants. Individual and collective learning processes are at the core of social movements (Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009; Freire, 1970). A scholar who studies movements in different countries may contribute to the circulation of practices, learnings and knowledge among actors and movements beyond national borders, which may help activists to solve some challenges they face.

2. Methodology, epistemology and experience

Methodology and epistemology are deeply intertwined in social movement studies. In this field, more than in most others, 'much depends on how the analyst chooses to approach the phenomenon [social movement] being studied' (Johnston, 2014, p. 10). Conceptual tools, methods, and what a 'global movement' refers to closely rely on the underlying meaning of 'collective action', 'contentious politics', or 'social movement' adopted by the researcher. Most research on transnational movements has focused on transnational networks, coalitions, circulations and diffusions between national organizations and international networks (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Smith, 2008; Tilly, 2004; Zajak & Haunss, 2022).

Developing empirically-based analyses of transnational or global movements represents an even higher challenge for researchers who seek to understand social movements beyond organizations and 'institutional-political reductionism' (Piven & Cloward 1977; Cox & Nilsen, 2007). How do we study the global dimensions and connections in movements rooted in experience, subjectivities and ephemeral collectives rather than organizations (McDonald, 2006)? How tangible are the international resonances among activists who favour personal forms of commitment and prefigurative actions in daily life over building organizations and networks? Should we and can we 'objectivise' these resonance and subjective experiences? What does 'global movement' mean for approaches that consider social movements first and foremost as producers of meanings (Eyerman & Jamison, 1995), knowledge (Arribas Lozano, 2018; Cox & Flesher Fominaya, 2009; Sousa Santos, 2019) and worldviews ('cosmovisions') rather than transnational networks of organizations and globally connected events? How do locally-rooted movements on different continents contribute to a global struggle to redefine our relationship with nature, democracy or the meaning of 'a good life'? The challenges raised are *practical, theoretical, methodological and epistemological*. The following sections of this text successively discuss these challenges by proposing an approach built on four pillars: *multi-site research, transnational analytical tools, dialogues with local actors and researchers, and a personal commitment and ethic towards intercultural dialogue*.

Rather than piling up authors to justify the choices implicitly or explicitly made during previous fieldwork and analyses, methodology in social sciences consists of explaining what has been done actually to collect and analyse the data. It requires clarifying the criteria that govern the collection and selection of the data as clearly as possible and situating one's position and relation to the actors. As explained by C. Wright Mills, 'this is necessarily a personal statement, but it is written with the hope that others ... will make it less personal by the facts of their own experience' (Wright Mills,

1959). From this perspective, each section of this text combines epistemological considerations and concrete examples from my research experience.

3. Multi-site research

Transnational research has sometimes been reduced to ethnographies of international institutions or events or the study of transnational movements' networks. However, the 'global' and particularly 'global movements' are not only produced in international arenas. Global dimensions of movements are produced by actors situated at different scales, on-site and online, in daily life and global events. The practices of multi-site and transnational research, notably when rooted in a committed approach (Juris & Khasnebush, 2013), challenge the conception of the 'global' as distant, universal and abstract. Ethnographies, interviews and dialogues with activists from different countries show that the 'global' is produced and experienced by actors and movements with local, national, regional and global dimensions. In turn, this global dimension challenges the practices of ethnography and qualitative research as locally rooted methods (Marcus, 1995; Burawoy 2000).

Leading anthropologist Franz Boas considered that he learned more from repeated shorter stays in tribes and communities and the possibility of comparing them with other places rather than from more extended stays in the same tribe or community (Elwert, 2001). Indeed, 'ethnography is not a one-shot event, but a succession of visits that could stretch over months or even years' (Burawoy, 2020, p. 130). It applies even more in researching global movements. Reproducing ethnographic stays or participatory observations (during eventful protests and stages of latency) allows for a better understanding of the evolution of a movement, its stakes and the social change it contributes to produce. More importantly, regular comebacks on the site foster trustful relationships with local activists and researchers. It also allows a better knowledge of the national context by observing and witnessing its evolutions and maintaining a dialogue with local researchers over several years.

In the past decade, most of my research focused on 'post-2011 movements'. I conducted fieldwork in several countries without trying to witness every significant uprising. I grasped opportunities to travel to some countries that experienced significant mobilizations, interviewed activists, and participated in protests and assemblies, notably in Barcelona, London, Ecuador, Tunis, New York City, Hong Kong, Moscow, Bucharest and different states in Mexico. I carried out more extended fieldwork in countries in which I had some research experience (three months and 37 interviews in Rio de Janeiro in 2013; 72 afternoons and evenings, over 30 interviews and two series of six focus groups on-site during 'Nuit Debout' in Paris in 2016, 27 interviews during the 2019 uprising in Chile ...). While I do not claim to have gained an in-depth knowledge of each country's mobilization or uprising, I learned a lot on each site by witnessing actions and assemblies, interviewing and sharing hopes, fears, challenges and perspectives with the actors of these movements.

During and between research stays, I keep in touch with some of the activists interviewed through social media. This complements interviews, for example, on the claims and arguments they post and their links with organizations or activist networks. It is also a valuable source to observe international resonances in a movement and the circulation of knowledge, claims and tactics. During my 2019 stay in Santiago, Chile, several activists I interviewed tweeted pictures and news from activists in Hong Kong. The interviews and encounters in the following days confirmed that young protesters in Santiago felt connected to and inspired by the democratic movement in Hong Kong. Some considered they were part in the same movement in different countries. It

was surprising – and significant – that the Hong Kong activists became their main reference, rather than Western movements (like Occupy or the Spanish Indignados) that benefitted from broader media coverage or the uprising ('el estallido') in Ecuador that started just two months before the 'Chilean awakening', and that Latin American scholars considered as the main antecedent of the Chilean uprising.

Social media are also helpful in keeping track of changes in claims and political stances among activists I interview. For example, many activists I interview during 'eventful part' of an occupation movement, tell me they do not identify with any party and would never get involved in party politics. It is not uncommon that, a few months later, some of them publish a post on social media announcing they have joined a party they consider aligned with the movement's aims. Keeping connected on social media makes it possible to follow some evolutions of activism after intense protests or even in different life-cycle periods. It is particularly insightful for forms of activism that mix private life and public commitments and consider daily life as part of social change.

3.1. To remain open to the unexpected

Carrying out empirical research during event-driven stages of movements in different countries requires careful preparation and planning. While observing vibrant actors and events, one must remember the main research hypotheses and analyses drawn from fieldwork in other countries. However, it is also crucial to remain open to the unexpected, to topics, actors and questions that could be rejected too quickly for being 'out of the scope'. They may shake up the analysis and hence make it progress. Without this opening to the unexpected, fieldwork and analyses may be limited to projections of analyses drawn from observations in other countries and miss specificities of local and national movements, as well as recent evolutions and new challenges in a movement that may be reflected in the movement in other countries.

While the emergence of the unexpected can hardly be provoked, it may be brought about, notably by avoiding fetishising one's research protocol and leaving room for randomness, unforeseen encounters and situations. My first research (1999–2010) focused on the 'alter-globalisation' / 'global justice' movement. In 2004, I attended the fourth World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, which gathered 120,000 activists. I planned meticulously every hour of the first two days of this huge gathering based on a thorough study of the Forum programme, my research hypotheses and my experience in the first three WSF (2001–2003). I moved from one workshop to another to listen to talks connected to my pre-established thematic grid and to activists and scholars who exposed their analyses of the global movement and the WSF process. After two intense days, my conviction was that the themes, actors and debates of this WSF in India did not differ much from the three previous WSFs in Brazil. On the third day, after browsing the event site for two cancelled workshops, I entered the neighbouring tents and attended the workshops they hosted, whatever the topic was. I discovered themes that were not (or barely) present in the alter-globalization movement 'as seen from the West' or to which I had not paid attention before, including spiritualities, local development practices or struggles against the construction of dams. These topics were missing in my analytical framework and most accounts of the WSF by Western scholars and activists. In the following years, they would become central in the alter-globalization and climate justice movements in which Global South activists would gain influence. The WSF in Mumbai was far more than a repetition of speeches on themes that I had scrutinized for years. I

would have missed them if I had stuck to the analytical grid and research plan drawn from previous fieldwork in other continents.

3.2. Translation beyond languages

A multi-site ‘global’ research also raises the question of languages. Passive understanding and minimal active practice of a national language improve the quality of dialogue with activists. It open access to the movement discourses, social media and self-analyses and improve the dialogues with activists. Jeff Juris (2008) considered it indispensable to learn Catalan in addition to Spanish to conduct participatory research and take an active part in the global justice movement in Barcelona. I have learned Spanish to understand social movements in Latin America. Passive Portuguese allowed me to interview activists during the 2013 mass protests in Brazil.

However, we can only learn a limited number of languages. In other countries, we rely on local translators or on a language we share with a part of the activists (often ‘global English’ or Spanish). These common languages open access to local realities and interpretations. Nevertheless, we should remain conscious that it also biases our perspectives on movements, notably by over-emphasizing the agency of bilingual activists who are more cosmopolitan, educated and urban than other actors. Assuming basic English (‘Globish’) as a shared language and focusing on socio-digital media leads to structural biases in analyzing social movements in a foreign country. For those who followed it on European activists’ social media, TV channels and newspapers, the 2011 Egyptian revolution seemed to be led by tech-savvy young people (a ‘Twitter revolution’) who spoke a fluent English. The reality was far from this. While social media played a role in the spark of outrage and early organizing of the protests, most participants were not geeks, and many did not use social media. Paulo Gerbaudo (2012) underlines the contribution of social media in the Egyptian revolution but also shows that protesters asked fellow citizens to ‘get out of the Internet and join us in the street’. And, by the way, most Egyptians do not speak English.

Local translators play a crucial role in connecting with other actors of the movements. This goes beyond language itself as similar words may hide different interpretations, worldviews and political cultures. Translation and limited mastering of foreign languages lead to misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations. However, as Nicole Doerr (2018) has shown, it may also ease some encounters and dialogues. Multilingualism, notably based on the passive understanding of other languages, was already at the core of Ivan Illich’s practices of cosmopolitan sociology in Cuernavaca in the 1970s. Beyond the concrete understanding of other peoples, practising other languages opens a window to different cultures and worldviews, and puts in perspective one’s own culture and knowledge, which is a crucial requisite of an intercultural dialogue.

4. From multi-site research to a global movement

Analyzing a global movement or a global wave of movements does not imply research has to analyse each of the struggles that arise in every country, as no one expects an analyst of a national movement to have conducted research in every city and town of the national territory. *What justifies conducting fieldwork in different countries is the purpose of varying contexts, actors and situations to identify common elements and challenges, as much as differences among these uprisings.* Collecting data in different countries while seeking to avoid homogenizing the actors by imposing a global outlook raises an epistemological question: *How do we move from ethnographic*

observations and interviews with actors situated in a particular place to analysis of a global movement or shared dimensions of a movement in different countries?

Ordering social facts and empirical data has always been a crucial task for sociologists (Wright Mills, 1959). It has become more complex (and crucial) as our challenge lies less in gathering a sufficient amount of information than in dealing with an overabundance of data. More interviews are required to study a movement in different countries. The Internet provides much broader access to activists' arguments (social media and websites have replaced the collection of leaflets and flyers), to national newspapers and abundant scholarly literature from different continents.

Mobilizations are often studied in their national specificities or in comparing different national cases. A different approach seeks to conduct multi-site research to put movements and experiences in different countries in dialogue (Marcus, 1995). Sociologists and anthropologists have proposed different theoretical and practical answers to this challenge of global ethnography in the following three decades. To conduct ethnography (or other qualitative methods) on an international or global object, Michael Burawoy (2000, p. xii) convincingly argues that the researcher needs to articulate empirical research with theoretical lenses and to "shift from studying sites to studying fields". He sees fields in 'the relation between sites' and, together with his research team, looked for 'manifestations' of globalization in forces, connections, and imagination. To understand global social movements, we also need to pay attention to features of these movements that 'resonate' (McDonald, 2006) across countries, sometimes without direct connections between sites. Starting with identifying similar elements in the repertoire of actions, practices, claims or values, this approach seeks to identify common meanings and structural logics, tensions, and challenges that animate social movements beyond the diversity of national political, social and cultural contexts. Research on a global movement may focus on one or several features of this movement, such as its repertoire of action, claims, practices or utopias. In any case, a global movement approach builds on transnational analytical categories.

A comparative approach compares movement organization, strategies or activism between two or more countries. It often leads 'inter-national' comparisons among national movement to homogenizing features and hiding the internal diversity of the national actors. In contrast, working with transnational analytical categories builds units of analysis that transcend borders. It grasps differences among activists in the same country or city and may encounter similar patterns of actions among some activists in different countries.

Each researcher will pick the concepts and categories she or he considers relevant to understand a movement. For instance, I have used the concept of transnational 'cultures of activism' to analyse social movements in different countries, defining them as

logics of action that draw on coherent sets of normative orientations rooted in a vision of the world, social change, the adversary, roles and meanings of the movement, which guide the practices of actors, including the organization of the movement. (Pleyers, 2010)

This conceptual tool has proved useful to avoid homogenizing the relationship to politics among actors taking part in a movement in one country while connecting actors from mobilizations in different countries. To take an example, young people from popular neighbourhoods of the Parisian suburbs who occasionally joined the 'Nuit Debout' square occupation in 2016 shared a similar culture of activism with young people from the favelas in Rio de Janeiro in June and July 2013. I was struck by the similarities in their discourses and practices, their concept of politics and relationship with the state, rooted in the experience of a lack of respect in their daily life, police violence and social inequalities. At the same time, their concepts of politics, relations with the state and way

of organizing differed so much from the ones developed by young ‘alter-activists’ holding assemblies and preparing actions on the same squares. The most relevant analytical category to understand them was not to find in the national context, but as a transnational culture of activism rooted in similar ways of seeing the state, politics, and the movement itself.

The concept of ‘culture of activism’ reveals that the relationship to politics in a social movement or a protest is not univocal but multiple. It suggests that national context may not be the main explanatory factor for the most significant differences among activists. In this approach, a ‘global outlook’ does not homogenize national actors and movements. It tries to grasp common meanings, practices and challenges that point to consistent cultures of activism that animate the movement in different countries. Hence, the multiplication of empirical research in different localities becomes a tool to overcome the dichotomies between the local and the global, personal experience and a social movement, the unity and the diversity of a movement.

The analyses of the Global Justice Movement or ‘Alter-Globalization’ provides a second example. This resolutely global movement started in the mid-1990s simultaneously in the Global South and North, notably with the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, protests against the World Trade Organization and the rise of the international peasant movement ‘La Via Campesina’. I conducted fieldwork research at local and national scales in different countries and attended international mobilizations and meetings, including eight World Social Forums. The global justice movement gathered very diverse actors. Internal debates and clashes were common. Analyses of fieldwork in different countries and at different scales (from local movements to global forums) showed that similar tensions reproduced in different contexts. Eventually, I found out that a similar tension animated the global justice movement wherever I observed it. The main differences among the activists were not related to national or regional cultures but to two ‘cultures of activism’ that converged in the activists’ quest for a fairer world but diverged in their concepts of social change and the way to organize the movement. On one side, activists closer to ‘the way of reason’ considered more active citizenship and less inequalities requires citizens to get trained in economics, scientific knowledge and global issues. Their concept of social change was rather top-down and focused on institutions, regulations and policymakers. Correspondingly, they mostly opted for more formal and top-down organizing, often in contradiction with their aim of fostering more active citizenship and participatory democracy. On the other side (the ‘way of subjectivity’), activists struggled to defend the specificity of their lived experience against the hold of global capitalism. Their concept of social change was bottom-up. Prefigurative activism was crucial as they aimed at implementing the movement values in their daily life experience, local communities and the movement organization. The co-existence of both cultures of activism in the same movement resulted in countless tensions and clashes but also in innovative solutions combining proposals and practices from both sides to overcome the challenges faced by the movement (Pleyers, 2010).

Fieldwork in different countries helps to grasp possible resonances between uprisings or protest waves. Each fieldwork brings new data that both strengthens and challenges previous analyses. It unveils recent developments that may be specific to the national movement or reflected in other actors of the global wave of movements. For instance, a research stay in Santiago in November 2019 allowed me to develop a specific analysis of this citizens’ revolt (‘el estallido’), drawing both on my analyses of similar movements in other countries and on what I was able to learn during my four previous stays in Chile. It also emphasized significant differences between different stages of movements and popular uprisings over the past decade, notably in their connection with institutional politics. While a rejection of all political parties was a shared feature of most

movements in the first years of the decade, by 2019 connections with more institutional processes were part of many activists' concerns, and the connection with political actors was operated much faster after the eventful stage of the movement.

5. Dialogues with local actors and researchers

5.1. Interviews as a sharing of knowledge

Qualitative and comprehensive research with activists is, first and foremost, a dialogue and, as Kim Tallbear (2014, p. 2) beautifully wrote, 'an opportunity of conversations and sharing of knowledge'. Encounters and interviews with activists foster the actors' reflexivity and self-analysis. In opposition to stances that identify research with extracting data to understand a 'research object', this approach promotes research practices that may contribute to a better understanding of the movement by its actors. Out of respect for the activists, one has to do one's work to be a valuable interlocutor. It notably requires acquiring a good knowledge of the country's political and social actors before starting interviews and meetings. During short research stays, I spend part of my nights transcribing interviews and notes to improve and adapt the questions I ask to activists and colleagues on the following days. The deeper the understanding of the movement is, the better the interviews and conversations get. Being available to share one's perspectives and (early stage) analyses is also part of the deal. After the first part of the interview, the dialogue opens to any question my interlocutor wants to ask.

During a fieldwork stay, I seize every opportunity for encounters with activists and researchers. An invitation to give a talk or share some perspectives on global movements in an activist network or an academic seminar is an opportunity to open reflexive dialogues with students, activists or researchers about the ongoing movement. It is often followed by an invitation to join activists in different spaces of the movement.

Reading, meeting and sharing perspectives with researchers of the host country is another insightful part of global research. A global outlook on social movements or research on a global movement does not aim at substituting analyses that focus on the local or national scales. It complements them and enters into a dialogue with them. Research that builds on fieldwork in different countries may shed a different light on a movement in a particular country and contribute to better understanding of the movement along with research focused on the local and national scales. Sociology is a collective sport.

5.2. Publication projects as a constitutive part of a global sociology

An approach of a global sociology anchored in dialogues with local and national activists and researchers cannot be dissociated from *publication practices*. On one side, a commitment to a dialogue with local actors and researchers requires to publishing the research results in the language, journals and publications of the country where the research was (partly) conducted. Even when publishing in these languages is not valued in academic curricula. On the other side, and more importantly, this approach requires proactive initiatives to help publishing the work by researchers from different countries in books and journals with international outreach.

Bringing to the fore analyses by researchers from the Global South in academic publications or public sociology is an essential commitment of global sociology. Assembling contributions by researchers from different continents on a movement as it developed in their country provides a

multi-situated analysis of a global movement or of the way movements across the world react to a global context, such as the 2010s wave of social protests or the COVID-19 pandemic (Bringel & Pleyers, 2022).

To help each article to reaching out an international audience requires a personal dialogue between the editors of the collective book and each author to ensure readers will be able to understand analyses rooted in empirical research and the national culture in a specific country. Elina Oinas, Henri Onodera and Leena Suurpää (2018) pushed the process one step further. Their book *What Politics? Youth and Political Engagement in Africa* illustrates how global sociology requires an approach that goes beyond purely academic considerations. The Finnish research team invited young actors and researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa to write a chapter on a social movement in which they participated. The authors assumed being at the same time researchers and actors of the movement they analysed. The coordination team considered them as authors, subjects of the collective research and co-producers of the analyses. To tackle knowledge, political and economic inequalities, the project coordinators engaged with each of them, provided individualized support in the analyses and writing processes, and adapted the publication schedule to the situations faced by the young authors and actors. Rather than evading the personal dimensions of sociological analyses, the book chapters combine the authors' personal experiences and self-analyses with their analyses of the movement and social dynamic in their country. The outcome is an insightful book that offers an understanding of youth activism 'through which young people engage in their immediate and imagined social environments with an aim of making best of them' (Oinas et al., 2018, p. 7).

Local researchers play a crucial role in allowing foreigners to grasp some elements of an uprising in their country. Editorial projects that help them publish their research in English and other languages are vital to a more global dialogue in social movement studies. However, here again, readers should be aware of some biases. Most authors of the Global South do not get translated into English. The selection obeys quality criteria, but depends also on the authors' international training, writing ability and often her/his mastering of analytical frames produced in Western universities. More generally, some resonance with the publisher's approach is required, and more locally rooted researchers remain ignored. Reading in different languages allows access to local and regional literature that will not be translated. It is particularly insightful as some specificities remain in the ways researchers from a linguistic area approach social movements. For instance, most Latin American colleagues have adopted a more committed stance in their research on social movements (Bringel, 2019). US sociology has often focused on how movements mobilize resources to influence on policymakers in an approach deeply rooted in specific social and political challenges movements face in their country.

6. Ethics and posture: global sociology as dialogues

Empathy is crucial in any comprehensive and qualitative method. It is not grounded in sharing the activists' views and perspectives (If it were the case, few social movement scholars would be able to study reactionary movements) but in the sincere will to understand the other in her/his experience, worldview and projects. A comprehensive approach aims at grasping the meanings at play in activists' practices, their own experience and how they intend to contribute to a movement. Social movements and activists being producers of knowledge, the researcher's position is not one of superiority. She/he stands as another producer of knowledge in a constructive dialogue and

participates in a collective reflexivity process alongside activists and other researchers. Multi-site fieldwork multiplies these dialogues and puts intercultural encounters at the core of the process.

In a discipline increasingly marked by the ‘decolonial turn’, a project of global sociology raises issues about the legitimacy of sociologists ‘from the Global North’ to conduct research and analyse social movements in the Global South or in an international perspective that includes the Global South.

Knowledge is always situated (Dussel, 1996; Harzing, 2004). Acknowledging this requires breaking with a crucial point of the ‘Northern epistemology’: the split between knowledge and knowledge producer, and the postulate that the knowledge produced by social sciences should be universal and context-independent. Recognizing one’s own ‘positionality’ and the limits of one’s knowledge is an indispensable step to renew a global approach.

The decolonial turn invites Western scholars to renounce their habit of rapidly universalizing their research results, social theories and concepts of emancipation. It demands that we acknowledge the epistemic domination rooted in Eurocentric sociology and recognize significant theoretical contributions by scholars and actors from different regions of the world and from oppressed backgrounds to understanding of movements both in the Global South and the Global North. However, the decolonial turn does not invalidate the project of a global sociology. The Mexican indigenous Zapatista movement has shown that promoting ‘a world where there is space for many worlds’ does not mean giving up any global perspective; quite the opposite.

The core of this renewed approach to global sociology lies in an openness to the other that is at once personal, sociological and cultural. This is the condition for an intercultural dialogue based on a philosophy of encounter and exchange (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009). In this dialogue, the researcher’s posture is rooted in a willingness to expose oneself to the risk (and hope) of losing some of one’s certainties and learning from the other. Under these premises, sociology becomes a collective project that combines researchers’ and actors’ reflexivities in a common quest to a better understanding of social movements, our world and how to transform it.

Understanding social movements (and our world) in the twenty-first century requires complementing research at the local and national scales with global analyses. This approach invites to overpass the dichotomies ‘local vs global’ and ‘irreducible experience vs global movement’. It conciliates the diversity of subjectivities in struggle and the existence of global movements or global waves of movements. More importantly, a global sociology of social movements shows that what is at stake in many citizens’ revolts and national mobilizations goes beyond the local or national scale, that locally-embedded actors play a substantial role in transforming our world and opening ways for citizens to become actors in the global age.

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