Democratization and social movements

Chapter 1 of Donatella della Porta, Mobilizing for democracy, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Social movements and democratization. An introduction

Most scholars of democratization have either ignored movements altogether or regarded them with suspicion as dangers to democracy, while most students of social movements have focused on fully mature democratic systems and ignored the transition cycles that place the question of democratization on the agenda and work it through to either democratic consolidation or defeat (Tarrow 1995, 221–2).

Strangely enough, while the pictures used to illustrate the most recent wave of protests for democracy in North Africa represent mass protest, as Sidney Tarrow stated some tomes ago, research on social movements and democratization have rarely interacted. In this volume, I aim at filling this gap by looking at episodes of democratization through the lenses of social movement studies. Without assuming that democratization is always produced from below, I will however single out different paths of democratization by looking at the ways in which the masses interacted with the elites, and protest with bargaining. My focus will be on one of this path: eventful democratization, that is cases in which authoritarian regimes break down following—often short but intense—waves of protest. Recognizing the particular power of some transformative events, I will however locate them within the broader mobilization processes, including the multitude of less visible, but still important protests that surround them. In this, using Sidney Tarrow’s concepts, I will try to combine attention to eventful history with the one on event history, with thick description of some ‘great protest events’ but also consideration for the cascades of small protest events that accompany, precede and follow them (Tarrow 1996, 586). Following recent research on social movements, I will look at the relations between structure and agency within this transformative moments. Cognitive, affective and relational mechanisms will be singled out as transforming the contexts in which dissidents act.

While in eventful democratization protests develop from the interaction between growing resources of contestation and closed opportunities, social movements are not irrelevant players in the other two paths. First of all, when opportunities open up given disalignment in the elites, participated pacts might develop from the encounter of reformers in institutions and moderates among social movement organizations. Protest, although rarely used, is nevertheless important here as a resource to threat or use on the negotiation table.

If in participated pacts a strong (or strengthening) civil society meets opening opportunities, more troubled democratization paths ensue when very repressive regimes thwarted the development of any autonomous associational form. In these cases violence often escalate from the interactions of suddenly mobilized opposition and brutal regime repression. Especially when there are divisions in and defections from security apparatuses, skills and resources for military action contribute to coups d’etat and civil war dynamics.
In all three paths, mobilization of resources, framing processes and appropriation of opportunities will develop in action, in different combinations. The comparison of different cases within two waves of protests for democracy, in Central Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the Middle East and North Africa in 2013, will allow to describe and theorize about causal mechanisms and conditions as they emerge in the three mentioned paths.

In this analysis, democratization struggles will be seen as processes whose outcomes is influenced by the interactions of different players, some of which pursuing democracy as a goal, some opposing it, and still others initially neutral. For most of them, positions towards democracy tend however to chance in action, bridged as they are with socio-economic and/or ethnonationalist frames.

In this introduction, I will first look at the literature on transition as well as on social movement studies in search for some main contributions that could illuminate democratization from below. Then I will present my research design and the structure of the volume.

**Social science literature on transition and social movements: bridging gaps**

The social science literature on democratization is large, but fragmented. Not only has ‘first’ democratization (in its slow form) attracted the attention of major scholars, but each new wave of (rapid) regime shift has produced related waves of research and thinking. Case studies and within-area comparisons have thus flourished, bringing not only rich empirical evidence, but also new concepts and interpretative frameworks.

However, the very spread and depth of democratization studies have also contributed to fragmentation in the field. First, political and social sciences have focused on the West and the North of the globe, where core disciplines such as comparative politics and political sociology have flourished, while the various waves of democratization have been addressed mainly by area studies. With all their value in attempting to go beyond ethnocentric visions of politics and society, however, area studies are pillarized around homogeneous geographical areas, each with their own focuses and biases. The very efforts involved in learning the histories and the languages of these areas have encouraged high levels of specialization (e.g. Dutton 2005; Burawoy 2005). With few, valuable exceptions, new waves of democratization in different geopolitical areas were in fact addressed by different (area) specialists, who stressed different aspects: for example, political parties and elite pacts in Southern Europe, military power in Latin America, civil society in Eastern Europe, electoral processes in the ‘orange revolutions’, religion in North Africa and the Middle East.

There is also another reason for fragmentation. Democratization can be (and has been) related to various processes: slow or fast, violent or nonviolent, radical or moderate, nationally chosen or internationally imposed. This has been reflected in the fact that democratization processes have been addressed under that label, but also under others—for example,
revolutions or nonviolence or civil society—with, unfortunately, little communication among different subfields or between those subfields and social movement studies. While the literature on revolutions originally concentrated on violent processes and deep social transformation, it has now expanded (perhaps with good reason) to include nonviolent regime changes, although remaining quite secluded from studies on democratization or social movements. Similarly, research on nonviolence has developed, especially on some waves of democratization, but with limited interactions with studies carried out, often on the same empirical realities, under different labels. The focus of nonviolence literature on Gandhi or anarchist theorists—which never occupied central stage in cognate research fields—as well as its orientation towards activists and its rooting in peace studies have contributed to the lack of dialogue with other related fields (Schock 2005). Since the wave of democratization in the late 1980s in Eastern Europe, attention has focused on the role of civil society, defined as ‘a solidarity sphere in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes gradually to be defined and to some degree enforced’ (Alexander 1998, 7). While often looking at the same empirical reality, studies on social movements and studies on Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) developed within political sociology and international relations, respectively, with different theoretical focuses and, again, few reciprocal contacts.

As McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) rightly observed, if conceptual distinctions are indeed useful to avoid theoretical confusion, a more intense dialogue among different streams of literature could help in identifying similar dynamics, as well as differences in structural conditions. As I will argue in what follows, it would be especially important to bridge social movement studies and democratization studies, which have remained, until now, worlds apart.

Even though social movement organizations (SMOs) are increasingly recognized, in political as well as scientific debates, as important actors in democratic processes, their performance during the different steps of the democratization process has rarely been addressed in a systematic and comparative way. On the one hand, in fact, social movements have been far from prominent in research on democratization, which has mainly focused on either socioeconomic pre-conditions or elite behaviour. As Nancy Bermeo (1997) aptly synthesized, in general the literature on democratization ‘accords much less attention to popular organizations than to political elites. Thus, the role of popular organizations in the transition process remains a subject of some confusion. Many of the major theoretical works on democratization suggest that popular mobilization is important for regime change, but even this very simple proposition is not universally shared.’ On the other hand, social movement scholars, until recently, have paid little attention to democratization processes, mostly concentrating their interest on democratic countries (especially on the Western European and North American experiences), where conditions for mobilization are more favourable.

**Democratization studies**

Research on democratization developed initially with a structuralist approach. Within *modernization* theory, Martin S. Lipset’s (1959) pioneering work associated the potential for the emergence of a democratic regime with economic development. Although powerful in explaining the survival of established democracies, modernization theory tended to ignore the role of social actors and movements in crafting democracy, leaving the timing of
Too Early to Tell: When is a Revolution a Revolution?
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The title of my paper, “Too Early to Tell: When is a Revolution a Revolution?” comes from an apocryphal story in which the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai responded to the question, “What do you think the impact of the French Revolution has been?” by saying, “It is still too early to tell.” Of course, this was in 1960. There is a certain sublime verisimilitude to this statement. History may be viewed as the momentary punctuation of an event that can result in tectonic shifts in class configurations, discourses, and conceptions of political possibilities that are felt centuries later.

In this essay, I hope to cast a brief glance at the uprisings of the Arab Spring and, by comparing them to the revolutions of the twentieth century, particularly the Iranian revolution, examine some of their resulting transformations and address how ephemeral or lasting these transformations may be, particularly for Tunisia and Egypt. This comparison begins by looking first at the particular ways in which a revolution is made, then examines what changes a revolutionary transformation entails, and finally offers some reflections on meaningful ways of looking at revolutions and revolutionary movements.

So, how are revolutions “made”? One of the foremost theoreticians and practitioners of revolutionary arts in the twentieth century was Lenin. He identified three potential prerequisites for the emergence of a revolution: mass insurrection; a well-mobilized class (rather than a party or conspiracy) acting as the leaders of the movement; and divisions and “vacillations” in the ranks of the enemy.

In both Tunisia and Egypt, the uprisings’ most notable characteristic was its broad-based nature. As in Iran of 1978 and 1979, the movements crossed class boundaries as well as religious and urban/rural divides. In all three cases, clearly organized working class movements were crucial to the formation of those face-to-face, hard fought, and longstanding relationships that often underline mass mobilization and that make or break revolutionary movements. In Tunisia and Egypt, union mobilization—which began a long time before the uprisings—was crucial, as was student activism. Here I am not referring to generalized youth, but students specifically. In Iran, as in Egypt, the mosques were a means of mobilization and dissemination of revolutionary directives and speeches. However, the mosques in Egypt were a starting point for demonstrations, rather than the organizational nodes they had been in Iran.
The extent to which internal divisions within regimes cause their vulnerability to uprisings depends greatly upon the complexion of power. This is where I differ in my analysis from Lenin. Such divisions were not present in a meaningful way in the monarchical regime of Iran in 1978 or 1979. Nevertheless, the revolution proceeded until it produced a horizontal split in the military that allowed revolutionary forces to take over military bases and arsenals throughout the cities. What was notable in Iran was not fissures in the ruling class, but precisely what Lenin considers a necessary precondition: vacillation. The Shah’s regime could not decide between a wholly violent suppression of the revolt and a gradual opening of political space. In fact, its alternation between coercion and a safety-valve style of appeasement opened up a space of mobilization where fear dissipated and the sense of possibility grew.

Vertical fissures, on the other hand, have occurred almost daily in the case of Libya. For example, officials began defecting from the regime as soon as the uprisings started. Yet, because of the concentration of power and political institutions in the hands of the Qaddafi family, these vacillations and divisions did not quickly alter the stability of the regime or its use of extraordinary violence in countering the armed insurrection against it. On the other hand, in both Tunisia and Egypt such divisions and vacillations were absolutely crucial to the outcome of the uprisings. In Tunisia, the military took the side of the protesters. In Egypt, the military—which is a much more powerful force with a much larger corpus of economic and political interest than in Tunisia—protected its flanks by forcing Mubarak out of power. (Post-revolution, however, it has left the structures of authority untouched, which does not bode well for the post-revolutionary regime.) These divisions will also determine what is to come in Yemen, but in petrol monarchies they may not matter, as the families monopolize the levers of power and the institutions of the state, decreasing the likelihood of divisions in general.

What Lenin does not mention is the role of outside intervention in precipitating revolution. However, given the Russian Revolution’s timing during the First and Second World Wars, he focuses on the effects of international war on revolutionary mobilization. And, in a very interesting text called “War and Revolution,” he reflects on the French Revolution. Lenin writes,

When the French revolutionary townspeople and revolutionary peasants overthrew the monarchy at the close of the eighteenth century by revolutionary means, that policy of the revolutionary class was bound to shake all the rest of autocratic, czarist, imperial, and semi-feudal Europe to its foundations. And the inevitable continuation of this policy of the victorious revolutionary class in France was the wars in which all the monarchist nations of Europe, forming their famous coalition, lined up against revolutionary France in counter-revolutionary war.¹

Lenin viewed this counter-revolutionary war as not necessarily a detrimental occasion, but one in which a new form of warfare is invented, where levy en masse underwrites the legitimacy of the new state, and where Napoleon invents entire new strategies of warfare which, in fact, are still reflected in the ways European powers fight.

Further along in the twentieth century, perhaps no moment is as striking as the war waged between Iran and Iraq. Taking place only a year after the revolution had overthrown the Shah, it had an immediate effect that was very much in line with Lenin’s analysis. Power was consolidated in the hands of Iran’s regime rather than the reverse, which is what Saddam Hussein and his Western allies had hoped. In the case of the Arab Spring, we have not seen outright war, but rather brutal suppression using foreign troops. This was the case in Bahrain, where Saudi Arabia deployed some 4,000 troops under the Peninsula Shield to an island whose population only numbers one million. Foreign interventions in most of the rest of the ongoing Arab revolutions have been less coercive and more willing to be hegemonic in the Gramscian sense. This means that the attempt from the outside to co-opt revolutionary movements has been far more pronounced than outright warfare. For example, U.S. and European powers have already attempted to affect the outcome of Tunisian elections via their “democracy promotion” programs, which entail injections of millions of dollars and euros to “assist” democratic forces into power.²

In Egypt, the form of co-optation has been more directly economic. The moderate elite who are in power right now are in mediations to allow for the IMF, the World Bank, and the U.S. government to “invest” in the country, or to ensure that the kinds of economic transformations that could take place fall within the narrow remit of a new liberal capitalism that we have come to recognize as Washington consensus.

In Yemen such interventions are more difficult to trace. There are certainly covert movements we are not privy to that likely take the shape of military-to-military cooperation between the United States, its allies, and the Yemeni army. But what is striking in the case of Yemen, Bahrain, and, I also argue, Syria and Libya, is the extent to which Saudi Arabia—as the most significant U.S. client in the region, along with Israel—has its own desperate agenda of survival, and has attempted to prevent the kind of transformation that it was helpless to forestall in Tunisia and Egypt. In Yemen, Libya, and Syria, Saudi Arabia has been very quick to cultivate and support its own acceptable oppositional candidates. These are figures from within the establishment with varying volumes of blood on their hands who would not rock the proverbial security boat in the region. It is important to remember that Saudi Arabia has long struggled to impose its own profoundly conservative—in all meanings of that word—vision of what social, socioeconomic, and political relations should be in the region, especially upon those countries unfortunate enough to be in its immediate periphery. This imposition involves not only

² Please note that this lecture was given before the NATO intervention in Libya.
the channeling of vast sums of money unaccounted for and opaquely transmitted to political subcontractors in the region but also, as we have seen especially with Bahrain and Libya, ensuring that its international patron—the United States—follows the contours of its own policy.

Having spoken about the larger forces that affect revolutions, I now focus on what sorts of transformations revolutionary movements are thought to bring. People influenced by Marxist ideas—who have been prominent in our thinking about revolutions in the twentieth century—usually see large-scale and lasting sociological transformations as those that matter. C.L.R James, the great Caribbean historian who was an unorthodox Marxian, wrote:

In a revolution, when the ceaseless, slow accumulation of centuries burst into volcanic eruptions, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lend themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the subsoil from which they come.3

The subsoil James mentions is the interrelation between social classes. One has to recognize, as James does, the power struggles resulting from the end of colonialism. In a sense, the structural conditions that led to the revolts in the countries of the Middle East fit the classical models. One of these structural features is the persistent widening of socioeconomic fissures between a fast-rising capitalist class that seems intent on flaunting its newly acquired wealth, and a group that Asef Bayat, a sociologist, has called “the poor middle classes.”4 These classes are educated, but they are barred from paths of affluence and prosperity because of a lack of jobs for skilled and educated workers. Such structural transformations tend to occur over generations, sometimes centuries. With hindsight, we can see that the Russian and Chinese revolutions were crucial in eventually bringing about a capitalist class who could stand shoulder to shoulder with the robber barons of the nineteenth century United States. These revolutions also brought about lasting transformations in such things as gender relations and political regimes.

In the Middle East, the Iranian revolution’s structural effects are still difficult to discern some 30 years later. We can at least say that the revolution has accelerated the rise of a bourgeois class and has brought about the slow transformation of the old American capitalists of the bazaar into a hybrid class engaged in industrial production. The revolution’s effect on gender relations in Iran is, of course, mixed at best. While women of lower and middle classes have been incorporated into the economy due to urban capitalist formations that the revolution hastened, the regime has also been retrograde in its rolling back

of legal and political protections for women. This issue has brought about an unintended consequence: the rise of an extraordinarily vibrant women’s movement that features innovative and creative coalition building across ideological divides.

This is also something that we see in the Arab world. Gender relations are very visible right now, and we are seeing transformations. What is striking is the role that women have played in all of the revolutions, particularly in Yemen, where the figure most clearly associated with organizing demonstrations is a woman rather than a man. It will likely take another generation for us to see whether these revolutionary movements have shifted class configurations.

The rise of a new political elite is another of the earliest and most visible revolutionary transformations. It is again striking to see the extent to which social, economic, and political elites are attempting to domesticate the Arab revolutionary movements by ensuring, or at least attempting to ensure, that the new guardians of the state be “moderate” economically and politically—in relation to both neighborhood and global hegemons. We saw this in the early attempts to ensure that Ghannouchi remained in power as Prime Minister of Tunisia as well as the overwhelming presence of the generals and functionaries of the former regimes in the ranks of the “opposition” in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. It is still too early to tell what sorts of changes we will see, but we will not have to wait for generations; elections and regime changes will give us some sort of an indication.

Beyond structural changes, I diverge from C.L.R James and his assessment of what he calls the “meteoric flights and flashes above,” or the ephemeral nature of such revolts. What have these revolutions wrought in terms of changes in the affective or the emotional terrain? Authoritarian regimes, especially those with well-developed police states, are particularly good at imposing a sense of powerlessness and an atmosphere of paralyzing fear. In Tunisia, the Ben Ali regime had a secret policeman for every 40 people. In Egypt, where the police force, by some reckonings, numbered 1.8 million, police stations functioned with impunity as places where violence was exercised on the bodies of anyone showing any defiance whatsoever. In the Iran of my childhood, the most famous saying was, “The wall has mice and the mice have ears,” which exhorted us—the children, the adults, everyone—to silence. When the Shah came to visit my primary school, when I was five or six years old, my father, a committed Marxist, sat me down and said, “You know, I want you to recognize that they are going to say he is a god, but he is not a god. He is just a man.” My mother became upset and said to my father, “Don’t say that! What if she repeats that? They will come and arrest you.” The atmosphere of fear was so incredibly powerful that even parents felt that they could not really speak to their children about what was what.

What we have heard again and again from the people of Sfax and Tunis, of Cairo and Alexandria and Suez, of Damascus and Daraa, of Bahrain and Aden and Sana’a, of Sohar and Muscat, is that their fear has broken. In places where the revolutionary movement has succeeded in bringing about changes in the political elite, we have what Elizabeth Wood has called, in her beautifully evocative phrase, “the pleasure of agency.” This, the sense that it is Spring—that revolutionary possibility can travel across borders, can take refuge
in people’s hearts and homes and emotions and ideas, in city streets, plazas, cafes, and mosques, where people gather before marching; that a sense of solidarity and affection can bind people in an imagined community of revolt; that all is possible—is at once ephemeral and difficult to grasp, but also profoundly transformative over generations. Many of the youth who mobilized in Iran in 2009, who were not even born during the revolution, know something about this fear having been broken. As Aimé Césaire, one of the great Caribbean poets, wrote, “The work of man is only just beginning, and it remains to conquer all the violence entrenched in the recesses of our passion. And there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory.” That rendezvous of victory is still to come.
democratization processes unexplained. Democratization has been also linked to elite strategies oriented to state building or political competition (Rokkan 1970, 3). When scholars within this approach did examine the role of organized and mobilized actors in society, they tended—as did Samuel Huntington (1965; 1991)—to consider mobilization, particularly of the working class, as a risk more than an asset.

Results on the relations between democracy and capitalism are ambivalent. Various streams of literature have paid particular attention to the role of capitalism in the development of democracy. In particular, but not only in the traditional Marxist approaches, democracy has often been presented as the typical political form of capitalism. As Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens (1992, 1) summarized, ‘in this view capitalism and democracy go hand in hand because democracy, while proclaiming the rule of the many, in fact protects the interests of capital owners. . . . The unrestrained operation of the market for capital and labour constitutes the material base of democracy.’ Even though capitalism might prosper without democracy, ‘virtually all full-fledged democracies we know are associated with capitalist political economics’ (Rueschemeyer et al.1992, 2).

Even though scholars have often stressed the link between democracy and capitalism, different trends of research on social structures and democratization have offered different conclusions. Quantitative research, based on large-N comparisons, consistently presented a positive correlation between economic development and democracy; small-N comparisons have instead limited this relationship to specific—and even rare—historical conditions. Lipset (1959; 1980) stated early on that the economically better off a country, the higher the chances that it is a democracy (1980, 31). Education, along with related values of tolerance and moderation as well as the development of a middle class, are considered as main causal mechanisms. Linking democracy to modernization theory, Cutright (1963) explained the dominance of democracy in modern countries, citing its complex structure, which made it effective in dealing with increasingly differentiated societies. Cutright and Wiley (1969) confirmed the role of literacy as a relevant measure of social development, also observing the stabilizing effect of high provisions in social security: by satisfying the needs of the population, democracies increase support for the status quo.

Some comparative historical investigations (O’Donnell 1973) pointed instead at the capitalist interest in authoritarian regimes, especially in dependent countries. According to Ken Bollen (1979), the development of capitalism favoured the development of democracy only for earlier economic development (and first democratization), while latecomers (especially at the periphery) were more likely to be ruled by autocrats. Barrington Moore (1966) influentially singled out various paths to development, with a fascist path dominated by powerful landowners and a bourgeoisie that needed protectionist support by the state. In fact, O’Donnell (1973) stressed an ‘elective affinity’ between bureaucratic authoritarianism and capitalist development, while even democracies offer to different classes asymmetrical chances to articulate their interests, privileging some over others. In fact, Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) have noted the paradox that democratization represents primarily an increase in political equality, but with tensions between democracy and inequalities, as ‘democracy may soften but it certainly does not eliminate the differences of power, wealth and status in class-divided societies’ (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, 43).
These debates are also reflected in discussions on the role of some social classes as main carriers of democratization processes (see also above). Barrington Moore Jr. (1966), R. Bendix (1964), and T.H. Marshall (1992) all recognized the impact of class struggles in early democratization. While the focus has usually been on the middle class as promoters of democratization, more recently Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens have pointed to the role of the working class in the last two waves of democratization in Southern Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. According to them (1992, 6), ‘one would have to examine the structure of class coalitions as well as the relative power of different classes to understand how the balance of class power would affect the possibilities for democracy.’ The assumption is that ‘Those who have the most to gain from democracy will be its most reliable promoters and defenders’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 57; see also Collier and Collier 2002).

While for some scholars democracy can fit various social structures, these three authors emphasized a mutual reinforcement between democracy and capitalism: ‘capitalist development is associated with democracy because it transforms the class structure, strengthening the working and the middle-class and weakening the landed upper class. It was not the capitalist market nor capitalists as the new dominant force, but rather the contradictions of capitalism that advanced the cause of democracy’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 7). In contrast to Barrington Moore’s approach, they stated in fact that ‘The working class was the most consistent democratic force’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 8). Noting that ‘It is ironic that not only liberal historians but also the orthodox Marxist accounts of the rise of democracy see the bourgeoisie as the protagonist of democracy’, they assess instead that ‘it was the subordinated classes that fought for democracy’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 46). In their view, ‘the chances of democracy then must be seen as fundamentally shaped by the balance of class power’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 47). The middle class usually played an ambivalent role, pressing for their inclusion, but only occasionally (when weak) allying with the working class in order to extend democracy to them as well. The peasantry and rural workers played different roles, accordingly to their capacity for autonomous organization and the influence of dominant classes upon them (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).¹

Even if the urban and rural middle classes might play an important role, the working class has been considered here as the most coherent pro-democratic actor (e.g., Theborn 1995). ‘The primary economic interest of the bourgeoisie as a class lies in the development and guarantee of the institutional infrastructure of capitalist development—in the institutions of property and contract, in the predictability of judicial decisions, in the functioning of markets for capital, goods and services, and labor, and in the protection against unwelcome state intervention’ (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, 61). A dependent development restricts the differentiation of the capitalist class as well as reducing the margins of negotiation with exploited classes.

Whatever the chosen class, a structuralist bias in the traditional vision of democratization is criticized by the transitologist approach, which stresses instead the dynamic characteristic of the process, while focusing on elite strategies and behaviour (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Higley and Gunther 1992). This trend of research has the advantage of refocusing attention towards agency. As Terry Lynn Karl (1990, 1) summarized, ‘the manner in which theorists of

¹ In particular, small independent family farmers tended to be more pro-democratic than were peasants from large landholdings.
comparative politics have sought to understand democracy in developing countries has changed as the once-dominant search for prerequisites of democracy has given way to a more process-oriented emphasis on contingent choice. Having undergone this evolution, theorists should now develop an interactive approach that seeks explicitly to relate structural constraints to the shaping of contingent choice. The inconsistent results of the structuralist approaches pushed scholars away from the search for general theory aimed at discovering identical conditions for the presence or absence of democratic regimes, and towards the analysis of ‘a variety of actors with different followings, preferences, calculations, resources, and time horizons’ (Karl 1990, 5–6).

Indeed, literature in the transitology perspective tends to downplay the impact of structural conditions, which had received much attention in the past, instead stressing the role of leadership. For O’Donnell and Schmitter, transitions from authoritarian rule are illustrations of ‘underdetermined social change, of large-scale transformations which occur when there are insufficient structural or behavioral parameters to guide and predict the outcome’ (1986, 363). In fact, their influential collection of research on the transition from authoritarian rule emphasizes its ‘structural indeterminacy’.

In these underdetermined processes, in times of uncertainty, the predispositions of elites are seen as determining whether democratization occurs at all. They are linked not so much to their material interests as to a sort of concern for their future reputation. In this narrative, ‘Individual heroics may in fact be key: the “catalyst” for the process of democratization comes, not from a debt crisis or rampant inflation or some major crisis of industrialization, but from gestures by exemplary individuals who begin testing the boundaries of behavior’ (Bermeo 1990, 361). This stream of research has also been said to be extremely stato-centric, with a privileged role accorded to institutional actors. Class also tends to stay out of the picture, as strategies are analysed in game theoretical terms as interactions of incumbents and challengers, soft-liners and hard-liners.

Non-elite and non-institutional actors are considered as marginal. As Ruth Collier (1999, 5) summarized, transitologists emphasize ‘elite strategic choices, downplaying or ignoring the role of labour in democratization’. If social movements might be effective in promoting the transition process, the ‘resurrection of civil society’ is seen as a short disruptive moment in which movements, unions, churches, and society in general push for the initial liberalization of a non-democratic regime into a transition towards democracy. In their seminal work, in fact, O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 53–4) observe that: ‘In some cases and at particular

\[2\] In particular, research on Latin America pointed at the need for revision, indicating that ‘there may be no single precondition that is sufficient to produce such an outcome. The search for causes rooted in economic, social, cultural/psychological, or international factors has not yielded a general law of democratization, nor is it likely to do so in the near future despite the proliferation of new cases’ (Karl 1990).
moments of the transition, many of these diverse layers of society may come together to form what we choose to call the popular upsurge. Trade unions, grassroots movements, religious groups, intellectuals, artists, clergymen, defenders of human rights, and professional associations all support each other’s efforts toward democratization and coalesce into a greater whole which identifies itself as “the people.” Even if these are moments of intense expectations, ‘regardless of its intensity and of the background from which it emerges, this popular upsurge is always ephemeral’ (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 55–6).

While mass mobilization is recognized as important in expanding the limits of mere liberalization, defined by some increase in civil and political rights, and partial democratization, contentious action is seen more as a symptom than a cause. Moreover, masses are presented as vulnerable to elite co-optation or manipulation, often focusing on very instrumentally defined purposes (see Przeworski 1991, 57; for a critique, Baker 1999). The analytic framework ‘focuses squarely on the strategic choices of elites, and popular action is considered relevant primarily for its indirect effects on intra-elite bargaining in situations in which a transition is already underway’ (Ulfelder 2005, 313). Mass mobilization is thus conceived of as a short phase, while the analysis focuses ‘on the process by which soft-line incumbents and moderate opposition party leaders reach some implicit or explicit agreement on a transition from an authoritarian regime. To a substantial extent this is a model of democratization in which collective actors, mass mobilization and protest are largely exogenous’ (Collier 1999, 6).

As in this wave of reflection the reforma pactada/ruptura pactada in Spain was considered (explicitly or implicitly) as the model for successful democratization, the ephemeral life of the civil society tended to be perceived as not only inevitable—given the re-channelling of participation through the political parties and the electoral system—but also desirable, in order to avoid frightening authoritarian soft-liners into abandoning the negotiation process with pro-democracy moderates. Moderation was therefore seen as a positive evolution, as the attitudes and goals of the various actors change along the process. This point was neatly made by Huntington, who stated:

If democratization did not produce the dangers they feared, people who had been liberal reformers or even standpatters might come to accept democracy. Similarly, participation in the processes of democratization could lead members of extremist opposition groups to moderate their revolutionary propensities and accept the constraints and opportunities democracy offered. The relative power of the groups shaped the nature of the democratization process and often changed during that process. If standpatters dominated the government and extremists the opposition, democratization was impossible, as, for example, where a right-wing personal dictator determined to hang on to power confronted an opposition dominated by Marxist-Leninists (Huntington 1991, 589).

A somewhat more positive view of intervention from below developed with research on the wave of democratization in Eastern Europe. Influentially, Linz and Stepan (1996) suggested that ‘A robust civil society, with the capacity to generate political alternatives and to monitor government and state, can help transitions get started, help resist reversals, help push transitions to their completion, help consolidate, and help deepen democracy. At all stages of
the democratization process, therefore, a lively and independent civil society is invaluable’ (1996, 9). This theoretical attention notwithstanding, their empirical research still focused on the elites.

So, even though the dynamic, agency-focused approach of transitology allowed for some interest in the role played by especially in the phase of liberalization (Pagnucco 1995), it did not bring much attention to them.

**Democratization in social movement studies**

In contrast, the field of social movement studies has stressed the relevance of contention. Rarely focusing on social movements in democratization phases, such research has flourished in (and on) established democracies (for a review, see Rossi and della Porta 2009). Even in established democracies, the relationship between movements and democracy has been mainly looked at in terms of institutional opportunities for protest, rather than the attitudes on and practices of democracy by activists and their organizations (della Porta 2009a; 2009b; della Porta and Rucht 2013). As critics have observed, even the rare research concerned with the issue ‘stops short of a systematic inquiry into the political principles of popular organizations and strategic choice, and so fails to pursue the connections between popular politics and processes of institutional change within political regimes’ (Foweraker 1995, 218).

If a systematic analysis of processes of transition from below is lacking, however, there has been some potential for the development of research on social movements and democratization. On the one hand, the emergence of the global justice movement encouraged some social movement scholars to pay more attention to issues of democracy, as well as to social movements in the Global South (e.g. della Porta 2009a; della Porta and Rucht 2013). At the theoretical level, recognizing the structuralist bias of the political process approach, a more dynamic vision of protest has been promoted, with a focus on the social mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects (McAdam et al. 2001). Recently, a similar evolution was identified in the related field of revolutions. Foran (2005) distinguished different generations in research on revolutions. The first generation tended to present a natural history of revolution, which starts when intellectuals cease to support the regime and continues with regime changes (reform and crisis), conflicts within the opposition between radical and moderates, who usually eventually prevail. A second generation stressed instead root causes such as dysfunctions, which bring about relative deprivation; structural causes are also emphasized by a third generation, which focuses on socioeconomic as well as international conditions. Against the structuralist dominance, a fourth generation searches for
some scholars within this approach proposed the reformulation of the transitology perspective, taking into account the role played by contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001; Schock 2005; Tilly 2004). Similarly to the transitology approach, they have stressed agency as well as the importance of looking at democratization as dynamic processes. On the other hand, some pioneering research has aimed at applying social movement studies to research on authoritarian regimes, from the Middle East (Wiktorowicz 2004; Hafez 2003; Gunning 2009) to Asia (Boudreau 2004) and the former Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002). Moreover, however dominant, the ‘elitist’ approach has not gone unchallenged in studies of democratization.

First of all, some normative reflections have pointed at the democratizing capacity of civil society, theoretically located between the state and the market, with diminishing confidence in the role played by political parties as carriers of the democratization process. The very conceptualization of a global civil society emphasizes the democratizing input coming ‘from below’ (Kaldor 2003; Keane 2003). In some of these interpretations, civil society is conceptualized as almost synonymous with social movements (Cohen and Arato 1992; Kaldor 2003). Within this frame, several programs of civil society promotion were initiated, sponsored by international governmental organizations as well as individual states.

An empirical linkage between social movements and democratization processes has been established as well. Among others, Charles Tilly has observed ‘a broad correspondence between democratization and social movements’. On the one hand, many of the processes that cause democratization also promote social movements, and ‘democratization as such further encourages people to form social movements’ (Tilly 2004, 131). On the other, ‘under some conditions and in a more limited way, social movements themselves promote democratization’ (Tilly 2004, 131).

Historical research has pointed at the pivotal role (some) social movements played in the struggle for expanding social rights. The labour movement was particularly active in calling for the right of association, as well as the right to form unions, and for increasing political participation (Sewell 1996; della Porta 2011). Even when ‘only a very small number of well-to-do English men (no women, no poor) could actually vote, parliamentary elections became occasions to air different viewpoints’ (Markoff 1996, 47). Claims framed by movements in the name of rights, citizenship, and their political practices played a crucial function in creating citizenry (Foweraker and Landman 1997; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003), as agency, as organizational resources, emotions, and culture. So, Foran (2005, 18) singled out five necessary conditions for a successful revolution: ‘1) dependent development; 2) a repressive, exclusionary, personalist state; 3) the elaboration of effective and powerful political cultures of resistance; and a revolutionary crisis consisting of 4) an economic downturn; 5) world-systemic opening (a let-up of external controls)’. These various conditions and mechanisms have been seen as supporting each other.
‘the struggle for rights has more than a merely rhetorical impact. The insistence on the rights of free speech and assembly is a precondition of the kind of collective (and democratic) decision-making which educates citizens’ (Foweraker 1995, 98).

Movements on behalf of excluded groups often cooperated and learned from each other. Many activists in the movement for women’s rights before the American Civil War had experience in the abolitionist movement, for example, just as the ‘British antislavery movement was a major source of many forms of activism in that country’ (Markoff 1996, 57). There were also alliances between women and labour movements for suffrage and welfare (Markoff 1996, 84; also della Porta, Valiente, and Kousis forthcoming). The labour movement developed specific public spheres in which a taste for freedom was nurtured as a necessary complement to calls for social justice (della Porta 2013a; della Porta 2005a). Also later on, case studies as well as comparative analyses have demonstrated the crucial role played by mobilized actors in the emergence of democracy, and in its preservation or expansion (della Porta 2007; della Porta 2009a; 2009b).

In addition, case studies on recent transitions have demonstrated the importance of social movements in the struggle for democracy, and in its preservation or expansion (see Rossi and della Porta 2009 for a review). As Ulfelder (2005, 313) synthesized, ‘Various subsequent studies of democratic transitions have afforded collective actors a more prominent role, allowing for the possibility that mass mobilization has a substantial impact on the transition process and is sometimes the catalyst that sets a transition in motion.’ Not even in the Spanish case can transition be considered a purely elite-controlled bargaining process, as massive strike waves, terrorist attacks by nationalist movements, and an ascending cycle of protest characterized the transition (see, among others, Foweraker 1989; Maravall 1978; 1982; McAdam et al. 2001, 171–86; Reinares 1987; Sánchez-Cuenca and Aguilar 2009; Tarrow 1995).

Much research has indicated that protests (especially strikes) often constitute precipitating events that trigger liberalization, spreading the perception among authoritarian elites that they need to open some spaces of freedom in order to avoid an imminent or potential civil war or violent takeover of power by democratic and/or revolutionary actors (e.g. Bermeo 1997; Wood 2000). Already research on first democratization had noted the importance of liberalization, as the granting of opposition rights, and the gradual extension of this rights, as a main path to democracy (Dahl 1971). Also in other cases, liberalization, in turn, opened up some (although limited) opportunities for social movements to develop. Trade unions and urban movements often exploited those openings, pushing for social rights but also political reform (Slater 1985; Collier 1999; Silver 2003; Schneider 1992; 1995; Hipsher 1998a), sometimes in alliance with transnational actors (e.g. in Latin America, as well as in Eastern Europe; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Glenn 2003).

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4 This would in fact be better defined as a destabilization/extrication process (Collier 1999, 126–32) or as ‘a cycle of protest intertwined with elite transaction’ (McAdam et al. 2001, 186).
During the transition, old movements and new social movements have been noted as participants in large coalitions asking for democratic rights and social justice (Jelin 1987; Tarrow 1995). The mobilization of a pro-democracy coalition of trade unions, churches, and social movements has often been pivotal in supporting the movement towards democracy when faced with contending counter-movements opposing liberalization. Protests can then be used by modernizing elites to push for free elections (Casper and Taylor 1996, 9–10; Glenn 2003, 104).

Social movements are then important in the consolidation phase, which opens up with the first free elections, the end of the period of uncertainty, and/or the implementation of a minimum quality of substantive democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996; O’Donnell 1993, 1994). In some cases, this phase is accompanied by a demobilization of civil society organizations as energies are channelled into party politics; in others, however, democracy fuels social movements. The presence of a tradition of mobilization and of political allies can in fact help maintain a high level of protest, as with the shantytown dwellers’ protests in Chile (Hipsher 1998b; Schneider 1992; 1995), the peasants’ and labour movements in Brazil (Branford and Rocha 2002; Burdick 2004), or the environmental movements in Eastern Europe (Flam 2001). Movements then call for extending rights to those who are excluded by ‘low intensity democracies’ and target authoritarian legacies (Eckstein 2001; Yashar 2005; della Porta 2013a). Movements’ alternative practices and values have often helped in sustaining and expanding democracy (Santos 2005; della Porta 2009a). Keeping elites under continuous popular pressure after transition can be important for a successful consolidation (Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005).

When looking at the impact of social movements on democracy, however, the empirical evidence is mixed. First, as mentioned, their relevance in democratization processes is discussed within a ‘populist approach’ emphasizing participation from below—with social movements as important actors in the creation of democratic public spheres—but denied by an ‘elitist approach’ considering democratization as mainly a top-down process (Tilly 2004). Moreover, empirical research has noted the potentials but also the limitations of development from below, both during and after democratization processes (della Porta 2005b). Research on the Global South, but also on transnational institutions, has addressed the inconsistent qualifications of civil society organizations and social movements in terms of their autonomy from the political system, their civility as inclusive conceptions of citizenship, their plurality as the capacity of representation of different groups in the population, as well as their legitimacy and internal accountability. In contemporary social movements, participatory and deliberative practices have indeed attracted some interest, but they have also been difficult to implement, as activists are the first to admit (della Porta 2009a; 2009b). Considered as particularly relevant for the successful implementation of a democratic process, to which they can contribute important resources of knowledge and commitment, civil society organizations are often quite critical participants and/or observers of the institutional policies that aim at implementing these goals.

Indeed, social movements contribute to democratization only under certain conditions. Collective mobilization has frequently produced destabilization of authoritarian regimes, but it has also led to an intensification of repression or the collapse of weak democratic regimes,
particularly when social movements do not keep to democratic conceptions. Labour, student, and ethnic movements brought about a crisis in the Franco regime in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, but the workers’ and peasants’ protests and the fascist counter-movements contributed to the failure of the process of democratization in Italy in the 1920s (Tarrow 1995). Beyond a social movement’s propensity to support democracy, democratization processes might follow different paths, being more or less influenced by the mobilization of social movements. Some democratization processes are protest-driven, others moved by pacts. And social movements might be strong in mobilizing, but also opt for bargaining instead.

As the relationship between social movements and democratization is not simple, a systematic cross-national comparison is needed to single out the conditions and mechanisms through which democratization is moved from below. A similar question has been addressed by Ruth Collier who, comparing recent Latin American with older European experiences, asked ‘whether a group of workers became part of the democratization process as a self conscious collectivity and played an active role that affected the democratic outcome’ (1999, 15). In this volume, I intend to broaden this question in time and space, as well as with reference to types of social movements other than labour. Bridging the useful insights arising from existing research on democratization processes with those developed within social movement studies, I will focus on participation from below in episodes of democratization.

**Democratization from below: the research questions**

Building on the most recent developments in social movement studies as well as democratization studies, I will pay particular attention to the causal mechanisms that intervene between macro-causes and macro-effects, in order to understand the way in which social movements exercise, or do not exercise, agency within a certain structure.

My research aims at understanding what I define as democratization from below, looking at the protest waves that accompanied democratic reforms. With Beissinger, I define protest events as ‘contentious and potentially subversive practices that challenge normalized practices, modes of causation, or systems of authority’ (2002, 14). Protest events might indeed change structures, as they are, in Hannah Arendt’s words, ‘occurrences that interrupt routine processes and routine procedures’ (1970, 7).

Of course, events are also rooted in structures. Giddens (1979) speaks of an intrinsic relation between structures and actions, as agency is inherent in the development of structure and structure influences, to a certain extent, action. Also according to Beissinger, pre-existing structural conditions are embedded in the orderliness of institutions as ‘institutions constrain and otherwise positively define the ways in which agents pursue their interests through their power to instil regularity and predictability in social affairs and to preclude alternative ways of acting’ (2002, 13). It is therefore important to consider the influence of structures, including political opportunities, as well as the capacity for agency in participation from below in the different stages of democratization processes (della Porta and Diani 2006; Rossi and della Porta 2009).
What to explain: democratization from below

A very first and general way to look at democratization from below would simply aim at balancing the mentioned empirical focus on elites with more attention to what non-elites (in particular, social movements) have done. As Collier and Mahoney stressed, ‘The dominant paradigm has built upon the founding essay by O’Donnell and Schmitter, which emphasizes the role of leadership and elite interaction. While that essay suggests that “the greatest challenge to the transitional regime is likely to come from the collective action of the working class”, it also emphasizes the ephemeral nature of the “popular upsurge” and the subsequent “decline of the people”’ (1997, 285). Addressing democratization from below would first of all help in redressing that bias.

My research aim, however, goes beyond this empirical enrichment by explaining different paths of democratization from below, with particular attention given to eventful democratization, that is, protest-driven episodes of democratization. Following Ruth Collier (1999), we might distinguish different meanings of the term ‘from below’ as linked to: a) the power of certain actors, distinguishing insiders from outsiders; b) the social background of those actors, distinguishing, in particular, between upper and lower classes; c) the arenas in which the conflicts take place, distinguishing institutional arenas from protest arenas.

Additionally, we can easily assume that the balance of participation by outsiders and contention in empirical cases varies. Focusing attention on the mobilization of labour, Ruth Collier (1999) has indeed inductively distinguished different paths. Assuming that each empirical case involves a combination of different aspects, and leaving aside for the moment the social background of those who mobilize, I started by building a typology that crosses the dimensions of insiders versus outsiders and moderation versus contestation. The first dimension defines the degree of participation of civil society and the second its forms.

The ensuing types are reported in Table 1.1. Differently from pacted transition, where citizens are not mobilized, in participatory pacts social movements are strong enough to push for democratization; in disruptive coup d’états, elites manipulate mass protest in order to win over conservative groups in participatory pacts; and in eventful democratization it is protest by outsiders that moves the episodes of democratization.

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Explaining democratization from below

The research presented in this volume focuses on paths of democratization from below, with particular attention given to eventful democratization. As democratic transitions display a wide variety of trajectories and outcomes, ‘the role of social movements within them is conditioned by the specific rhythm of the “protest cycle”, the shape of the political opportunity structure, and the contingency of strategic choice’ (Foweraker 1995, 90, n. 2).

Breaking with essentialist, deterministic, and structuralist understandings, the project follows Beissinger’s (2002) stress on temporality, contextualization, and agency. I consider agency as inherent in the development of structure, and structure as influencing action, at least to a certain extent. As Beissinger observed in his illuminating analysis of the breakdown of the Soviet empire, ‘nationalism needs to be understood not only as a cause of action, but also as the product of action. This recursive quality of human action—the fact that action can function as both cause and effect—and the significance of this for the study of nationalism are the central theoretical issues’ (Beissinger 2002, 11). A causal analysis, artificially distinguishing dependent and independent variables, risks obscuring this continuous relationship. In Beissinger’s words, ‘the idea that identities could be defined in the context of agency or that nationalism is both a structured and a structuring phenomenon has not received sufficient attention’ (2002, 9).

In parallel, when looking at social movements more in general, we should understand them as both structured and structuring phenomena. They are, that is, both constrained in their action by the context in which they move, but also able, through their action, to change those structures. As Sewell (1990) has shown in his brilliant analysis of the Bastille takeover, this does not happen only in the long term, but also in the (very) short, événementiel one, as events are relational processes in which various actors make choices that are, at least in part, linked to others’ expected reactions.

In my study I want in fact to stress the effects of protest on the social movement itself, by focusing on what, inspired by the historical sociologist William H. Sewell (1996), I have called ‘eventful protest’ (della Porta 2008). Sewell defines events as a ‘relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transform structure’, and an eventful conception of temporality as ‘one that takes into account the transformation of structures by events’ (Sewell (1996), emphasis added). I suggest that, especially during cycles of protest, some contingent intense events tend to affect the given context by fuelling mechanisms of social change:

\[\text{As he notes, even constructivist approaches have not sufficiently ‘investigated the ways in which the action itself may be constitutive of nationhood’ (Beissinger 2002, 11), for example by looking at how nationalism suddenly crystallizes rather than developing gradually (Brubaker 1996).}\]
organizational networks develop; frames are bridged; personal links foster reciprocal trust. In this sense, some protest events constitute processes during which collective experiences develop through the interactions of different individual and collective actors, taking part with different roles and aims. The event has a transformative effect as it alters the conditions for action ‘largely by constituting and empowering new groups of actors or by re-empowering existing groups in new ways’ (Sewell 1996, 271). Predictability and structural determinacy are indeed challenged as these protest events set in motion social processes that ‘are inherently contingent, discontinuous and open ended’ (Sewell 1996, 272).

This bridging of structure and action can be observed through a focus on protest events during episodes of democratization. While the social science literature on first democratization paid attention to long lasting processes of increase (and sometimes, decrease) in democratic rights, literature on transitology has looked at relatively short moments. Rather than analysing the long term effects of these moments as foundational (or not) for democracy, I will reconstruct protests during episodes of democratization, their origins, characteristics, and short-term effects. Without assessing the long term consequences of these episodes to see if they bring about sustained changes, I define them on the basis of their short term effects in moving a step forward in the direction of democracy.

When looking at eventful democratization, I shall indeed focus on short periods of intense protest, looking at the relational, affective, and cognitive mechanisms that take place within them. As we will see, the historical context of the selected cases varies, as do the characteristics of the selected organizations. Rather than searching for invariant determinants, I want to identify some common dynamics that are present in the evolution of various cases of democratization. For this purpose, I use the concept of causal mechanisms.

In recent years, the language of mechanisms has become fashionable in the social sciences, signalling dissatisfaction with correlational analysis (Mahoney 2003). Distinguishing as many as nine ways to define a mechanism, Gerring (2007) proposed a minimal common denominator in the search for the means through which a cause produces an effect. Thus, he singled out the core meaning of mechanism in ‘the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished’ (Gerring 2007, 178). In one understanding, the

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6 Mahoney (2003) instead considered mechanisms as ‘unobserved entities, processes or structures through which an independent variable exerts an effect on a dependent variable’ (Mahoney 2003, 1). They generate outcomes, but do not themselves require explanation as they are ‘hypothetical ultimate causes’ that explain ‘why a causal variable exerts an effect on a given outcome variable’ (Mahoney 2003, 1–2). Identifying mechanisms with general approaches, he distinguishes three main mechanisms: rational choice (micro-level); structural functionalism (macro-level); and power of collective actors (meso-level).
concept of causal mechanism has then been used to refer either to (historical) paths, with a search for events, which are observable and context dependent, or to microlevel explanations, with a search for variables at the individual level in the quest for universal, law-like causal explanations. In macro-analyses, causal mechanisms have been linked to systematic process tracing (Hall 2003) through a causal reconstruction that aim at explaining a given social phenomenon, being it an event or a structure, by singling out the process through which it is generated (Mayntz 2003). Mechanisms refer, therefore, to intermediary steps between conditions and outcomes. In microlevel explanations, instead, the theoretical focus is on individual agency. According to Hedstrom and Bearman (2009, 4), ‘Analytical sociology explains by detailing mechanisms through which social facts are brought about, and these mechanisms invariably refer to individuals’ actions and the relations that link actors to one another.’

In my own understanding, mechanisms are categories of action that filter structural conditions and produce effects (see della Porta 2013b). Following Tilly (2001), I conceptualize mechanisms as relatively abstract patterns of action that can travel from one episode to the next, explaining how a cause creates a consequence in a given context. I would not restrict capacity of action to individuals, however, instead including collective actors. I will in fact consider mechanisms as a concatenation of generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (for example, cycles of protest) through individual and/or organizational agents. In this way, I believe that the search for mechanisms helps in combining attention to structure and to agency.

Looking at mechanisms, my approach is relational, as it locates eventful democratization in the interactions of various institutional and non-institutional actors; constructivist, as it takes into account not only the external opportunities and constraints, but also the social construction of their experiential reality by the various actors participating in social and political conflicts; and emergent, as it recognizes that democratization from below involves the capacity of events to change structures (della Porta 2013b). Cognitive and affective processes intervene in the mobilization, contributing to define the situation as well as forging solidarities and identities. Considering the constraining power of the context in which episodes of mobilization take place, I shall address both endogenous, social movement properties and exogenous, environmental ones.

First, I shall look at democratization events as transformative, insofar as they alter the cultural meanings or significations of political and social categories and fundamentally shape people’s collective loyalties and actions (Sewell 1990). They are settings in which one sees better the structural influences, but also ‘the spectacle-like quality of the event makes it an important

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7 Mechanisms should allow us to build general causal explanations: ‘A mechanism is a precise, abstract and action-based explanation which shows how the occurring of triggering events regularly generates the type of outcome to be explained’ (Hedstrom and Bearman 2009, 6).
site of cultural transactions at which national identities are potentially formed’ (Beissinger 2007, 22). The contention intrinsic to the event is strongly constitutive of identities (Beissinger 2007, 23). As Jeffrey Alexander noted, ‘Social dramas, unlike theatrical ones, are open-ended and contingent. They can be staged, but nobody is certain whether the actors will arrive, who they will be, how events will unfold, which side will win a confrontation, and what the drama’s effects on the audience will be’ (2011, 36).

Even recognizing this transformative capacity of events, however, I expect the relevance of opposition from below during democratization processes to be influenced by some characteristics of the social movements that mobilize. Social movements are here defined as (1) informal networks of individuals and organizations, based on (2) shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest (della Porta and Diani 2006, chap. 1). Even as social movement studies tend to consider democracy as a precondition for their development, various actors (sometimes defined as civil society) have targeted the legitimacy and the (national and international) support for authoritarian regimes (on the Latin American cases, see Jelin 1987; Corradi et al. 1992; Escobar and Álvarez 1992). Among the social movement organizations that have played a pro-democratic role are church-related actors (see Lowden 1996 on Chile; Burdick 1992; Levine and Mainwaring 2001 on Brazil; della Porta and Mattina 1986 on Spain; Glenn 2003; Osa 2003b on Poland); human rights networks, sometimes in transnational alliances (Brysk 1993; Brito 1997; Sikkink 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998, chap. 3; Wright 2007); cultural groups (Glenn 2003 on Czechoslovakia); as well as, very often, the labour movement, sometimes in alliance with new social movements. Human rights movements campaign to delegitimize authoritarian regimes in international fora such as the United Nations, and in clandestine or open resistance to the authoritarian regime at the national level.

Following social movement studies, we can assume that three sets of characteristics of these networks can affect their role in democratization processes: their frames on democratic issues, organizational structures, and action repertoires (on these concepts, see della Porta and Diani 2006).

Frames are schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space as well as in the world at large (Snow et al. 1986, 464). Social movement framings about democracy and democratization vary. For example, past research indicated that the labour movement was often divided in its positions about representative democracy. Even if it tended to support the various stages of (initial) democratization, cross-national differences were relevant (Marks, Mbaye, and Kim 2009). More in general, social movements propose alternative conceptions of democracy, often mixing participatory and deliberative models. Beyond support for democracy in general, specific conceptions of democracy vary. On the whole, social movements tend to consider a representative conception of democracy as, at least, insufficient, focusing instead on democracy as a process that is variously defined as participatory, direct, open and deliberative. Traditionally, social movements have emphasized the participatory conception of democracy, stressing the importance of increasing direct forms of participation. In this line, social movement organizations have been said to assert that direct democracy is closer to the interests of the people than is liberal democracy, which is based on the delegation of power to representatives who can be controlled only at the moment of election and who have
full authority to take decisions between one election and another (Kitschelt 1990). Moreover, following visions of deliberative democracy, recent movements have stressed the importance of building public spaces where consensual decision making develops. Conceptions of democracy are also embedded in visions of the enemy and the self, in diagnostic and prognostic assumptions, in which a civil society is often pitted against tyranny. Different (more or less inclusive) appeals to the nation might be mobilized as well. The moderation versus radicalization of claims for autonomy/independence has been mentioned as favouring rather than jeopardizing the transition to democracy (among others, Oberschall 2000; Glenn 2003; Reinares 1987).

As already proved by previous research on social movements in democracies (della Porta 2009a; 2009b; 2013a), I expect that, in democratization processes as well, conceptions of democracy interact with other organizational characteristics of social movements. Since an organization is also a ‘context for political conversation’ (Elisosoph 1998), frames interact with organizational structures as well as the repertoire of contentious action. Indeed, organizational forms have been analysed in relation to the cultural meaning that activists give to them (see Breines 1989; Clemens 1993; Polletta 2002). Various pieces of research on social movements have confirmed that informal, decentralized groups tend to espouse more participatory and consensus-oriented conceptions of democracy (della Porta 2009a; della Porta 2009b; della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, and Reiter 2006). Social networks of various types have emerged as fundamental, especially for some paths of mobilization under authoritarian regimes (Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003). The resilience of these resistance networks under the impact of repression can lead to splits within the ruling authoritarian elites (Schock 2005).

Conceptions of democracy have also been linked to repertoires of action. Previous research has in fact indicated that an emphasis on protest brings about a ‘logic of membership’ that favours participatory democratic models (della Porta 2009a). In addition, social movement organizations and activists that embrace nonviolent practices tend to emphasize consensual decision-making. In reverse, the use of violent forms of action tends to reduce both participation and deliberation (della Porta 1995). As mentioned, research on nonviolence has developed as a research field, pointing at the growing spread and success of (almost oxymoronical) peaceful revolutions. The extent to which nonviolence is tenable in the presence of high levels of repression is, however, an open question.

In this process, major transnational influences are at stake. The conceptions of democracy expressed by local social movement organizations and the Western conceptions promoted by transnational actors may develop into cross-fertilization, but may also hamper efforts at developing an autonomous civil society (e.g. Challand 2008; Wada 2006; Dorronsoro 2005; Lelandais 2008). Based on previous research (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Chiodi 2007b), I

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8 Research in non-EU countries has in fact found a tension between rich nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), often funded by international actors, and grassroots local groups (e.g. Chandhoke 2003).
expect all of these aspects to have an indirect or direct impact on mobilization from below in democratization processes. I also expect to find relevant cross-national phenomena of diffusion of ideas, often based on active strategies of promotion (e.g. Beissinger 2007; Chessa 2004; Henderson 2002).

Moving from endogenous to exogenous contextual constraints, I also expect social and political opportunities, especially as they are perceived by civil society actors, to influence the role they play in democratization processes. As mentioned, structuralist approaches have investigated external conditions that might explain paths of democratization. Democratization studies have looked at economic development and class structure, while social movement studies have focused on political dimensions, defined with reference to stable characteristics such as the functional and territorial distribution of power, political culture, and cleavage structure, as well as more dynamic features such as the positions of potential allies and opponents. The basic assumption in this approach is that the more opportunities a political system offers to social movements, the more moderate, single issue and open-structured those movements will be. Drawing on this previous research, I expect political as well as social opportunities to influence mobilization levels (Kriesi 1991; Tarrow 1989; Kriesi et al. 1995), strategies (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986), ideologies / framing and behaviour (della Porta and Rucht 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995), and the organizational structures of social movements (Rucht 1996; Kriesi 1996). This, however, does not happen automatically, without the agency power of mobilization itself, as opportunities must be perceived and ‘appropriated’ by the collective actors (McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow 2001).

In looking at political opportunities, the research on democratization has mainly addressed the characteristics of the authoritarian regime. Linz and Stepan (1996) hypothesized that the type of non-democratic regime influences the potential for the emergence of movements, protests, strikes, and underground resistance networks that precede liberalization and accompany democratization. Regimes have usually been divided into totalitarian, authoritarian, and sultanistic types (e.g. Linz and Stepan 1996), and each of them is expected to have a different impact on civil society, especially through different levels and styles of repression. Different transition paths can also offer different opportunities to social movements. Linz and Stepan (1996, chap. 2) singled out the specific challenges of multiple simultaneous transitions, where regime changes are accompanied by changes in the economic system and/or the nation-state arrangement. It is in fact important not only whether the previous regime was authoritarian or totalitarian, but also whether it was capitalist or communist (Stark and Bruszt 1998). Especially in the case of a triple transition, the problem of nation-state building is reflected in the emergence of nationalist movements mobilizing in the name of contending visions of what the demos of the future democracy should be (Beissinger 2002).

International actors also intervene as (often powerful) allies or opponents. Shifts in the constellation of states supporting versus opposing the dictators play an important role in opening or closing windows of opportunity for the opposition. Also influential are the evolving international regimes that define the global normative context for action by states and parties engaged in violent conflict, as well as the development of transnational epistemic communities that link states and civil society organizations against human rights violations.
Research design

My research aims at building theory through understanding the dynamics of episodes of mobilization for democracy. In order to do this, I will—as mentioned—bridge insights from two fields of the social sciences (social movement studies and transition studies), building upon empirical evidence collected on a (relatively large) number of cases.

I address mobilizations for democracy, mixing most similar and most different research designs. Intra-area comparisons allow for a finer understanding about how specific contextual conditions operate. However, cross-area comparisons are particularly suited to assessing the robustness of findings. As much research on each wave of mobilization for democracy in a particular geographical region has been framed within specific area studies traditions, it has inherited their special sensitivity towards some theories and interpretations but also tended to overlook others. While contextual conditions across waves tend to vary, we might expect instead that some common mechanisms might be at play. Combining infra-area with cross-area comparisons will therefore allow exploiting the strengths of both comparative strategies.

Within these cross-area perspectives, I will compare the major episodes of democratization in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the so-called MENA region (Middle East and Northern Africa) in 2011. While on the East European cases a relevant amount of research allowed for more in-depth interpretation, the MENA region has been chosen not only for its diversity in comparison with the other wave, but also for its actual relevance. To a certain extent, one could say that one can draw from the Eastern European cases some well-founded analytic frames, whose validity for the MENA region can be preliminarily assessed.

Within each area, my case selection was based on the following assumptions. First, my main focus is on eventful democratization that leads to episodes of democratization. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia are positive cases of eventful democratization in Eastern Europe; Tunisia and Egypt in the MENA region. These are the cases I will analyse more in depth in order to understand the specific mechanisms of eventful democratization.

When moving from agency to contextual constraints, however, I will also introduce cases that followed different paths—thus avoiding selecting on the dependent variable. In order to do this, I will consider all other countries in Central Eastern Europe, the Baltic, and the Balkans during the ‘velvet revolutions’ of 1989 as well as all MENA countries where relevant mobilizations for democracy developed around 2011.

In this sense, rather than sampling a few cases based on theoretical assumptions, I aimed at covering all critical cases in two specific waves, in different historical moments, geopolitical conditions, and with different regime types and socioeconomic structures. In particular, I will consider, together with GDR and Czechoslovakia, also Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Albania for Eastern Europe; and, together with Tunisia and Egypt, also Libya and Syria for the MENA region. I will also introduce some references to the Baltic States, former Yugoslavia, Yemen, Morocco and Turkey. More specifically, GDR and Czechoslovakia as
well as Egypt and Tunisia will be analysed, as mentioned, as cases of eventful democratization. Hungary and Poland will be considered instead as cases of (more or less) participated pacts and contrasted with to a more limited extent, Morocco, Yemen and Turkey. Romania and Albania, as well as Libya and Syria, will be discussed under the label of participated coup d’état. Finally, the Baltic and the Balkan areas will be contrasted as examples of evolution of democratization processes when other, nationalist social movements dominate the scene.

Even though the main aim is theory building, the volume reports much empirical evidence. I have in general relied on historical comparative analysis. Empirical evidence is derived in part from analysis of existing studies (especially on Central Eastern Europe) and in part from fieldwork (mainly on the MENA region). On all cases, I relied upon research reports I have commissioned from country experts endowed with relevant linguistic knowledge, as well as my own secondary analysis of existing research and conversations with experts. All reports were written by social movement scholars using a common analytic scheme to investigate episodes of mobilization for democracy. To case reports, I have added the collection of systematic evidence on protest events, derived from various media sources.

This brings me to the issue of the potential outdating of the empirical results, in a situation in constant change. While it is true that our knowledge of the recent upheaval in the MENA region is, as I mention above, shallower than the one we now have on the 1989 ‘revolutions’, I will focus attention not so much on the outcomes, which are still open, but rather on the characteristics (frames, organizational structures, forms of action) and dynamics of the past episodes of mobilization. As we do not know where these countries are going in terms of democratization, I focus on the insurgent moments rather than their long term outcomes. Even if it is still uncertain to which extent (some of) the ‘Arab Spring’ protests will bring about democratic consolidation, we can already study them as episodes of mobilization for democracy.

This volume

Given my background in social movement studies, I see the original contribution of this volume in a systematic discussion of the heuristic capacity of concepts and hypotheses developed in that field to illuminate the dynamics of episodes of mobilization from below, but also to see their limitations when applied to non-democracies. While much of the social science literature that has looked at democratization from below has done it either from within transition studies or referring to the traditionalist, more structuralist approach to social movements, I strive instead to develop a more dynamic approach, looking at the constructive and relational nature of episodes of mobilization for democracy.

In this analysis, and resonant with recent changes in the social sciences, I will aim at combining focuses on agency with the acknowledgment of contextual constraints on it. In order to do this, I will first look at the eventfulness of some episodes of democratization, singling out relational, cognitive, and affective mechanisms within them. An in-depth comparison of GDR, Czechoslovakia, Tunisia, and Egypt will be developed here in order to find robust mechanisms, common to all cases. While social movement studies have long
considered the opening of political opportunities as a precondition for mobilization and transition studies mainly focused upon elites, I will point at the relevance of protest events as producers of opportunities (see Chapter 2).

Embedding eventful democratization in its broader environment, I will look at social movements’ resource mobilization (Chapter 3) and collective framing (Chapter 4). While social movement studies consider organizational resources as fundamental for mobilization, and transition studies talks of short moments of popular (spontaneous) mobilization, I will specify when and how civil society organizations did contribute to protest, but also when they did not, highlighting the (potential and actual tensions) between civil society organizations and insurgents. While social movement studies developed upon cross-national comparison, I will follow some recent innovations in transition studies that allow for incorporating concepts of wave and diffusion in the analysis of domestic and international opportunities. The concept of civil society will be discussed here.

Repression and facilitation will emerge as central aspects in the mobilization processes. Rather than considering them, however, simply as costs and benefits, I will look at the interaction of various actors within the protests at large (Chapter 5). While social movement studies has tended to overlook capitalist developments, focusing on political opportunities, and transition studies has addressed the type of authoritarian regimes, I will then look at appropriation of opportunities by considering (also) the economic bases of political regimes (Chapter 6).

In order to assess the peculiarity of eventful democratization, I will then analyse cases in which (more or less) strong civil societies have opted for bargaining rather than mobilization (such as Hungary and Poland), looking also at the troubled history of democracy in Morocco and Turkey (Chapter 7) as well as at cases in which strong repression thwarted civil society developments (such as Romania and Albania, but also Libya and Syria) (Chapter 8). Finally, I shall discuss cases in which nationalism was used in mobilization against democratization rather than for it (Chapter 9). In all chapters, as well as in the conclusion (Chapter 10), reference to other cases will be introduced in order to discuss the external validity of my findings.