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# Between deliberation and contestation: the convergence of struggles against austerity and its world in the Nuit Debout movement

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## ABSTRACT

Nuit debout represents one of the main mobilizations in France in recent years and the most important anti-austerity movement in the country since the financial crisis. Based on document analysis and fieldwork, this paper addresses the development of master frames within the context of free spaces. The introduction of the parliamentary debate on the French Jobs Act can be understood as a suddenly imposed grievance that triggered the emergence in France of a movement against austerity and the perceived retrenchment of democratic life. This happened as the grievance was framed within the French left-wing movements through the adoption and adaptation of ideas coming from a movement cascade that started in 2008 in Iceland, peaked in 2011 in Spain, Greece and the US and continued in countries as Turkey in 2013. Moving from structure to action, the paper highlights how Nuit debout provided a platform for the convergence of previously disconnected mobilizations. In particular, the movement's self-characterization as a 'convergence of struggles' and as a movement 'against the Jobs Act and its world' developed within free spaces in which contentious but also deliberative practices were accommodated.


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The Nuit debout movement emerged in Paris in early 2016 on the occasion of a national strike against the French Labour Reform proposal, the Jobs Act. At its height, Nuit debout mobilized approximately 400,000 people in France and a network of over four hundred Nuit debout groups stretched across the country and even abroad (See Le Monde, 2016). The most significant mass mobilization in France since the unfolding of the financial crisis, Nuit debout continued steadily until the French Parliament finally approved the Jobs Act proposal in the same year. Then, the movement entered a phase of declining visibility, even if it remained resonant during the successive electoral campaign and in the wave of protests targeting austerity policies under new president Emmanuel Macron (see Bretton, 2018).

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In this paper we provide a thick description of an under-explored anti-austerity movement, enabling analysis of its main characteristics, focusing especially on the importance of the discursive practices developed in the context of the movement. In examining how discursive practices contribute to shape social movements, we explore an important, yet largely neglected phenomenon (see Doerr, 2018). We engage in a much needed effort to integrate emerging scholarship on deliberation in movements with more traditional concepts employed in social movement studies (e.g. Della Porta & Rucht, 2013).

As we show, the French Jobs Act represented a suddenly imposed grievance (Walsh, 1981), triggering an unexpected, widespread and rapid mobilization, catalyzing existing collective resources, involving the convergence of various streams of conflict. Building on previous studies on how frames and repertoires of action spread transnationally through processes of imitation and emulation, but also of learning and adaptation, we also show that *Nuit debout* can be considered as part of a social movement cascade of protests against austerity (Della Porta, 2017). A core aspect of *Nuit debout* consists in its ability to create some space for inclusive discursive engagement. In particular, the very engagement in *nuit debut* – at once form of protest and organizational format – provided the free space (Polletta, 1999) necessary for the emergence of master frames, through which a defensive aggregation of various streams of protest transformed into a proactively shared discourse.

In the next section, we illustrate the methodology of this study. Then, we present the domestic context in which the movement developed, with the Jobs Act seen as a catalyzer of discontent with the neoliberal turn of the center-left government. Further, we investigate framing processes occurring during *Nuit debout*. We connect the emergence of the two master-frames characteristic of *Nuit debout* (the call against the ‘world’ of the labour law and for a convergence of the struggles) to the existence of a mix of contestatory and deliberative practices within the movement.

## Methodology

Our analysis is based on original empirical evidence from ethnographic research and consultation of documents. One of the authors has engaged in a month-long observant participation, joining assemblies, meetings, demonstrations, informal gatherings, self-funding events, movie projections and public occupations in the city of Marseille.

We closely observed the Marseille mobilization (in combination with the collection and analysis of material from *Nuit debout* groups from all of France) for several reasons. First, while paying attention to the Parisian events is a reasonable and valuable undertaking, *Nuit debout* has been a nation-wide mobilization rooted in local contexts, which have been largely overlooked to date (see also Lemièrre, 2016). Furthermore, Marseille, the second city of France for its size, with a rich history of popular mobilization (Peraldi & Samson, 2013), has been highly involved in the movement and local activists were closely connected to other initiatives (particularly in Paris metropolitan area and in Southern France) and in the nation-wide network of *Nuit debout*. Finally, more pragmatically, Marseille offered a highly active yet manageable context for in-depth observant participation by a single researcher in terms of number of activities and geographical dispersion.

In addition to unrecorded discussions with participants that took place almost on a daily basis, four activists, chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the protest events, were interviewed in-depth. These activists, thought mainly based in Marseille, were also in contact with other initiatives across France. They had been involved in the local *Nuit debout* since its beginning and were among its most active and recognized participants. Although they were not in charge of specific commissions, they often had a very active role during plenary sessions, either as moderators or as speakers. Questions aimed at understanding the views that informed the ideas and the organizational practices of the movement.

Finally, we consulted a variety of documents, both in print and online. In particular, we reviewed press coverage about the movement and materials produced by *Nuit debout* groups across France (both those intended for fellow activists and for the larger public).<sup>1</sup> We collected online material from web pages, social media profiles (Facebook and Twitter) and blogs of about one-hundred French *Nuit debout* groups. Such groups were identified either through their presence on the movement's own main web-page, or on web-sites of reference to the movement or on blogs and web-pages of other *Nuit debout* groups across France. Our research focuses on a one year period beginning with the birth of the movement in early (2016).

### **The jobs act and the birth of nuit debout**

*Nuit debout* is usually located within the wave of so-called 'movements of the squares' or 'movements of the crisis' (Della Porta & Mattoni, 2014), which developed from 2008 in Iceland, to 2011 in Greece, Spain and the United States and to Brazil or Turkey in 2013 (Gerbaudo, 2017). Like the Spanish-born *Indignados* or their Greek counterpart and the US Occupy movements, *Nuit debout* can be understood as a manifestation of a wider wave of progressive mobilization against the neo-liberal order and its handling of the Great Recession (Hayes, 2017). Interestingly, however, while *Nuit debout* was based on grievances similar to those of earlier anti-austerity movements in other countries and it adopted and adapted some of their practices, the French movement took shape only once the former movements underwent a phase of decline, or at least of profound change (Della Porta & Mattoni, 2014).

The introduction of the Jobs Act worked as a suddenly imposed grievance. In combination with the ongoing state of emergency, it triggered the rise of a movement in which different strands of protests could meet and the anti-austerity sentiment, manifested in other countries, could finally be channeled. The birth of *Nuit debout* is connected to the wave of protests against a law proposal deregulating the labor market, the Jobs Act. Also known as the *Loi Travail* or *Loi El-Khomri*, after the then French Socialist Minister of Labour. This law represented one of the most contentious measures promoted by the ruling Socialist Party. In the pursuit of a more flexible and competitive labour market, the reform involved some key aspects, including a reduction of protections for permanent contracts and dismissal procedures, the reconfiguration of the relevance of company-level agreements and of the role of employee-representation bodies (Laulom et al., 2016).

Besides taking issue with all of the above measures, opponents fundamentally criticized president's Hollande support for a neo-liberal reform agenda. Although

elected on a program of anti-cyclical economic policies, the Socialist Party in power had gradually given up on its promises, with the labour law being perceived as a manifestation of this approach (Bérout, 2018). First presented before parliament in February 2016, the Jobs Act was adopted in August of the same year, through a special procedure known as 49.3, which effectively enabled the government to bypass parliamentary opposition to the law, generating even greater protests from its opponents (Cukier & Lassere, 2016).

Although it was triggered by the Jobs Act, the movement was also spurred by a reaction to an official state of emergency and the resulting curtailment of the freedom to demonstrate. Indeed, the reconstitution of a public square was particularly important given that *Nuit debout* emerged in open defiance to the limitations imposed by the emergency state declared by the French government in the aftermath of the November 2015 attacks in Paris, and extended after the subsequent terrorist attacks. In this respect, it is worth noticing that the *nuit debout* (literally, ‘up all night’ or ‘standing night’), the practice that gave its name to the movement and was engaged in by all local groups, was far from being a single occupation, an isolated assembly, an autonomous demonstration, or a specific strike. Rather, the *nuit debout* came to represent the common and publicly visible form of participation for all those who joined in the protest. The *nuit debout* refers to the idea of occupying, for an undefined number of days, weeks or months, a square or other public spaces – not only to perform a reappropriation of the commons but also to engage in direct democracy and to pursue further mobilization. As interviewees remarked systematically, the *nuit debout* embodied the idea of a ‘reappropriation of the public square’ and of a ‘reappropriation of politics by the citizenry’.

Opportunities for progressive social movements were closing down in France at the moment in which the protest developed. Traditionally characterized by rather closed political opportunity structures, given highly centralized institutional power with a strong executive and limited power for local institutions (Kriesi et al. 1995), France was seeing a further closure of channels of access to decision making. On the one hand, the timid opening to countercyclical socio-economic policies promised by the Socialist Party had been disclaimed, with full embracement of policies of privatization, liberalization and deregulation. On the other hand, the rather repressive policing tradition was exacerbated even further after the declaration of the state of emergency at the end of January 2016 (Duhamel, 2016). Indeed, the first protests against the Jobs Act were met with contempt by the majority of the political actors in institutions – former French president Nicolas Sarkozy called movement participants ‘people with nothing in their brain’ – and with firm police reactions (see Le Monde, 2016a).

The protest wave did not respond, therefore, to an opening in political opportunities, but rather to a perceived threat (Della Porta, 2015). Even though the government’s ability to repress was arguably at its highest with the declaration of the state of emergency, the launch of the Jobs Act generated widespread reaction. Organized protests, which had been growing in the preceding months, suddenly found expression in the *Nuit debout* movement, as participants embarked on a large-scale effort to critically make sense of the world surrounding them.

Whilst the proposed deregulation of the labour market catalyzed reactions by a variety of social and political actors it is important to remember that mobilizations

stemming from suddenly imposed grievances do not emerge from nowhere. Instead, they are built upon, or favored by the convergence of already existing mobilizations. The concept of the suddenly imposed grievance makes reference to pre-existing activism and the presence of oppositional ideology that are mobilized against a perceived threat (Koopmans & Duyvendak, 1995; Walsh, 1981). In this sense, Nuit debout can be seen as building upon the French tradition of mobilization, yet aiming at the convergence of a multitude of struggles that had tended to develop apart from each other.

Social movements in France certainly have a long tradition of contentious mobilizations. Organizationally weak and traditionally fragmented between old and new social movements (focusing respectively on labour rights and emerging rights), the French left-libertarian family has occasionally been able to create alliances to engage in disruptive forms of action to stop unwanted change (Crettiez & Sommier, 2002). For instance, this occurred in the mobilization of the movement *de sans* (the ‘without ones’: homeless, undocumented migrants, unemployed, and so on) in the 1990s (Fillieule, 1993). Overall, however, while providing supports for the *sans-papiers* and the *sans-logis*, as well as the *sans-emplois*, the radical Left had remained trapped within organizational competition (E.g. Maurer, Sophie et Emmanuel Pierru, 2001). While unions have quickly been losing their social basis, center-left governments further contributed to internal splits – especially visible in the movement on migration rights – through selective cooptation. In the early 2000s, the European Social Forum provided another occasion for encounters, although it was also unable to overcome ideological divisions (Sommier & Agrikoliansky, 2005).

Fragmented and divided during the low ebb of protests, both pre-existing groups and new activists met again in the Nuit debut process. 31 March 2016, is generally acknowledged as the birthdate of Nuit debout. During a general strike against the Jobs Act organized by France’s main labour union (*Confédération générale du travail*–CGT), a group of activists called for the occupation of the Place de la République, a highly important and symbolic site in Paris. As envisioned at a public meeting on 23 February at the adjacent Bourse du Travail building, organizers aimed at creating a space of convergence by occupying a public square. According to one of the organizers, François Ruffin (founder and director of leftist journal *Fakir*), the meeting intended to bring together active protest groups to envision common ways for promoting their individual struggles (see Besse Desmoulières, 2016). The 31 March strike was seen as an opportunity to protest together for a variety of groups including: mobilized workers, teachers opposing the government’s line on education reform, representatives of a workers’ union (*Solidaires*), the alter-global French movement Attac, and anti-development protestors. Among those who immediately mobilized were citizens who had been discussing the Jobs Act law proposal for weeks, as well as student collectives, which had already clashed with the police during unauthorized, wild demonstrations (*manifestation sauvage*). The call to protest reached out widely: an estimated 390,000 people joined in nationwide demonstrations. Later that day, local squares across all of the main cities and numerous smaller centers in France were occupied, day and night (Le Monde, 2016). As a result, even in its earliest moments, Nuit debout was fueled by the participation of citizens with no particular activist background.

Far from being homogenous, Nuit debout was a highly diversified movement that strove to achieve a positive interaction among its many components. Whilst we do not

claim that the movement attained this objective at all times, existing tensions – in particular between a *citoyenniste* and a *mouvementiste* approach (Maniglier, 2016) – were handled constructively, at least in the more active period of the mobilization. Indeed, our investigation, focusing on the period of stronger mobilization triggered by the introduction of the Jobs Act in political debate, suggests that Nuit debout engaged in the development of shared master-frames through deliberative practices that effectively advanced the struggle of the movement.

### **Challenging the jobs act and its world through a convergence of struggles: the emergence of master frames and their effects**

In this section we first introduce the relevant concepts from literature on framing and explore the continuity between the framing in earlier anti-austerity movements and in Nuit debout. Then, we show how Nuit debout adapted these frames to the French context and promoted the emergence of two interrelated master frames. The first one – diagnostic – connected to Nuit debout's critique of the 'Jobs Act and its World' and the second one – prognostic – tied to the idea of a *convergence de luttes* or convergence of struggles. This effort enabled the encounter between a variety of social movements, going beyond traditional cleavages in the French movement scene.

In David Snow's definition (Tan & Snow, 2013: 470) frames are 'the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents ... and other actors ... relevant to the interests of movements and the challenges they mount in pursuit of those interests'. Frames play a central role in collective actions as 'relatively coherent sets of action oriented beliefs and meaning that legitimate and inspire social movement campaigns and activities' (Snow, 2013, 471), developing through revitalization (as resuscitation of forgotten items) or fabrication (as new creations) (Tan and Snow 2015).

Using a well-established distinction, we will refer to diagnostic frames, singling out a problem and attributing responsibility for it; prognostic frames, articulating a proposed solution; and motivational frames, defining a call for action (Snow & Benford, 1988). We will also refer to master frames: collective action frames that are wider than more context-specific frames traditionally adopted by single movements (Benford, 2013; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). We single out in Nuit debout diagnostic and prognostic master frames as dominant interpretative frames on which the specific elaborations of the various organizations converge (Snow & Benford, 1992, 1988).<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the emergence of master frames has been connected to waves of protest that are based on the clustering together of movements, despite unfavorable political opportunities (Carroll & Ratner, 1996; Mooney & Hunt, 1996; Noonan, 1995; Snow, 2004), which is exactly the type of context within which Nuit debout developed.

In its framing, Nuit debout shared four important features with previous anti-austerity mobilizations such as the Spanish Indignados and the Occupy movement in the United States. Participants themselves felt part of the global wave of recent protests. Indeed, early calls for mass demonstrations frequently referred to mobilizations in Greece, Spain and the United States, often with an explicit rhetoric of global

defense of democracy. For instance, on the website of Nuit debout Tours (2016), we read:

After yesterday, Tunis, Cairo, Madrid, Athens and New York opened up the way and Paris took up the relay, today, an inextinguishable longing for democracy spreads once more across the four corners of the globe.<sup>3</sup>

Firstly, Nuit debout placed material concerns at the heart of its protest. In particular, a central issue for the movement, like for previous anti-austerity mobilizations (Gerbaudo, 2017), was the deterioration of the economic situation triggered by the 2008 crisis and the reforms in response to it. While with less vigor than in Ireland or Southern Europe, the financial crisis that had reached Europe in 2008 hit the French economy as well, with ensuing unemployment and declining social protection. Interestingly, Nuit debout groups across all of France hosted, among others, ‘political economy commissions’ for participants to debate economic issues specifically. An excerpt illustrative of the centrality of economic matters can be drawn from the self-managed Wiki of Nuit debout Paris (2016a): ‘The current economic system does not tolerate any attempt to rational and altruistic management. Economy has to serve real equality among every man and every woman, guaranteeing their future.’ Furthermore, they claim: ‘It is impossible that 99% of the world population slaves away, is born and dies for the great pleasure of the 1% of the society of the powerful ones.’

Second, and consistent with their anti-austerity critique (Hayes, 2017), Nuit debout was vocal in denouncing the deterioration of contemporary democracies. Through its ‘democracy commissions’, Nuit debout exposed the limits of representative democracy, seen as subordinated to the interests of the few. For example, in a ‘call to democracy’ issued by Nuit debout Paris (2016b), we read:

We can no longer accept the setting aside of the people in politics, we cannot accept oligarchies hoarding of politics, we do not accept any more the way in which this pseudo representative democracy that is nothing more and nothing less than an electoral aristocracy works.

Third, the above two problems – the injustice stemming from the excesses of capitalism and the flaws of a constrained democratic order – were analyzed jointly as a manifestation of the shortcomings of a neo-liberal political order, often referred to as ‘wild capitalism’ (*capitalisme sauvage*). Like previous anti-austerity movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2014; Tejerina et al., 2013), Nuit debout protestors not only opposed this economic regime, but they were also determined to point out its perverse ethical and social effects. For instance, in an early document reporting the discussion of a Nuit Debout (Nuit Debout Paris, 2016) inter-commissions meeting, we read:

Reasons for mobilizing and organizing Nuit debout are the ones we stated since March 31. ... We directly oppose political parties, we are really fed up with neo-liberalism and its reforms, we [promote] deeply social, anti-racist and anti-sexist values.

Protestors thus targeted a law that was taken to represent a broad, and deeply unjust, system.

Fourth, similarly to previous movements (Tejerina et al., 2013), Nuit debout strove to propose alternative practices and innovative ideas to redress these problems, along



the path already indicated by previous movements. For instance, according to *Alternatives Economiques*, a magazine close to the movement:

Today, the need to propose alternatives to a society whose human and environmental damages are unbearable is based on a desire for ‘concrete utopias’... The multiplication of these initiatives... draws the contours of another society. A society that also calls for a democratic renewal, as is testified by the citizens’ forums of the Spanish Indignados, Occupy Wall Street in New York in 2011 and, since last spring, of Nuit debout in Paris (Vindt, 2016).

The above four elements – concerns about degrading material conditions and political life, the pervasiveness of the neo-liberal order and the need for a democratic reaction to the existing situation – do not only speak to Nuit debout’s continuity with previous movements. They also provided the very contents upon which the movement developed its own frames.

### ***Diagnosing the problem: the jobs act and its world***

The diagnostic frame of Nuit debout saw in the ‘the Jobs Act and its own world’ (*la Loi travaille et son monde*) the very problem against which to mobilize, an idea that quickly gained popularity and it worked effectively as a master frame. This slogan was widely present across the movement’s materials and featured in calls to action from virtually any Nuit debout group in France. The idea of a world that created the Jobs Act also represented a way to not only acknowledge the plurality of actors united in the Nuit debout movement but also to stress the need of a coordinated opposition. That is, the different struggles in which the various actors engaged came to be seen as part of the same, broader struggle against the world of the Jobs Act. In Nuit debout, every actor could identify a vast spectrum of targets against which to reclaim justice.

Certainly, the economic injustice and unsustainability of capitalism represented the main target. For instance, *Fakir* magazine identifies the problematic world of the Jobs Act as:

this world where, for more than thirty years, investors shares have skyrocketed whilst wage earners have to ‘modernize themselves’, ‘become flexible’, ‘soften’, that is, kowtowing. This world where, in agreement with the WTO and the European treaties, the oligarchy installed from Paris to Panama ‘the free circulation of capitals and merchandise’, putting popular sovereignty under tutelage, extinguished democracy (Ruffin, 2016).

Nonetheless, there was ground for alternative (or additional) readings of the composition of this world that Nuit Debout was opposing with the cognitive connection of wide-reaching targets for the protests. The definition of the diagnostic frame as ‘the Jobs act and its world’ was broad enough to connect different specific frames. For instance, an interviewee identifying himself as a Marxist revolutionary argued that:

by that [the world of the Jobs act] I mean capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, a world of permanent war, racism, exploitation, sexism. ... I find it interesting that the formula is vague and general: different people refer to it in different terms but they all share a common feeling of resentment for injustice from that world and this lead us to reflect upon how to analyse this world, give a name to this world on the basis of our own backgrounds...<sup>4</sup>

Online documents confirm that different actors gave different names to the ‘world’ behind the Jobs Act. For instance, the group *Feministes debout* explicitly framed its struggle within the movement as one against a world of male domination, homophobia and inequality between genders.<sup>5</sup> More generally, Nuit debout groups across France articulated a wide effort to engage in a vast critique of societal and political problems: from speciesism, to racism, homophobia, ableism, environmental crisis, and nuclear proliferation.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the world under discussion was not the only object left open to activists’ definition. Many participating movements linked their slogans with Nuit debout by keeping the wording ‘*et son monde*’ but changing the primary target. For example, one of the key mobilizations that converged into Nuit debout – opposing the construction of a hotly contested airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes – promptly labelled its mobilization as a struggle ‘against Notre-Dames-des-Landes airport and its world’ (see Confederation Nationale du Travail, 2016). Other examples of this include calls to mobilization by groups that explicitly saw themselves as part of Nuit debout, such as those ‘against the government, MEDEF and its world’ or ‘against patriarchy and its world’.<sup>7</sup>

The emergency state contributed to building the distinction between, on the one hand, those who had passed the law and, on the other, those who opposed it. Nuit debout assemblies ‘against the emergency state, police violence and repression’ referred to the government and political parties (starting from the Socialist Party, which was the target of the campaign ‘We will no-longer vote for the Socialist Party’) as the main representative of the former category.<sup>8</sup> The latter category, instead, was populated by movement activists of different kinds and citizens of Muslim faith.<sup>9</sup> All those movement actors affected by the restrictions placed upon freedom of manifestation could thus join in Nuit debout.

### **Addressing the problem: convergence of struggle**

The other master frame fundamental to the movement is prognostic, as it singles out ways to solve the problems through *la convergence des luttes*, a convergence of struggles – against the Jobs Act and its world. As a labor market reform – which traditionally represents a most contentious subject in French politics (Lindvall, 2011) – the Jobs Act was relevant enough to attract the interest of a variety of activists as well as of a substantial part of the population.

This frame played a highly important role for a far-reaching protest involving a wide array of social movement actors. The idea of a convergence of struggles took central stage in the activists’ understanding of the movement and was nearly ubiquitous in the materials it produced. It systematically spread as an inspiring principle during the assemblies we observed and references to it were present in virtually all of the online spaces of the Nuit debout groups we explored. *Convergence des luttes* came to represent a metonym for Nuit debout itself on social media. One of the Facebook pages of reference for the movement, significantly titled ‘Convergence des luttes #jourenuitdebout’, reported systematically on the different struggles of social movements joined in Nuit debout.<sup>10</sup> The very active Twitter profile *Convergence des luttes* (@ConvDesLuttes) also had regular updates about the different strands of mobilization occurring in the context of Nuit debout.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, many of the Nuit Debout

groups established across France, from Paris to Nice, formed a *Convergence des luttes* commission. The declared goal of the Parisian commission was:

concretizing the convergence of struggles at different levels. ... to create meeting spaces between different collectives that too often struggle separately. The commission aims at creating a synergic dynamic for actors to dialogue, identify interests in common and overcome their potential divergences (Paris, 2016cc).

In the experience of activists, the convergence occurred also with respect to the type of people who joined in the activities in squares. As remarked by an activist in Marseilles, for instance, 'there were people associated with workers unions and those who were not, younger and less young people and so on and they [all] converged on the square, and we have started to discuss'.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the call for a convergence of struggles stands out as a clear and effective device for an encompassing prognostic framing effort characteristic of *Nuit debout*. The idea of a *convergence des luttes* and of a common opposition against the different possible worlds of which the Jobs Act is expression allowed for a variety of movement actors effectively coming to see their individual struggles as part of a wider effort shared with other *Nuit debout* participants, notwithstanding their traditional divergences.

### Deliberation in free spaces

In this section we discuss the mix of contentious and deliberative practices in the *Nuit debout* which allowed for a widespread mobilization involving different movement actors. We explore some of the main discursive activities of *Nuit debout*, their deliberative qualities and their relationship with previous movement's discursive practices. Finally, we devote specific attention to two particularly important practices hosted in the movement: *nuit debout* and *education populaire*.

Following Polletta's (1999: 1) classical definition we refer to free spaces as 'small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization'. We show that the connection of different frames within a common diagnosis (the Jobs Act and its world) and prognosis (a convergence of struggles) was nurtured within the free spaces. In this sense, we are not only interested in observing emerging framing processes but also in understanding what practices they are based upon. In particular, we look beyond the classical idea of repertoires of contention (Della Porta & Diani, 2009; Tilly, 1986), broadly intended as the means for collective actors to advance their claims, into emerging deliberative practices that *Nuit debout* activists engaged in.

Although *Nuit debout* certainly featured a variety of contentious practices, it also searched for discursive practices that had to facilitate encounters and dialogues among different actors and individuals. As we explain, the high variety of social movement actors participating in *Nuit debout* affected not only the way in which the movement framed its action but also the movement's repertoire, in two ways. On the one hand, a rich repertoire of action emerged mainly made up of traditional, often contestatory practices of the various social movement actors composing *Nuit debout*. On the other hand, and more importantly to our analysis, a need surfaced for more discursive forms

of engagement in order to establish successful communication across different social movement actors joined in the mobilization, and to develop a shared and inclusive narrative.

The protest repertoire of *Nuit debout* included multiple types of performances ranging from major demonstrations to sabotage of highway tollbooths. Between the end of March and June there were at least 10 demonstrations of national relevance. During one month of participant observation, Marseilles activists also engaged in numerous protest activities. These ranged from a parade in costumes through the streets of the city to celebrate the funeral of the labor statute, on the occasion of the approval of the *Loi Travail*, to protests before the prefecture against the detainment of a young activist at a street protest in a nearby town.

While *Nuit debout* did not, therefore, lack a substantial contestatory repertoire, from the first day of the *nuit debout* at the Place de la Republique onwards, the movement emphasized discursive and direct democratic forms of engagement. This approach can be seen as part of a wider effort to bridge the different components of the movement. A wide array of discursive activities were organized, including hundreds of days of assemblies and workshops. These events often featured many of the practices already adopted by previous movements, such as the Indignados' silent hand signs or even the social forums' strictly enforced timing rules for speakers. Assemblies were generally open to the public and only rarely reserved to the representatives of different groups within the movement. Overall, as an interviewee reported, the main effort of the movement consisted in 'creating a permanent space of reflection that asks in what world we live, how to change it and with what'.<sup>13</sup> *Nuit debout*'s occupied squares embodied the idea of free spaces introduced in social movement scholarship by Polletta (1999). In fact, they provided the context in which different activists came in contact and developed a shared understanding fundamental for their collective mobilization (see also Diani, 2000).

During the one month period of participant observations, *Nuit debout* activists in Marseille engaged in a remarkable amount of deliberative activities, whose quality, inclusivity and effectiveness we could observe directly. In this paper we cannot provide a fully-fledged assessment of the deliberative qualities of the movement. Nevertheless, drawing from literature on deliberation in movements (Felicetti, 2016; Haug, Rucht, & Teune, 2013; Polletta, 2002), we assess some key aspects concerning the type of engagement that occurred and the extent of inclusion in different types of activities. On the basis of our observations it is safe to claim that at least a degree of substantial deliberation occurred in the occupied spaces.

To begin with, activists generally held two or three open assemblies and two small group meetings each week. The open assemblies, usually attended by about twenty people, hosted three to four working groups (commissions) and a plenary session for attendees to share their insight and to plan future action. Small group meetings of core actors were usually attended by four to six people and mainly charged with taking organizational choices. Small group meetings (and the activists that attended them) were fundamental to keep the local movement active, yet, open meetings had steering power. In passing, one can notice that similar to Occupy's working groups (see Halvorsen, 2015), *Nuit debout*'s commissions represented the places for local activists interested in specific topics to discuss them thoroughly before engaging with the wider assembly. *Nuit debout* was characterized by a great variety of commissions and the

movement tried to feature a mix of structural and thematic commissions. The former were responsible for issues concerning the life of the movement and the latter for in-depth discussion on issues of interest to activists. Commissions varied in size and composition, yet according to our observations, their meetings were usually small (between five to ten people). More active movement members had an important role in guaranteeing the continuity of the work of commissions over time. In any case, final decisions over important questions, such as, for instance, on what form to give to the local protest and how to connect with other Nuit debout initiatives, were generally taken during open assemblies.

In terms of deliberative qualities, during open assemblies, commissions and small-group meetings participants generally engaged in respectful and egalitarian ways and they adopted self-moderation techniques. No form of coercion was visible during interactions and participants seemed comfortable. Informal group leaders emerged but they usually refrained from dominating open assemblies or commissions. Although different standpoints were discussed in open assemblies, they were engaged with more systematically in small-group assemblies and commissions. In larger meetings participants generally limited themselves to acknowledging their disagreement (for similar observations on the Global Justice Movement, see Della Porta & Rucht, 2013). Participants also seemed to engage in terms that others could understand, striving for what Gutmann and Thompson (2009) call 'reciprocity' – a key feature in deliberation. Finally, another important component of deliberative engagement was present. In particular, rather than appeal to self-interest, reference to principles of social justice and promotion of interests of weaker components of the population were systematically used in arguing (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012).

In terms of inclusion, the open assembly was generally attended by activists with a variety of backgrounds although university students, the unemployed, retired and precarious workers were the most represented groups. Social workers, young professionals, people with disability and from ethnic minorities were also regularly present. Participants brought a variety of perspectives. However, they clearly shared similar judgements on some basic issues. For instance, and hardly surprising giving the nature of the movement, the negative judgment on the Jobs Act, on political parties or the racist nature of anti-terrorist legislation was never questioned. Instead, diversity of viewpoints was substantial on other subjects. For instance, there were markedly different opinions on how to safeguard the interests of weaker sectors of society in the wake of neoliberal reforms, on how to protect common goods from commodification and on possible strategies to promote radical change.

In developing its repertoire, Nuit debout drew consistently from the repertoires of action, organizational models and frames brought from previous similar movements. As for the Global Justice Movement, but also for previous waves of anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe (Della Porta, 2015), cross-movement contamination and critical appropriation processes developed in action during the protests creating opportunities and resources for collective action, thus empowering emerging actors. In its effort to build deliberative practices, Nuit debout consistently and selectively drew from the practices already experimented since 2008 in the so-called 'movements of the squares', adapting them however to specific circumstances. First and foremost, the activists occupied open spaces transforming them in large and inclusive permanent

assemblies in open air (Della Porta & Rucht, 2013). However, in order to limit repression, with the exception of the very first days of mobilization, the participants did not systematically camp in the squares at night. Instead, they developed a more subtle form of appropriation of the public spaces during the days and evening, and until late into the night.

The practice of *nuit debout* itself represents at once an extension of and a departure from the traditional repertoires of contestation used by the various groups which joined in the protest. This practice was initially conceived of as a mobilization initiative during a traditional activist meeting. The *nuit debout* of March 31 was called for at the end of a day of general strikes, daytime occupations of public squares, authorized mass demonstrations and small unauthorized ones (including clashes with police forces). However, the *nuit debout* is also a practice that is distinct from more traditional forms of engagement. The practice shares substantial features with the *acampadas* that emerged in Spain during the Indignados protests of 2011, which represented an evolution from the practices of Social Forums in the Global Justice Movements (Della Porta, 2015). *Acampadas* are a repertoire of engagement taking place in open public spaces, through forms of direct democracy, staged in assemblies open to all; discussions welcome prefigurative and emotional arguments, and they are aimed at the construction of the commons and at promoting change in the population at large. All of these features are also embedded in the *nuits debouts*.

As was the case in the ‘movements of the squares’ in Greece or Spain, an important performative task for the *Nuit debout* was to reconquer the dispossessed public space as a venue for political activity. The occupation is therefore aimed not only at disruption, but also at prefiguring an (alternative) democratic life. As an interviewee reported, referring to a widely held view: ‘what I found interesting [about the *Nuit debout*] is that it’s a way to bring the citizen movement on the public square’.<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, another activist remarked that the most important thing *Nuit debout* had achieved consisted in ‘its reinvesting in the public square, bringing back the popular voice in the public square’.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, *Nuit debout*’s engagement with the idea of popular education (*éducation populaire* or *edu pop*) (see Cox, 2014) is another particularly interesting discursive practice. Knowledge production and learning are central concerns for social movements (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991), whose importance as knowledge producers is clear, though underestimated (Chesters, 2012). For the sake of our argument, it is important to remark how *Nuit debout*’s *edu pop* not only provides a clear manifestation of what Della Porta and Pavan (2017) termed a ‘knowledge practice’ but it also plays an instrumental role in the development of the movement’s master frames.

In Marseilles, popular education events took place during fieldwork in different occasions, on themes from LGBTQI, gender relations, economy, democracy to history of popular mobilizations locally and nationwide. This activity fully resonates with social movements’ efforts to promote alternative epistemologies to challenge the status quo (Fuster Morell, 2009). Indeed, references to Gramscian ideas of challenging hegemonic forms of knowledge emerged, both in interviews and during participant observation. According to *Nuit debout*, popular education represents a platform that was:

devoted to proposing another form of sharing knowledge and expertise, outside of the media and scholastic contexts. Herein, we, as an independent and self-run collective, want

to build and make alive this place and this community every day and allow in this way for debates to occur (Debout Education Populaire, D. E, 2016).

Popular education was widely promoted through the activities of dedicated commissions, the *commissions education populaire*, in Nuit debout groups across France. The main goal of the popular education meetings was to allow for in-depth discussion. Consequently, whilst discussions during these workshops may have influenced the participants' views, decision making processes were always kept aside from such initiatives. Although storytelling certainly had its place, in contrast to the open assemblies, speakers during popular education workshops would generally strive to share insight from some specialist form of knowledge they had. As we observed, activists who were invited to share expertise gave particular attention to the horizontality and inclusivity of the process. Horizontality was intended as a means for guest speakers to present themselves as private citizens contributing to sharing accessible and critical knowledge with others, rather than as the bearers of superior knowledge. Furthermore, the popular education workshops had the function of giving people from different groups a space to express and justify their perspectives on an array of issues before the rest of the movement. In the words of an interviewee discussing the idea of popular education in the context of Nuit debout:

[popular education] has a very important role. That is, it poses political questions or in general questions that are usually left to specialists – in the domain of politics, media and university – it brings such questions on the public square. Thus, it has a role of collective reflection, argumentative debates within Nuit debout, but also a role of proposition of Nuit debout to society, a meeting point .

Indeed, the interviewee added:

popular education itself was a practical form of convergence [of struggles] because at times we had debates of popular education that were introduced by Nuit debout people, and at times we invited people, comrades from unions, ecology groups. Also popular education was itself a convergence.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

Nuit debout can be seen as a manifestation of a process in which ideas, networks and practices in abeyance may re-emerge in different movements within the same wave or in different waves of mobilization (Melucci, 1989).<sup>17</sup> It represents yet another episode in the movement cascade that became visible with the so-called saucepan revolution in Iceland, and spread later to protest movements against the Great Regression and the authority policies triggered by it. In this paper we show that, importing ideas about protest forms and contents, Nuit debout adapted them to the domestic context, triggering interesting developments in the French social movement scene. Not only has it been able to connect different groups in a fragmented social movement scene, but it has done so in a way that has involved a dramatic expansion of the repertoire of such movements, including discursive activities. Such activities occurred within free spaces and the master frames that emerged (one – diagnostic – connected to a critique of the 'Jobs Act and its World' and one – prognostic – tied to the idea of a convergence of struggles) enabled for the transformation of various streams of protest into a proactive shared discourse.

## Notes

1. A list of Nuit debout's web-pages consulted and further information on interviews is available upon request.
2. Like Gerhards and Rucht (1992) seminal analysis of master frames we observed no particular motivational frame in our case study. We concur with them that this might be because the motivational capacity of diagnostic and prognostic master frames is enhanced by their containing explicit or implicit motivating elements.
3. Translated into English by the authors.
4. Interviewee 1, 27/7/2016.
5. <https://feministesdebout.wordpress.com/>.
6. See for instance, [https://wiki.nuitdebout.fr/wiki/Villes/Paris\\_R%C3%A9publique#Commissions](https://wiki.nuitdebout.fr/wiki/Villes/Paris_R%C3%A9publique#Commissions).
7. MEDEF, *Mouvement des Entreprises de France*, is the largest employer federation in France. See respectively: <http://plateforme2016.hautetfort.com/plateforme-2016/> and <https://wiki.nuitdebout.fr/wiki/Villes/Rennes>.
8. See <http://www.fakirpresse.info/-nous-ne-voterons-plus-ps-98->.
9. See, for instance, <https://lacollective34.wordpress.com/2016/11/02/communiquede-lag-contre-letat-durgence-et-les-violences-detat-commission-anti-repression-et-de-lag-populairenuit-debout-contre-la-loi-travail-et-son-monde/>.
10. <https://www.facebook.com/convergencesdeslutt31M/>.
11. <https://twitter.com/convdeslutt31M/>.
12. **Interviewee 2, 3/08/2016.**
13. **Interviewee 1, 27/07/2016.**
14. Interviewee 4, 31/10/2016.
15. Interviewee 3, 3/8/2016.
16. Interviewee 1, 27/07/2016.
17. For a fascinating theoretical development on this topic and the idea of time in social movement research, see Gillan (forthcoming).

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