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Weipert-Fenner, Irene; Wolff, Jonas

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Unemployed Movements in the Global South: The cases of Argentina and Tunisia

Irene Weipert-Fenner/Jonas Wolff

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ABSTRACT

Comparative research on unemployed activism, to date, is largely based on countries in the Global North although two outstanding cases of mobilization of jobless people can be found in the Global South: Argentina, which between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s experienced probably the strongest wave of mobilization of unemployed workers on record worldwide, and Tunisia, where unemployed have played a significant role in waves of protests since 2008, including during the national uprising of 2010/11 that brought down long-standing Dictator Ben Ali. This working paper studies the two cases along the factors derived from general social movement theory and systematically compares them with the findings on unemployed movements in the Global North. The analysis reveals important common features that characterize unemployed movements across countries and contexts, but also dynamics that a narrow North-Western focus tends to miss. Most importantly, changes in general political opportunity structures and the mobilization of unemployed prove to be strongly interrelated in Argentina and Tunisia. The effects of opening political opportunities, however, have had decidedly ambivalent effects on these unemployed movements.

1 INTRODUCTION

During the last ten years, a series of comparative studies on mobilization processes among unemployed people has emerged (cf. Baglioni et al. 2008; Chabanet and Faniel 2012; Giugni 2008; Lahusen 2013; Reiss and Perry 2011). Until now, however, this scholarship almost entirely focuses on the Global North and, in particular, on Europe. Argentina, the country with the greatest mobilization of unemployed that ever existed, has not found systematic integration into these comparative studies. The same holds true for the few existing studies on other cases from the Global South such as Emperador Badimon's (2013a, b) work on the unemployed graduates in Morocco and the analysis of the politicization of unemployment in British-ruled Palestine by De Vries and Bar-On (2011). Against this background, the present paper sets out to contribute to existing comparative research on unemployed movements by systematically bringing in two experiences from the Global South, namely: the above-mentioned case of Argentina and the more recent, and hitherto understudied, case of Tunisia.

In Argentina, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a severe economic crisis triggered what is, to date, the most impressive cycle of contention among unemployed people worldwide (cf. Delamata 2004; Dinerstein 2003; Epstein 2006; Garay 2007; Svampa and Pereyra 2004; Wolff 2007). Tunisia represents those North African countries that, since the early 1990s, have seen the rise of unemployed movements, which have mainly been driven by unemployed university graduates (cf. Emperador Badimon 2013a, b; Geisser 2000). In both cases, unemployed movements became part of broader social uprisings that led to important episodes of political change: the 2011 "revolution" in Tunisia, i.e. the fall of long-standing dictator Ben Ali and the subsequent process of democratization, and

¹ This working paper has been written in the context of the research project "Socioeconomic Protests and Political Transformation: Dynamics of Contentious Politics in Egypt and Tunisia against the Background of South American Experiences" which is generously funded by the *VolkswagenStiftung* (see <http://bit.ly/29xdLmO>). A previous version was presented at IPSA's 24th World Congress of Political Science, 23–28 July 2016, Poznań, Poland. The authors thank Didier Chabanet as well as our research team for comments and Giuseppe Campisi, Johanna Faulstich, Fynn Kaese, Francis Köllner, and Isabel Ruckelshaus for research assistance.

the 2001 “social explosion” in Argentina, i.e. the toppling of elected president De la Rúa and the following process of within-regime change.²

In order to embark on a truly global research agenda on unemployed movements, this paper undertakes a two-step comparison. On the one hand, we compare Argentina and Tunisia as very dissimilar cases within the Global South (democratic versus authoritarian/transition context; mobilization of unemployed workers versus mobilization of unemployed graduates; broad range of unemployed organizations versus only one). On the other hand, we compare common features of these Southern cases with key findings from the existing comparative studies on unemployed movements in the Global North. The overall rationale behind this comparative strategy is that (a) factors that have been identified by existing research on the Global North and that also characterize both our different Southern cases can be assumed to generally characterize the mobilization of the unemployed independent of different regional or country contexts; and that (b) features that characterize both Argentina and Tunisia but set them apart from what we know about European (and U.S.) cases plausibly reflect differences between the Global North and the Global South.³

Theoretically, our two-step comparison draws on the range of key explanatory factors that have been identified by general social movement theory. Hence, our analytical framework considers grievances, organizational resources and mobilization networks, collective action frames, as well as political opportunities.⁴ In doing so, we explicitly refrain from taking the research findings on Northern unemployed movements as the benchmark against which we, then, assess the Southern experiences. Still, we are aware that also social movement research in general has its origin, and still a strong imprint, from empirical research on Europe and the U.S. (cf. Beinin and Vairel 2013; Rossi and Von Bülow 2015).

Empirically, we identify the following factors that arguably shape unemployed mobilization worldwide: Relative increases in grievances trigger mobilization, while pre-existing local networks, available sociopolitical allies (such as trade unions) as well as the development of collective action frames that meet with public resonance are crucial for the development of proper unemployed movements. The most notable difference of our cases as compared to existing research concerns political opportunity structures. Research on European unemployed movements shows that it is not differences in general political opportunity structures that matter but opportunities that are specific to the institutional field (welfare state/social security) that is directly relevant for unemployed people (Giugni 2008). Our case studies confirm this relevance of specific opportunities, but Argentina and Tunisia also show a high degree of interconnectedness between shifting general political opportunities and unemployed mobilization. In both cases, in spite of very different types of political change (regime change in Tunisia, within-regime change in Argentina), the opening of

2 In addition to Tunisia, further examples of this kind include Morocco (*Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs du Maroc*) and, in West Africa, Senegal (*Regroupement des Diplômés Sans Emploi du Senegal*). The Algerian unemployed movement (*Comité national de défense des droits des chômeurs*) likewise includes unemployed graduates but also unemployed workers without university degree.

3 We deliberately use the terms Global South and Global North, although we are fully aware that both as well as the distinction between the two are problematic proxies for a much more complex set of differences, asymmetric relationships and (post-colonial) historical legacies that characterize the contemporary world (see, for instance, Hollington et al. 2015). For our purposes, the focus on the Global South is justified by three overarching differences between the countries of the former Third World and those from the so-called developed world: The latter is generally characterized by high state capacities (including in the area of welfare/social security), relatively stable and democratic political regimes, high levels of capitalist, socioeconomic development, and a highly institutionalized, formal economy; the former, in contrast, tend to have lower (and varying) state capacities (including in the area of welfare/social security), much more diverse and unstable political regimes, lower levels of capitalist, socioeconomic development and a large informal sector. These differences, quite plausibly, will affect the grievances associated with unemployment as well as the opportunities, capacities and strategies to collectively address these grievances.

4 In line with contemporary versions of the contentious politics approach (McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 2011), we do not consider these factors to be competing independent variables but as mutually dependent parts of the causal mechanisms that underlie the complex dynamics of social movements and that, as dynamic, social factors, can themselves be transformed, reinterpreted and/or appropriated by the very movements.

political opportunities had crucial, but ambivalent, consequences for the unemployed movements: The political opening, in both cases, has had mobilizing as well as demobilizing effects.

In what follows, we will introduce the two cases, describing the emergence and dynamics, the demands and repertoires of contention that characterize the unemployed movements in Argentina and Tunisia, respectively. In a second, explanatory step, we will discuss factors that social movement research has identified as crucial in shaping dynamics of contention. The conclusion identifies the overall results of this study and situates them within existing research. In terms of sources and methods, the two case studies inevitably differ significantly as in the case of Argentina, we can draw on extensive existing research, including studies conducted by one of the authors, in order to basically look back at a fairly completed cycle of contention (Wolff 2007). In the case of Tunisia, we mostly have to rely on field research carried out by the other author, primary sources and newspaper accounts in order to get a grip on what is still very much a moving target.⁵ In contrast to the case of Argentina, where a whole series of different unemployed movement organizations emerged, the unemployed movement in Tunisia is easier to grasp as unemployed protests have produced only one organization that exists nation-wide and on which we, hence, can and have to focus on: the *Union des diplômés chômeurs* (UDC).

2. THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT IN ARGENTINA

In the early 1990s, Argentina saw the implementation of a fairly radical program of monetary stabilization and neoliberal reforms, which initially stopped hyperinflation, but quickly gave way to a period of economic stagnation and, in 2001, finally collapsed in an economic breakdown driven by mutually reinforcing debt, currency and banking crises.⁶ While this context of socioeconomic deterioration undoubtedly fueled the mobilization of the unemployed in the country (see below), the first expressions of what was to become known as the *piquetero* (picketer) movement emerged from quite specific local contexts: marginal urban areas in the provinces of Neuquén (Cutral-Có/Plaza Huincul) and Salta (General Mosconi/Tartagal). In these oil towns, the privatization of the state petroleum company implied not only the dramatic loss of jobs, but the dismantling of an entire parallel welfare state (cf. Auyero 2004; Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 103–151). In both cases, massive roadblocks (*piquetes*) erupting in the mid-1990s forced state representatives to negotiate with the unemployed and respond to their demands. Attempts to openly repress the protests only further fueled mobilization. Having demonstrated that it was possible to collectively respond to rising unemployment and poverty, these experiences in Argentina's interior quickly spread across the country and, in particular, into the de-industrialized suburbs of Buenos Aires. Given the preferred mode of contention, the *piquete*, the movement became to be called (and called themselves) the *piqueteros*. In 1997, there were already 170 *piquetes* across the country, escalating to 252 (1999), 514 (2000), 1,383 (2001), and 2,336 (2002) roadblocks.⁷ In 2003, according to competing estimations, between 200,000 and 360,000 of roughly 2.3 million unemployed were organized in a broad and heterogeneous set of unemployed organizations (Godio 2003; Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 233).

According to Svampa and Pereyra (2004: 55), the rise of the *piqueteros* was enabled by the “convergence of two factors: the adoption of roadblocks as the generalized technique of struggle, on the one hand; the rapid institutionalization of a response by the state via the *planes sociales*, on the

5 Field research on Tunisia has been carried out in Tunis, Sfax and Gabes, in November 2014 and March 2015 and included semi-structured interviews with individual UDC members, group interviews and participant observation of organizational meetings and demonstrations. To explore the social and political relations of the UDC, semi-structured interviews were conducted with trade unionists and politicians. Expert interviews with scholars, journalists and NGOs active in the socioeconomic field helped contextualize and double-check the findings.

6 The following section draws on Wolff (2007: 6–9).

7 Data taken from Centro de Estudios Nueva Mayoría (cf. Wolff 2007: 6).

other”⁸. The former offered a strategy of protest that proved effective, could be adopted easily and created collective experiences and solidarity. The latter refers to social cash transfers that the federal and provincial governments have granted to unemployed households since the mid-1990s; in return, the recipients were generally obliged to participate in municipal work or local development projects. Thus, the unemployed protests had a tangible, feasible and unifying object: the granting of new and the perpetuation of existing “social plans”. In 1999, the new government headed by Fernando de la Rúa allowed the *piquetero* organizations to manage part of the social subsidies and the corresponding local development projects. Reacting to the open socio-political crisis, interim president Eduardo Duhalde in 2002 massively extended the social plans, which finally included some two million households (CELS 2003). By continuing to block roads, the *piquetero* organizations were able to achieve the granting of such social plans (and food aid etc.), including in nearly 10% of the cases the right to fully manage the corresponding funds and projects.

The increase of unemployed organizations and roadblocks in 2000 and 2001 went hand in hand with efforts to coordinate and organize the different groups. While attempts to unite the *piqueteros* failed, they nevertheless led to the emergence of coordinating bodies, cooperative relations and concerted protest activities, if primarily within the different wings of the movement (see below). Thus, they furthered the image of the *piqueteros* as the new contentious political actor on the national scene. In the end, the mass protests of December 2001 that led to the ousting of President De la Rúa were largely a spontaneous “social explosion” in reaction to the desperate political attempts to save the Argentine economic model currency board where organized societal forces played minor roles only (Wolff 2007: 8). Yet, the escalation of social protest, which was particularly driven by the *piqueteros*, certainly prepared the (contentious) ground for the latter events. With the experience of December 2001 and confronted with Duhalde’s weak transition government, in 2002, the *piquetero* movement only gained momentum.

In 2002 and, in particular, following the 2003 election of Néstor Kirchner who initiated a post-neoliberal turn in economic policies and presided over a remarkable economic recovery, the unemployed movement split into roughly two wings: a group of reformist, dialogue-oriented organizations that were willing to negotiate, if not openly cooperate with the state, and a group of contestatory organizations that took a much more confrontational, if not revolutionary stance towards the state. While in the years since 2003 some individual organizations have changed allegiances and the entire movement of unemployed organizations has significantly lost strength, this basic distinction persists until today (cf. Kaese and Wolff 2016; Le Borgne de Boisriou 2014; Svampa 2011). The most important organization representing the former wing is the Federación Tierra y Vivienda (FTV), the largest nation-wide *piquetero* organization that has been allied to the dissident labor confederation Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA); it is characterized by a trade-unionist and left-Peronist orientation, and has openly supported both the government of Kirchner (2003–2007) and that of his wife and then widow Cristina Fernández (2008–2015) (cf. Serdar 2015). The latter group – which in December 2001 formed the National Piquetero Block – has united organizations led by small parties of the traditional radical left like the Trotskyist Polo Obrero and various, usually small groups of autonomist unemployed organizations that are largely based in local communities in the Greater Buenos Aires area (cf. Rossi 2015: 118; Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 239–42).

After peaking at more than 2,000 roadblocks in the year following the “social explosion”, the number of *piquetero* protests has since gone down almost continuously (Kaese and Wolff 2016). From 2003 onwards, dialogue-oriented unemployed organizations such as the FTV openly supported President Kirchner, with *piquetero* leaders even taking up posts in the government. In a context of political and economic re-stabilization, the more radical groups saw themselves increasingly marginalized which led many of them to focus on local community work. This retreat to the local level

8 All English translations of quotations are the authors’.

was generally supported by the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández which have increased social programs to subsidize small “productive enterprises” and cooperatives (in part) organized by the unemployed organizations (cf. Le Borgne de Boisriou 2014: 131–132; Svampa 2011; Wolff 2007: 24). When, in 2008, the number of roadblocks again escalated to unprecedented heights, it was the agricultural associations that used this technique of contentious action in their resistance against an increase in the export duties on agricultural products (Svampa 2014: 162–163). Recent years, however, saw a significant re-increase in protests by *piquetero* organizations, confirming that the unemployed organizations still retain a certain capacity to mobilize and act contentiously (cf. Fraga 2014; Kaese and Wolff 2016).

3. THE UNEMPLOYED MOVEMENT IN TUNISIA

Unemployment was the major grievance that motivated public protests in Tunisia during the last decade in spite of the very limited freedom of public speech, assembly and association under the Ben Ali regime. Much of the discontent caused by the lack of employment has been voiced in spontaneous, unorganized and locally limited protests.⁹ Although there have been incidents when they connected on a regional (2008, 2015) and a national level (2010/2011), no organization emerged as an umbrella for these activities. The only organization of relevance that operates nation-wide is the UDC that has rallied for the cause of unemployed graduates since 2006. In their very first sit-in in front of the Ministry of the Interior, former student union activists who had been unemployed since their graduation protested against corrupt recruitment procedures in the public sector. These initial protests met with a complete lack of recognition from the government, which motivated the activists to found the UDC.¹⁰

The UDC started with only a few hundred activists who demanded a reform of the nontransparent and corrupted procedures in which public sector jobs were distributed among university graduates. Operating illegally during the Ben Ali regime, the most important incident of mobilization was the UDC’s participation in the popular uprising in the Gafsa mining basin in 2008. What started as a spontaneous protest against the corrupt distribution of jobs at the phosphate mining company (*Compagnie des phosphates de Gafsa* – CGT), the major employer of the region, turned into a six month long revolt for work and regional development (Gobe 2010). The unemployed graduates did not play a prominent role during these protests but helped sustain and organize them together with local trade unionists. The uprising also revealed common claims uniting the UDC and other marginalized groups. Despite a brutal crackdown by the security forces, the length and vehemence of the protests paved the way for the 2010 uprising that also started in Tunisia’s marginalized *hinterland* as a massive protest mainly driven by socioeconomic grievances. In 2010, however, regional and national leaders of the trade union federation supported the protests, which helped them to spread to the more developed urban coastal areas where the uprising turned into a broader movement for change that included claims for political rights and freedoms (Chomiak 2011; Allal 2013).

After the toppling of Ben Ali, the UDC grew to a membership of today 16,000 (out of a population of 10 million). Between 2,000 and 3,000 are considered active members.¹¹ Since 2011, UDC’s activism has increased in quantity, geographical scope and repertoire of contention. The organization also developed a broader agenda of political demands and internal democratic procedures. In 2013, an executive board was elected and founding member and long-term UDC leader Salam al-Ayari officially became the general secretary of UDC.

9 Interview with several activists of the NGO “Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux” (FTDES) that report on and support socioeconomic protests all over Tunisia. Media reports on public contention in the marginalized interior regions of Tunisia confirm the assessment.

10 Interview with founder and current leader of the UDC, Salam al-Ayari, Tunis, March 2015.

11 Interview Salam al-Ayari, Tunis, March 2015.

What is specific about an unemployed movement that represents university graduates is that most activists have never been employed before. UDC members, therefore, claim a right to work they never enjoyed. In their understanding, this right is violated if they are forced to work in the informal sector, have only a temporary contract in the formal sector or a job that does not fit their level of academic education.¹² The UDC, thus, rebels against the broken promise that higher education is a guarantee for social mobility and a life with dignity. While the academic system produced more and more university graduates without a real chance for decent employment afterwards, hiring practices in the public sector shifted from a principle of educational meritocracy to a clientelist logic that privileged familial and regional solidarities (Hafaiedh 2000). Unemployed activism of graduates in Tunisia, thereby, also turned against old and new networks of influence and dependency.

Another major issue for the UDC has been development, especially of the marginalized regions in the South and the interior parts of Tunisia. Before the revolution in 2010, 90% of new jobs and enterprises were created in the coastal governorates of Tunis, Bizerte, Nabeul, Sousse, Monastir and Sfax (Boughzala and Hamdi 2014: 6). Resource extraction (phosphate and oil) as well as agriculture have been the main sources of employment in Tunisia's *hinterland*, yet even the major profits of these sectors are channeled to the centers of economic prosperity until today. Improvements in education in the marginalized regions did not lead to job creation, but instead to higher awareness of persisting inequality.

Both issue areas, socioeconomic regional marginalization and access to the job market, are directly reflected in the unemployed graduates' activism in Tunisia, especially since 2011. In order to systematically identify the (shifting) claims and the (evolving) repertoire of contention, we analyzed the Facebook pages of the national bureau and the regional offices of the UDC. The period covered ranges from September 2011, when the union started to use the social media platform for reporting about its activities, until June 2015. The most frequently raised claim was the call for employment and development, followed by calls for a reform of and a fight against corruption in the recruitment procedures in the public sector, including giving UDC an active role in the process. From 2014 on, however, further mobilization developed against political repression and lack of recognition by state actors. The UDC here rallied either against the repression of fellow activists or in solidarity with UDC activists whose activities were simply ignored.¹³

The level of activism has increased over the years and reached a new record high in 2015 with 80 events in six months, compared to 39 in the whole year of 2012. This points to an increasing frustration with the newly installed democratic institutions as none of the six governments that followed the toppling of Ben Ali offered anything resembling a broader economic agenda promising the creation of jobs. In the difficult economic situation after the revolution, individual measures (such as financial support to attend trainings) or exemptions from social security taxes in the private sector failed to seriously tackle the issue of unemployment. Instead, successive governments have tended to occasionally create jobs in the public sector, either to calm protests or to satisfy the needs of a specific constituency. With a view to the latter, the UDC – and a broader anti-Islamist public – accused the Islamist Nahda Party of having created 24,000 jobs in the public sector only for its own clientele.¹⁴

12 Group interview with UDC activists, Tunis, March 2015. A similar concept of unemployment is found in Morocco, see Emperador Badimon (2013a, b).

13 Three fourths of all protests against repression since September 2011 occurred between 2014 and June 2015, and 22 out of 33 solidarity events took place during the first six months of 2015.

14 Interview Salam al-Ayari, Tunis, March 2015.

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Grievances: increasing unemployment as a trigger

Studies on European countries suggest that a relative increase in unemployment, rather than its absolute level, “constitutes fertile ground for the organization of and protests by the unemployed” (Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 12). In terms of the overall scholarship on contentious action, this points to the relevance of relative deprivation (Gurr 1970) or grievances (Simmons 2014) as a first factor that refers to the motivation, or reasons, that leads people to initiate or join unemployed movements (cf. Baglioni et al. 2008: 325–327; Lahusen 2013: 6). This is supported by the two cases examined here.

In Argentina, the correlation between increasing social hardships and the growth of the unemployment movement is obvious. Urban unemployment rates increased from 7% in 1992 to 14% in 1999 to reach almost 20% in 2002; during the same time period poverty rates (in Greater Buenos Aires) rose from almost 19% to nearly 27% to more than 52% (Epstein and Pion-Berlin 2006: 8). At the same time, as the governments at the central and provincial levels were increasingly running out of cash, a series of social assistance programs were cut back (Epstein 2006: 99). The neoliberal reforms, the crisis and, ultimately, the virtual collapse of the Argentine economy thereby greatly enhanced the social basis of the *piqueteros*. Poverty and unemployment became problems that affected large parts of the population, including urban sectors and (former) middle classes (cf. Epstein 2006: 98–100; Wolff 2009: 1007–1008).

In Tunisia, too, rising unemployment rates correlate with the mobilization of the unemployed. More specifically, it was a specific worsening of the situation among university graduates that has driven mobilization. Tunisia, as other resource-poor countries in North Africa, followed a state developmental model in the 1960s that included jobs for university graduates as part of an “authoritarian bargain” (Desai et al. 2009): in exchange for political loyalty, the state provided jobs and social protection. The authoritarian regime furthermore presented education as a guarantee for social mobility (cf. Hafaiedh 2000). When Tunisia embarked on neoliberal reforms in the late 1980s, however, privatization and liberalization meant that fewer jobs in the public sector were available. At the same, the number of university graduates increased drastically, from 121,000 in 1997 to 336,000 in 2007 (Timoumi 2013:118), while the quality of public education suffered from budget cuts.

The initial mobilization of Tunisia’s unemployed graduates coincides with this worsening of their situation. Unemployment rates among university graduates rose from 3.8% (1994) to 14.0% (2005), 16.9 % (2006), 18.2 % (2007) and 20.0% (2008), 21.9 (2009), 22.9 (2010) to 29.2 (2011) (Touhami 2012). Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, the official total unemployment rate remained at 13–14%. After the ouster of Ben Ali, unemployment rose to 19 % in 2011, but has remained at 15% since 2012.¹⁵ However, the share of unemployed graduates is still high at around 30%,¹⁶ which helps explain increased mobilization after 2011.

4.2 Organizational resources and mobilizing structures: enabling conditions

Social movement research has amply documented that grievances alone are far from sufficient to enable collective contentious action (cf. McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 2011). In order for a social movement to arise and spread, social networks need to develop and organizations need to be formed. This is particularly true for unemployed movements who usually have scarce resources and “mobilizing structures” (McAdam et al. 2001: 47–48) at their disposal (cf. Bagguley 1992: 447–450; Baglioni et al. 2008: 329–330). Therefore, existing research on European cases has emphasized

¹⁵ Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), accessed via <http://bit.ly/1NFVJXU>.

¹⁶ Data from Tunisia’s National Institute of Statistics (Institut national de la statistique – INS), available at <http://bit.ly/1IPVHeY>.

the support and solidarity of other social and political organizations, most notably of trade unions, but also of (leftist) political parties (cf. Baglioni et al. 2008: 330–332; Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 16–19; Della Porta 2008: 291; Lahusen 2013: 11–12; Linders and Kalander 2007). Likewise, our two cases show the importance of material and immaterial resources as well as of mobilizing structures which are somehow seized and/or appropriated from existing sources and sites.

In Argentina, three such sources have been crucial: pre-existing local mobilizing structures; allied sociopolitical organizations; and state subsidies. First, research on the *piqueteros* shows that a specific territoriality, that is, “a foundation and embeddedness in the local sphere or community” (Wolff 2007: 10), has been a crucial feature of mobilization processes. The Argentine unemployed organizations emerged in poor and marginalized (sub-)urban spaces and, in doing so, could draw on existing local solidarity networks built on experiences with collective land occupations, informal housing projects, the self-organization of basic social services, and communal nurseries, soup kitchens and health centers (Merklen 2004; cf. Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 55–72). As a result, almost all unemployed organizations – even those that were formed by political parties and/or later became part of nation-wide organizations – have been based on grassroots organizations that conduct self-help initiatives, operate embedded in the respective local communities and focus on serving tangible local needs (Wolff 2007: 15).

Second, besides such very local organizational resources and structures, the *piqueteros* have also benefited from alliances with sociopolitical organizations such as parties and trade unions. It is not by chance that the largest unemployed organizations are those that have a direct trade-union nexus, namely the above-mentioned FTV as well as the *Corriente Clasista y Combativa* (CCC). Both emerged from deindustrialized popular districts (in Greater Buenos Aires) and, thus, their leadership and base draws to an important extent on former industrial workers and trade union activists. The direct relationship with national trade-union organizations has been particularly important in helping unite local initiatives in an institutionalized, nation-wide organizational structure with the capacity to represent the organization in the public and political sphere (cf. Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 58–63). As mentioned above, other *piquetero* organizations have rather benefited from close connections with (usually small, but well-organized) political parties, while it is not by chance that the autonomist unemployed organizations have mostly remained fairly small, only loosely coordinated local initiatives.

Third, it was state subsidies, and the mentioned social cash transfer programs in particular, that offered important material resources enabling the unemployed organizations to expand their communal work. The administration of these programs both facilitated and pushed the improvement of the unemployed organizations’ internal structures and strengthened their ties to the individual member and to the respective local community (cf. Delamata 2004: 9–11; Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 88–102). Yet, these state subsidies were gained by the very mobilization of the unemployed; this, in many cases, included fierce local struggles between *piqueteros* and local state authorities or representatives of the traditional political parties (cf. Delamata 2004: 9–11; Mazzeo 2004: 75–110). In this sense, the granting of social subsidies constituted an important motivation driving contentious action, which also allowed the organizations to offer selective incentives to their activists.¹⁷ This role of state subsidies as supporting mobilization, however, changed later when they increasingly became a means of tying unemployed organizations to the government and thereby effectively taming them (see below).

In Tunisia, too, pre-existing mobilizing structures and alliances with societal actors were important factors for the development of the unemployed movement. In contrast to Argentina, however, state subsidies were never deployed as a strategy to calm unemployed protests, neither under dicta-

17 Emperor Badimon (2013b: 201–202) reports a similar logic in the case of the Morocco: Unemployed groups established lists with their members ranked according to their level of activity in the movement which then served as a basis for the distribution of the jobs in the public administration they had “won”.

torship when the organization was formally illegal, nor during the six governments since 2011. Resources of the UDC, therefore, remained severely limited, and the UDC could never act as an autonomous provider of social services for its members, which in turn restricted its expansion. It however managed to sustain activism because of resources derived from existing networks of the students' union, its alliance with the trade union federation and its outreach via local offices to marginalized regions far off the strongholds of the Ben Ali regime.

In terms of pre-existing mobilizing structures, the students' union (*Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie* – UGET) provided the space in which the very idea to found a graduate unemployed organization was born. Correspondingly, the first UDC activists had all been active UGET members. In addition to their level of education, this helps explain the high organizational skills from the beginning.¹⁸ Not only did UGET provide a pool of already mobilized people willing to join the UDC after their graduation, but it also contributed a network of people, who had built mutual trust during years of joint activism. The UDC could also build on prior experiences with claim-making and on a common frame to interpret the political, social and economic situation of Tunisia.¹⁹

Equally important for the provision of resources was, second, the alliance with the trade union federation *Union générale tunisienne du travail* (UGTT). Drawing on its legacy from the fight of independence from the French and because of its high, nationwide organizational capacities, the UGTT retained an important role as a collective actor even during the dictatorship. Although its leadership was coopted by the Ben Ali regime, local cadres remained autonomous from political interference, creating the perception that UGTT was the only organization in which dissent could be voiced (Yousfi 2015a). The trade union federation served as an umbrella for different kinds of socioeconomic and political claims and provided support and shelter for the UGET as well as the UDC (Yousfi 2015b). In addition, the alliance of UGTT, UGET and UDC served as a natural career of activism over different stages of life in which the UDC represented the bridge from student activism to labor activism.²⁰ The cooperation of these societal actors with left-wing parties, most importantly Tunisia's Communist Workers' Party, contributed to broaden demands and organizational skills (Chomiak 2014: 31–2; Antonakis-Nashif 2015: 12). Their support, however, remained limited as the parties themselves were heavily repressed.

After the revolution, the UGTT expanded its political role, as a broker of the National Dialogue, but also as the official representative of social demands within the Social Dialogue. On the one hand, the tripartite negotiations between the UGTT, the employers' association (*Union tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat* – UTICA) and the government over social protection and employment increased the power of the trade union federation. On the other hand, this increasing strength of the UGTT limited the influence of other social organizations and made the latter dependent on the trade unions. This ambivalence of the alliance with trade unions became visible after the revolution (see below).

A third factor that helped develop UDC activism from the very beginning was its regional outreach. Upon its foundation, only a few hundred activists established three offices in the cities of Jendouba, Gabes and Redeyef, all of which have suffered from economic marginalization. Building local networks laid the foundation for broader protest activities such as the aforementioned 2008 revolt in the region of Gafsa that constituted the first event in which the cause of the UDC, the right to work, led to a broader alliance in which the UDC expanded contacts and networks. Local alliances in the marginalized regions were also the core of the 2010 upheaval that swept from the interior regions to the capital of Tunisia, yet this time they transcended the regional boundaries

18 Research on unemployment movements in Europe suggests a positive correlation between education levels and political activism (Lahusen 2013: 9).

19 In general, therefore, the UDC has shared a radical leftist agenda of the UGET and local cadres of UGTT including a pronounced criticism of neoliberal policies especially of privatization and the role of international financial institutions.

20 Group interview with UDC activists, Tunis, March 2015.

with the support of the national leadership of the trade union federation (cf. Chomiak 2011; Allal 2013).

After the revolution, the UDC did not have to work clandestinely anymore. On the one hand, new resources for mobilization, most importantly the cheap communication technology of new social media, became accessible and are now very professionally used. Instead of investing time and money in own web pages or printed publications, the UDC mostly uses Facebook to inform about its activities. The national as well as the local and regional offices publish declarations and open letters, post videos and share links among each other. On the other hand, financially, the UDC works with very limited resources and based on volunteer work. Media and general public attention is relatively low which explains that an increasing share of the activities is driven by solidarity with protests that receive little public attention. This puts even more pressure on an organization with very limited resources. A recent sharp increase in hunger strikes underlines that unemployed graduates do not see a lot of other means to create pressure on the government than their bare lives.²¹ As a political ally, the newly formed left-wing party alliance “Popular Front” (*jabha sha 'biyya*) led by the former party leader of the Workers’ Party, Hamma Hammami, generally supports the cause of the UDC and expresses solidarity with its activities. Yet, it remains weak with only 15 out of 217 parliamentary seats. The limited cooperation also becomes visible in the fact that the UDC did not officially support the Popular Front in the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014 (UDC 2014).

4.3 Framing: collective action frames and public resonance

In the case of unemployed people, the very motivation to act collectively is also problematic given that people, under these conditions, tend to focus “their energy and attention on survival,” while “downward mobility” often leads to “sheer demoralization” (Waisman 1999: 47). This is further reinforced by the lack of a common identity among the unemployed and by the “stigmatization” they frequently experience in the society at large (Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 1). As a result, it is crucial to include the ideational dimension of mobilization and, more specifically, the “collective action frames” (Benford and Snow 2000) that inform unemployed movements as well as the cultural framework that creates a certain resonance for their claims in the larger society (cf. Giugni 2008: 302; Della Porta 2008: 282; Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 19–20; Lahusen 2013: 8). In order for mobilization to succeed, thus, both the unemployed themselves and the general public have to view unemployment as a social problem that has to be addressed at the political level rather than as an individual failure of those affected.

In Argentina, it was the escalating economic and political crisis that made the general public more and more receptive to the claims articulated by the *piqueteros*. The dramatic worsening of the situation in 2001 and 2002 meant that social hardships were seen as produced by a specific economic model and a particular set of decisions of the political elite (cf. Epstein 2006: 107). The disruptive tactics applied by the unemployed organizations thus came to be seen as an appropriate response to an unresponsive and irresponsible political regime. The slogan “*Que se vayan todos*” (“Out with them all!”) that dominated the protests of December 2001 meant that the *piqueteros*’ criticism as to the exclusionary nature of both the political regime and the economic model was broadly appreciated (cf. Svampa 2014: 156–159). During this context of open crisis, the protests of the unemployed and poor people from the marginalized suburban areas (the *piqueteros*) met with direct support from the urban middle sectors that protested by banging pots (*cacerolazos*) and organized neighborhood assemblies. The relevance of this public resonance became obvious once it started to decline: With the Kirchner government taking up many claims raised during the protests and with the economic situation improving, societal calls for a “normalization” of the situa-

21 In the first six months of 2015, UDC activists held seven hunger strikes, a sharp increase from two hunger strikes in 2014.

tion spread and the appropriateness of continued roadblocks met with increasing criticism. As a consequence, those *piquetero* groups that continued confronting the government were more and more marginalized politically (cf. Wolff 2007: 23–24).

With a view to the internal construction of a viable collective action frame, the very practice of collective protest proved crucial (cf. Auyero 2004). Together, the collective experience of massive (and successful) roadblocks and the participatory solidarity work in the respective local settings helped transform the negatively defined self-identification as “the unemployed” into a positive identity: the *piquetero*. Being a *piquetero* meant being part of a collective (rather than an individual unemployed) and being active (rather than a passive victim). At the same time, however, the identity as a *piquetero* – defined as an unemployed worker – still meant identifying with a situation (being unemployed) that was supposed to be temporary (cf. Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 168–174). This became a problem once the economic situation improved and unemployment started to go down. In general, the failed attempts to unite the unemployed movement as well as its increasing fragmentation since 2003 shows that main elements of the collective action frame driving the unemployed protests were still “negative”: directed *against* a specific (neoliberal) kind of economic policies, *against* a political regime that does not respond to societal claims, *against* mass poverty and rising unemployment etc. The social category of “unemployed workers”, or so it seems, does not represent a viable social cleavage on which to build a unified political organization with a “positive” agenda for change (Wolff 2007: 27). Under these circumstances, the logic of struggling for tangible benefits (social cash transfers, state support for local “productive projects” or cooperatives) became another crucial element that framed and made sense of the collective action of the *piqueteros* (cf. Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 172; Wolff 2007: 7). But this orientation at obtaining a maximum amount of state resources had also ambivalent effects: On the one hand, it has meant that the different unemployed organizations were and are effectively competing with each other; on the other, it created a dependency on the state, facilitating governmental strategies aimed at coopting and dividing the *piqueteros*.

Similar to the South American case, the aggravation of living conditions of wide parts of the Tunisian society helped the unemployed graduates to present themselves as sharing grievances with other social groups. In contrast to Argentina, however, the grievance was not framed as an exclusion from the labor market, but as an enforced situation of waiting for inclusion. This phenomenon is part of a bigger social problem, often labeled as “waithood” (Singerman 2007; Dhillon and Youssef 2009), that was crucial for both the construction of a common identity and collective action frame among the unemployed and for enabling a broader public resonance for their claims. It denominates delayed adulthood due to the lack of resources, most importantly work. Without regular income, other aspects of adulthood such as founding a family by getting married and moving out of the parents’ home are all put on hold. Waiting became the main attitude of university graduates, supported by a state that created a system to hide the status of waithood through internships or annual recruitment exams (the ones that did not pass were only waiting for the next round) (cf. Hafaiedh 2000). In the context of the aforementioned authoritarian bargain, waithood, thereby, also reflected a submission to the state as a welfare provider.

Young people stuck in the phase of adolescence were long associated with passivity. Agency was only found in individual coping strategies. Honwana (2014) finds collective action against waithood with a transformative potential, yet “only” as spontaneous protests without sustained and organized mobilization. It is against this backdrop that one has to understand the collective action frame of the unemployed activists of the UDC: overcoming waithood by, first, calling their situation by the name. Instead of finding excuses for informal economic activities, they define themselves as unemployed. The same holds true for temporarily limited contracts and jobs perceived as inadequate for university graduates. Unemployment, thus, has become an element of identity in a political struggle that aims at reclaiming the right to work in order to leave “waithood”. Demanding employment in the civil service and public sector still reflects the notion of the state as the welfare provider that had been a key element of the old authoritarian bargain.

Yet, the former role of the state within the authoritarian regime has now turned into a responsibility of the state that the activists are free to call for in a democratizing regime, also by contentious actions.

This holds true not only for unemployed with a university degree. The broader social meaning of work becomes evident when we see how the major slogan of the UDC travelled: “shughl, hurriya, karama wataniya” (work, freedom and national dignity). It was invented by UDC activists in their founding protest event in their very first sit-in in 2006. Yet, the slogan was adaptable and was widely chanted in the uprising of 2008 in the Gafsa region. Unemployed without university degree also picked it up when they protested against logics of clientelism and patronage in the job distribution of the phosphate mining company. The peak of social acceptance was reached in the uprising of 2010/2011 when “work, freedom, and national dignity” became a central slogan heard from the beginning of the revolution in the interior of Tunisia until the last days ending with the ouster of Ben Ali. The combined claim for political and economic rights, as expressed in the call for dignity, served as the perfect umbrella for the more socially and economically motivated protests from the Tunisian *hinterland* and protesters from coastal regions focusing on political rights.

After the revolution, however, the political discourse and mainstream media sidelined socioeconomic claims. They focused on the transition to a democratic regime, i.e. on the election and work of the National Constituent Assembly (2011–2014), as well as on the increasing polarization between the Islamist Party al-Nahda and Nidaa Tunis, a broad alliance of anti-Islamist forces including a high number of former members from the ruling party under Ben Ali. The polarization and securitization increased with the politically motivated assassinations against left wing politicians in 2013 and the terrorist attacks against tourists in March and June 2015. Social movements especially in the marginalized regions are denounced as contributing to disorder and chaos and paving the way for terrorism.²² This mainstream discourse contributed to a general fatigue with protests and strikes that continue nevertheless. At the same time, UDC activists have increasingly framed their demands within a broader cluster of claims concerning development, thereby reaching out to the main claim raised in the contestation in the South and hinterland, i.e. the development of the marginalized regions.

4.4 Shifting political opportunities: ambivalent effects

The role of (shifting) political opportunity structures, which is very prominent in the overall study of social movements (cf. McAdam et al. 2001; Tarrow 2011), does not loom large in the research on European unemployed movements. Focusing on Europe, Giugni (2008: 306) has explicitly suggested that the mobilization of the unemployed “is influenced only to a limited extent by the general political opportunity structures, while it is much more sensitive to the specific political opportunity structures”, the latter referring, for instance, to the specific shape of the welfare state (see also Lahusen 2013: 5, 17).²³ Although the relevant policy fields in Argentina and Tunisia are very different from each other as well as from the European countries analyzed by Giugni (2008), the specific opportunity structures clearly influenced unemployed activism also in the Southern cases. In Argentina, as described above, the specific logic of direct social subsidies granted to the unemployed (organizations) shaped the dynamics of mobilization (again, in ambivalent ways). In the case of the unemployed graduates in Tunisia, the relevant policy field addressed by the movement was not social security as such but rather the public sector (and its recruitment procedures) through which social benefits were distributed. Neither regime change nor increasing contention among the unemployed graduates has changed the ways in which the state distributes social securi-

22 The latest example was President Beji Qaid Essebsi’s immediate reaction to the Sousse terrorist attack (Marzouki 2015).

23 Chabanet and Faniel (2012: 16), for instance, briefly refer to “the importance of political opportunity structures”, but immediately leave “strictly political variables or actors” aside to focus on the role of trade unions (see also Baglioni et al. 2008: 327).

ty and therefore, as mentioned above, continue to shape unemployed grievances and UDC demands in spite of the far-reaching political changes since 2011.

In contrast to the European cases however, (changes in) the general political opportunity structures clearly shaped the emergence and dynamics of unemployed movements in both Argentina and Tunisia. Indeed, the development of these unemployed movements is interconnected with all four dimensions of political opportunity structures as defined by McAdam (1996: 27): the openness/closure of the political system, the (in-)stability of elite alignments, the presence/absence of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression. However, as we will show, increasing political opportunities have had ambivalent effects on the two movements.

In Argentina, a generally established, but publicly de-legitimized democratic regime presented a decisive opportunity structure for the unemployed movement. In this context, which prohibited an all-out strategy of repression, individual attempts at repressing protests only fueled mobilization processes and increased the solidarity with and among the *piqueteros* (cf. Dinerstein 2003: 4–5; Epstein 2006: 101–102; Wolff 2009: 1012). After the “social explosion” of December 2001, the weak transition government and the persistently high level of societal protests meant increasing opportunities to enforce political concessions. Hence, interim president Duhalde had to accept the unemployed organizations as official interlocutors and respond to their protests by expanding social emergency plans. As concerns the issue of repression, when in June 2002 the police killed two *piqueteros*, President Duhalde felt obliged to bring forward the presidential elections in order to prevent social protest from escalating into uncontrollable degrees (Wolff 2007: 8).

The election and assumption of Néstor Kirchner, then, implied a profound “change in political opportunity structures” (Svampa and Pereyra 2004: 212) – with, however, ambivalent effects. On the one hand, the center-left, post-neoliberal, inclusionary, and popular discourse of the new government implied a general openness towards both the claims and the representatives of the *piqueteros*. This greatly increased the political opportunities for those unemployed organizations that were willing to adopt a cooperative stance towards the government: they could gain a voice, if not a post, in the government and increase the amount of state support for their own (local) activities (cf. Rossi 2015). On the other hand, however, this opening of political opportunities further aggravated the fragmentation of the unemployed movement as such. As Svampa and Pereyra (2004: 212) have noted, “Kirchner’s policy consisted in applying, simultaneously, a whole range of strategies available to integrate, coopt, discipline and/or isolate the universe of the *piquetero* movement, discriminating between the different wings and organizations.” With a view to the more contestatory unemployed organizations, this included a targeted strategy of delegitimation and criminalization. But also in the case of the cooperative *piqueteros*, the possibilities of exerting an influence on the government largely remained informal, depending on personal relations and clientelist mechanisms, while the direct relation with the government reduced their capacity and willingness to act autonomously and contentiously (Wolff 2007: 26–27).²⁴

The Tunisian case, first and foremost, demonstrates that political opportunity structures do not determine processes of mobilization, but that the latter can, themselves, contribute to opening up what was initially a closed political environment. When the UDC emerged, Ben Ali’s regime was extremely hostile to any form of social activism, even compared to many other authoritarian regimes in North Africa. Public protests were extremely rare and mostly ended with violent repression. Independent organizations and associations had to work clandestinely. Media was state controlled and party pluralism severely limited. As described before, only the trade union federation enjoyed a little room of maneuver – and by sharing this room with the unemployed activists, the

24 In Morocco, in a quite different political context, a fairly similar logic can be observed: Here, the focus on “material”, rather than “political”, demands was used by the political regime in order to dissociate the movement of unemployed postgraduates from the 2011 pro-democracy protests (Emperador Badimon 2013: 207–208).

latter became able to start a movement that contributed to the wave of protests that, in the end, toppled the political regime.

With the fall of the Ben Ali regime in January 2011, the political environment changed dramatically from extremely close to fairly open. People made much use of the newly won freedom of speech and association and, as a consequence, all variants of public protest and civil society activism at first increased tremendously. Since then, different waves of protests have occurred.²⁵ Also, the UDC profited from the new openness and expanded in numbers of members and geographical outreach. Mobilization increased significantly.

At the same time as the UDC took advantage of the new opportunities, it gained also autonomy from its former allies, UGET and UGTT. The dependency on the UGTT decreased and a more critical view towards the trade union federation developed. UDC activists increasingly felt being exploited by the trade union: When needed, they were used for building up pressure; yet, as soon as the UGTT sat down at the negotiation table with political actors, workers' interests such as the increase of salaries were all that mattered and the unemployed needs were ignored.²⁶ The UGTT, on its part, has adopted an ambivalent view on unemployed protests because of what they regard as negative side effects on workers: for instance, when protests harm the phosphate mining activities or block the means of transportation in the Gafsa basin, the processing of phosphate in Gabes and Sfax is negatively affected, potentially harming workers as well.²⁷ At the same time, UDC is still in dire need of the UGTT (Yousfi 2015b). The trade union federation is the sole powerful societal actor from the same political camp capable of strongly bargaining for socioeconomic demands. Moreover, it still provides indispensable space for UDC activism, e.g. when offering rooms in trade union buildings for hunger strikes. The UGTT also publicly expresses solidarity with UDC protests that are ignored by the mainstream media.²⁸

Also, relations with its other close ally, the student union UGET, have suffered since the opening of opportunity structures for activism. The unemployed activists felt as if UGET was not in need of cooperation partners anymore.²⁹ This supports the general observation heard in Tunisia that the removal of the common enemy, the Ben Ali-regime, led to decreasing cohesion of former anti-regime alliances. Since 2011, mobilization against the Nahda-led government, especially during the summer 2013 after the assassinations of left-wing politicians, constituted such a point to again rally together. As soon as the general crisis was over, the alliance weakened and diverging interests seem to drive the left-wing allies away from each other.

The gap between workers and unemployed is a recurrent pattern in labor-unemployed relations and often leads to the marginalization of the unemployed movement. This, however, is too early to say for the case of Tunisia with a still relatively high level of socioeconomic contention and internal struggles among the trade unions themselves about the right balance between UGTT's political and social role (cf. Yousfi 2015a).

5. CONCLUSION

The case studies on Argentina and Tunisia confirm key insights from existing research on European unemployed movements: it is not so much the absolute level but a relative increase in unem-

25 The year 2013 for instance was marked by political mobilization in favor and against the Nahda-led government, yet exact numbers of participants are disputed (cf. Middle East Monitor 2013). Socioeconomic protests including strikes and unemployed activism started to rise again by late 2014 with up to 119 protest events (09/2014) and reached a new peak in spring 2015 with 474 events in April 2015 according to the monthly reports of the FTDES.

26 Interview Salam al-Ayari, Tunis, March 2015.

27 Furthermore, UGTT representatives criticize that unemployed protests often lead to concessions that give jobs to people that are justified neither by economic needs nor by personal capabilities. Interview with a member of the UGTT executive board, Tunis, November 2014.

28 Group interview with UDC activists, Tunis, March 2015.

29 Group interview with UDC activists, Tunis, March 2015.

ployment that triggers mobilization. In both countries, rising unemployment rates were also accompanied by deteriorating living conditions of large parts of society. This explains why the two unemployed movements succeeded in framing unemployment as a social, economic and political problem and not as the result of individual failure. Yet, on closer look, the specific collective action frames of the two unemployed movements have been quite different, mirroring their respective constituencies as well as the different sociopolitical contexts: In Argentina, the identity as unemployed workers and the strategy to claim state subsidies have proven crucial, while in the Tunisian case the claim for a right to decent work to overcome “waithood” predominated. At the same time, both unemployed movements very clearly depended on broader social support for their claims and contestatory practices. Such a supportive public resonance was likewise facilitated by the overall context of socioeconomic deterioration (and by the legitimacy crisis of the respective political regimes).

As regards the role of organizational resources and mobilizing structures, our findings are also generally in line with existing research on European countries. First, both Argentina and Tunisia confirm the importance of allies (trade unions, leftist parties) that support the unemployed movements. This was particularly relevant for the Tunisian UDC and the relation with UGTT. Second, as in the case of Europe (cf. Baglioni et al. 2008: 327–328; Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 16; Della Porta 2008: 282; Lahusen 2013: 14–15; Linders and Kalander 2007), these allies, and trade unions in particular, have played an ambivalent role. In the case of Argentina, alliances with competing political parties and trade union organizations have significantly reinforced the fragmentation of the unemployed movement. In Tunisia, the UDC felt deceived by the trade union confederation UGTT, as the latter took on an increasingly political role after the revolution. Third, our case studies have emphasized how the unemployed movements emerged out of pre-existing social networks and benefited from their embeddedness in local communities. This is similar to European experiences, where it is “basically at the local level that the unemployed are part of social networks that can be used as vehicles for mobilization” (Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 14; cf. Lahusen 2013: 8). While apparently a universal feature of unemployed mobilization, the role of pre-existing local networks is arguably of particular importance in the countries of the Global South, which are generally characterized by a higher degree of social and regional heterogeneity as well as by a greater social relevance of informal and community structures. In Argentina and Tunisia, such mobilizing structures and the local rootedness of activism very much helped to overcome the unemployed’s lack of material resources, which is much more pronounced than in the European cases.

The most specific feature that has shaped the two unemployed movements we have studied, and which sets them apart from European experiences, is their interaction with broader uprisings that have led to far-reaching political change in Argentina and, in particular, in Tunisia. This, first and foremost, shows how contentious actors actively shape the political context in which they operate and can, thereby, themselves contribute to expanding their own political opportunities (cf. Tarrow 2011: 167). Second, the effects of these changing political opportunity structures have been much more complex than expectations of linear notions of more or less open/closed political contexts that support/constrain movements would suggest. In the Tunisian case, regime change – from authoritarianism to a transition towards democracy – clearly benefited the unemployed activism as the threat of brutal repression was suspended. New freedoms and liberties were first perceived as creating remarkable opportunities for making claims and entering negotiations with state representatives that could now be held accountable. The post-revolutionary governments, however, only granted a very limited amount of policy concessions and rarely recognized the UDC as a negotiation partner. In line with existing research, which emphasizes that “incoherent” political regimes that are neither outright closed and repressive nor consistently open and democratic are particular prone to see contentious mobilization (cf. Tarrow 2011: chapter 8; Wolff 2009: 1020, note 11), the combination of limited concessions and limited repression has fueled mobilization in Tunisia. In general, this finding also holds for the Argentine case, but here policy concessions have been much more significant and had decidedly mixed effects on unemployed mobilization: During a first

phase of mobilization, the successful struggle for state subsidies fueled the growth of the Argentine unemployed movement without implying a turn to a non-contentious service orientation as, e.g., in the case of Ireland (Chabanet and Faniel 2012: 10); yet, in later years, these same social programs increasingly became a mechanism through which the (Kirchner) government coopted individual unemployed organizations and deepened the divisions within the unemployed movement. In a more general sense, it was the widespread perception that the Kirchner government was really taking up many of the claims made by the unemployed organizations (and other protest groups) that contributed to the gradual demobilization of unemployed movement as well as to a public opinion that became increasingly hostile to the *piquetero*'s remaining protests.

In sum, the opening up of the political opportunity structures in both Argentina and Tunisia had ambivalent effects. The analysis of unemployed movements that have operated during processes of far-reaching political change, thus, reveals important insights into the complex relationship between contentious action and political change that cannot be gained from studying established democracies in the Global North with high (welfare) state capacity only. This also applies to the reverse effect: the movements' impact on the political context. In contrast to the European experiences, which have remained fairly weak across the board, the unemployed movements in Argentina and Tunisia have made significant contributions to the waves of protest that enforced major political changes in the two countries. These findings point to the need to further broaden the comparative analysis of Southern cases and to better connect social movement theories with research on political regimes and transformation processes.

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Contact

Irene Weipert-Fenner
weipert-fenner@hsfk.de

Jonas Wolff
wolff@hsfk.de

Tel: +49 69 959 104-0

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Peace Research Institute Frankfurt
Baseler Straße 27–31
60329 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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