

New Models of Citizen Participation

Perennial and the Syrian Crisis

A CASE STUDY

The development of transnational connections has fostered non-state actors and enabled the rise of new models of citizen participation in the global stage. Nowadays, digital tools offer social activists new means to act. This work studies the case of Perennial, a project led by two Canadian entrepreneurs, whose vision is to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource for all civil society. This study attempts to test if the theory on transnational activism applies to the case of Perennial. It suggests that information flow, skillful individuals, the density of transnational advocacy networks, and digital connections have enabled digital transnational activism, which offers individuals a new repertoire of contention with a broader scale.

INTRODUCTION

In response to the Syrian crisis' consequences on civil populations, many non-governmental organizations in Syria and abroad decided to act, using digital tools to communicate, mobilize communities, collect information and resources. Through online civic campaigns, these organizations are building bridges between those in need and individuals willing to help. In order to increase participation in these campaigns, two Canadian entrepreneurs and a team of volunteers are working on a project called Perennial. The project's vision is to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource for all civil society. It's about to launch a crowdfunding campaign to get funds to finance the project, followed by a crowdsourcing campaign with its partner organizations on the ground to mobilize human and financial resources.

In this context, this paper asks the following question: what explains the rise of new models of citizen participation in a context of global transnational connections?

In this work, we will test if the theory on transnational activism applies to the case of the Perennial project. First, we will set our conceptual framework (I) by reviewing the approach to transnationalism, global citizenship and global norms (1); citizen engagement at the age of globalization (2); the development of transnational activism and advocacy networks (3) and citizen activism in the digital era (4). Following these elements, we will introduce the causal model of our analysis (5). Then, we will proceed to the aforementioned case study (II) based on the Syrian crisis. We will introduce the Syrian civil war as the defining conflict of the digital age (1); we will present the Perennial project (2) and we will analyse it in the light of our conceptual framework (3).

CITIZEN ACTIVISM: FROM THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS TO THE DIGITAL ERA

TRANSNATIONALISM, GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBAL NORMS

Transnationalism finds its roots in the third inter-paradigmatic debate that took place in the 1970s. It opposed state-centric approaches (realist paradigm) and non-state-centric approaches

(Marxist and transnationalist paradigms). The transnationalist approach may seem close to the liberal philosophy, as they have the same annalistic unit, which is the individual. But it offers a different vision of the individual, his links with the state and his role in the international community.

When the study of transnational relations developed, the international scene was marked by events that state-centric academics were not able to explain. Here we think of the end of the Vietnam War, the oil shocks, the 1973 Chilean *coup d'état*, etc. What was new in these events is the fact that non-state actors were involved in these: social mobilization in the US and abroad against the American war in Vietnam, the role and power of major oil companies, the technological support of a private company to the army in Chile. The world was subject to multiple changes that would eventually shape global politics. The main source of change was the development of technologies that made it easier for people to travel and communicate: the Internet, wireless communication, plane services, and television to name but a few. Transnationalists came to the conclusion that the State was not the only strong player anymore. Hence arose the necessity to shift from a state-centric to a multi-centric approach to global politics.

In his book *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (1990), James Rosenau's main concern is the dynamics of change in the international system. He challenges the realist paradigm by asking how their state-centric approach can explain this dynamics of change. In his attempt to reconceptualize international relations, Rosenau [a] outlines the shift from a state-centric global politics to a multi-centric one. In order to do so, he analyses the dynamics of micro-macro interactions. Micro actors, as citizens, leaders or private actors have benefited from skills improvement, greater sensitivity to community members and greater readiness to act (1990, 114-124). This dynamics of change takes place in a context of microelectronic revolution and postindustrial order that have altered the state's position in global politics: narrowed scope, reduced autonomy, constricted capacity to adapt to change (127-132). Macro actors other than the state, such as subgroups, transnational organizations, leaderless publics and movements, through collective action, are now able to challenge state-centric global politics.

In a second book, *Distant Proximities* (2003), Rosenau [b]

deepens his analysis on micro-macro interactions and introduces two concepts to define present world politics. The first one is the concept of “framegration.” Framegration is used to suggest the complex interactions between the fragmenting and the integrating forces of localization (i.e. resource scarcities, mass migrations and nationalism) and globalization (i.e. free market, global political and economic institutions) (11-17). The second concept introduced by Rosenau lies in the title of his book: “*Distant Proximities*.” It expresses the idea that in today’s world, everything that may be remote is at the same time close-at-hand. Therefore, it means that we now have to “use the local and the global as prisms for looking at the same thing” (4). The concept of distant proximities differs from globalization, which is seen by Rosenau as an elusive term. Globalization is not new, but it is surely more accessible today. We are actually living what is called the *democratization of globalization* (Tétrault and Lipschutz 2005, 145-164). In this context, individuals gain power, in the sense that they have “the ability to get things done, to influence and persuade” (169). They become effective global citizens as any other global politics actors.

The growing phenomenon of global citizens has enabled the transmission of values and norms. In *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change* (1998), the constructivist academics Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink try to understand where these norms come from, how they evolve and to what extent do they influence politics. They define a norm as “a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). In the second half of the 20th century, many norms were institutionalized thanks to the development of organizational platforms such as NGOs and international organizations. These platforms, along with the existence of norm entrepreneurs are the two conditions of norms emergence. As Finnemore and Sikkink recall, a large proportion of international norms were initially local norms. They also discuss the existence of a norm tipping point and norm cascades in the process of norm adoption by political actors. They suggest that there is a tipping point, which would occur after 30% of the actors adopted a norm, after which we see a “norm cascade” when the rest of the actors quickly adopt it (891). The rise of international norms is another element that weakens state sovereignty and fosters citizen engagement, an issue that we will look at in the next section.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AT THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: BIRTH OF A GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY?

The development of transnational connections, and the rise of global citizens and norms have given birth to a new form of engagement. Citizen engagement now takes place at a global scale, for new purposes and with high impact. This engagement is the consequence of a *skillful revolution*, according to James Rosenau. With his notion of “skillful individuals,” Rosenau [a] argues that individuals are increasingly more emotionally and analytically skillful, and that their impact as global citizens has profound consequences on global politics. “*Indeed, it may well be that the skill revolution is a major source of the weakening of the anarchical state system and the growth of a vast nongovernmental world composed of social movements, aroused ethnic minorities, volunteer organizations, and innumerable other types of collective actors*” (655-686).

The various alter-globalizations movements of the 1990s, such as the mobilization against the WTO ministerial summit in Seattle (1999) and against the G-8 summit in Genoa (2001), give a good illustration of this global citizen engagement. Regarding the Seattle events, Geoffrey Pleyers sees a shift in citizen participation. Leaving aside their real impact, they were invested with major significance. The mobilizations have shown that “ordinary citizens” and NGOs “can have an impact on decisions taken at the highest level, even by international organizations which had previously appeared to be inaccessible” (2010, 19).

It calls on us to consider the existence of a global civil society, which is understood by Helmut Andrew and Nuno Themundo as the “socio-sphere located between the family, state, and market and operating beyond the confines of national societies, politics, and economies” (2002, 193). They note that there has been an increasing growth in the number of international non-governmental organizations after 1990. Globalization has offered “greater opportunities for organising across borders than before, in terms of both resources and access to centres of influence” (198).

As a conclusion, we see that citizen engagement has benefited from the development of global transnational connections. It has gained in density and power, and has altered world stage by forming what we could call a global civil society. In his study of alterglobalization actors, Pleyers notes that with the increase of international alter-globalization

gatherings, the issues, dynamics, and transnational connections all contributed to decreasing the importance of the national context as international networks and the continental level assumed a mounting significance in the movement" (2010, 29). Hence, the interest, in the next paragraph, to elaborate further on the development of transnational activism and advocacy networks.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY NETWORKS

The development of global transnational connections has enabled domestic-based activists to form a spectrum of what Sydney Tarrow calls "rooted cosmopolitans." They are individuals that "*move physically and cognitively outside their origins*" but remain linked "*to place, to the social networks that inhabit that space, and to the resources, experiences and opportunities that place provides them with*" (2005, 42). Above all, rooted cosmopolitans engage themselves in regular transnational practices. According to Tarrow, transnational activists are a subgroup of rooted cosmopolitans. He defines transnational activists as follows: "individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies" (43-48).

Transnational activists are usually engaged in transnational networks. This is part of what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink describe in *Activism Beyond Borders*. They speak of transnational advocacy networks to describe systems that "*multiply the channels of access to the international system*" by building links among actors of civil societies, states and international organizations (1998). Transnational advocacy networks are "*organized to promote causes, principled ideas, and norms, and they often involve individuals advocating policy changes*" (8-9). They may include international and domestic non-governmental research and advocacy organizations, local social movements, foundations, etc. These webs of connections share values, generate, organize, and exchange information and services. According to Keck and Sikkink, transnational advocacy networks emerge for several reasons: when the channels between the state and its domestic actors are blocked (*boomerang pattern*), through political entrepreneurs (activists) and thanks to the growth of international contacts (increasing international

network activities). Following Keck and Sikkink's typology, transnational advocacy networks seek influence through information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics and accountability politics. This influence works at various levels: issue creation and agenda setting, influence on discursive positions of states and international organization, influence on institution procedures, influence on policy change in "target actors," influence on state behaviour (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). In their attempt to study the influence of transnational advocacy networks, Keck and Sikkink give much importance to ideas and norms, which recalls Finnemore and Sikkink's work on the transmission of values and norms at a global scale (1998). But the development of transnational activism and advocacy networks does not necessarily involve the empowerment of citizens. We previously saw that citizen engagement has gained in density and power, moreover from a transnational point of view, through transnational activism and advocacy networks. But as Moises Naim recalls in his book *The end of power* (2013), it is far more than a simple shift of power. Naim indeed explains that "*the transformation of power is more total and complicated. Power itself has become more available – and, indeed, in today's world more people have power. Yet its horizons have contracted, and once attained it has become harder to use*" (2013). It may be easier for citizen and networks to gain power, but their impact may not necessarily be effective, as we saw with the Seattle events, that have had partial success.

To conclude, we note that the rise of transnational connections and global citizens has led to the development of transnational activism and advocacy networks. It has given birth to transnational campaigns and movements that have had partial but highly visible success. Nowadays, one of the new challenges that emerge is the development of new electronic technologies (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005, 227-245). Their broader access has given transnational activists new resources and means to organize themselves and to act. It brings us to the last element of our conceptual frameworks, which is related to transnational citizen activism in the digital era.

TRANSNATIONAL CITIZEN ACTIVISM IN THE DIGITAL ERA

What we will try to understand here is the implication of digital tools in transnational citizen activism. According to Jennifer Earl

and Katrina Kimport, there are two schools of thought. In the first, it is argued that the development of information and communication technologies has not changed the process of activism. But it has surely changed the scale of activism. Activists benefit from new audience members, increased reach and speed of communication, and reduced cost. In the second school of thought, research suggests that the use of information and communication technologies, primarily the World Wide Web, may have consequences on the process of activism (Earl and Kimport 2011, 21-41).

In the introduction of their book *Digitally enabled social change*, Earl and Kimport give three illustrations of the use of the Internet as digital activism. The first example compares two social events: the March on Washington for civil rights in 1963 and the rally against the Iraq war, organized by United for Peace and Justice in 2007 in Washington. Both events had hundreds of thousands of attendees, hosted speakers and political figures, and aimed at taking their message to political leaders (the 1963 event relied on local networks, flyers and speeches whereas the 2007 event mobilized people through the Internet). This is a common use of Internet, which is called “*e-mobilization*.” It enabled the organization to conduct a collective action on a very large scale, quickly and at low cost. The second example takes place on both sides in the 2000 U.S. presidential elections, when George W. Bush and Al Gore had to face third-party challengers. In the midst of the political campaign, some web sites launched a strategic voting movement. They were offering undecided voters the opportunity to be matched to others in “safe states” and pledged to vote in a certain way. The idea was to support the chances of third-party candidates to get 5 percent of the votes and get better funding, without affecting the election outcomes. This is an illustration of what the authors call an “E-movement.” The third example is what they call “E-tactics.” An example of E-tactics is the use of online petitions in order to mobilize people quickly about a specific concern (4-20). The development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s eliminated the traditional media as an intermediary and thus facilitated communications. This is even more accurate when it comes to particularly hosted climates.

As we said earlier, one of the schools of thought suggests that the use of information and communication technologies has consequences on the process of activism. It would offer transnational citizen activists a new repertoire of contention. This is what Earl and

Kimport call the new “*digital repertoire of contention*,” in other words, a new digital set of tactics available for use. This “digital repertoire of contention” is characterized by a collective action possible with or without participant copresence. Short, sporadic, episodic, and enduring campaigns are possible. Tactics are not necessarily politically oriented and they are used as a means of redress (177-192). For instance, internet-based networks “*can coordinate action and choose targets much faster than hierarchical states or corporations can react*” (Hill 2013, 57). One illustration of the use of this “digital repertoire of contention” is the social movement Occupy, which has been highly creative: “*organizers and activists developed innovative repertoires of social-movement action like the human mic, while redefining old repertoires like the seizure of public space and the use of general assemblies. Moreover, having been surrounded with digital technologies all their lives, many of the young OWS activists imaginatively deployed social media and cutting-edge digital tools like live streaming to bring attention to the encampments*” (Wolfson 2014, 182). Michael Dartnell, in *Insurgency Online: Web Activism and Global Conflict*, speaks of a post-realist world. The media-scape and power are no longer state prerogatives. Digital tools empower non-state actors, by giving them new opportunities “for reflexion, perception, and social experience” (Dartnell 2006, 92-104). Eventually, this new form of activism tends to be non-hierarchical and non-violent: “*the vast majority – but not all – recent activist movements have been non-violent. Non-violence is related to the non-hierarchical nature of recent activist movements. An army, by definition, is hierarchical. A movement that people can join in different ways, at different times, discussing issues on Facebook, or in public squares, is unlikely to lead to the rigid hierarchy necessary for sustained violence*” (Hill 2013, 138).

Nevertheless, each of the aforesaid benefits of digital tools for citizen activism needs to be balanced by their feedback effects. There may be as many opportunities than risks arising from the digital era. As an illustration, we could mention the promotion of democracy in the digital era, which was fostered but also, in a way, limited by digital tools. This is what Evgeny Morozov stresses in his book *Net Delusion: The dark side of internet freedom* (2011).

According to him “*one major problem with a networked society is that it has also suddenly over empowered those who oppose the very process of democratization [...]. As a result, it has become difficult to focus on getting things done, for it’s not immediately obvious if the new,*

networked threats to democracy are more ominous than the ones the West originally thought to fight. Have the nonstate enemies of democracy been empowered to a greater degree than the previous enemy (i.e., the monolithic authoritarian state) has been disempowered?"(256). In the same vein, Hill identifies "*astroturf*" campaigns, which are fake versions of grassroots activism led, for instance, by governments themselves. According to him, "recent years have seen corporations and even government agencies using the internet to give the impression that public opinion is in favour of policies that benefit the company or government concerned" (2013, 127). In short, if digital tools offer transnational citizen activists a new repertoire of contention, as the two-faced Janus, one must not forget to consider the risks they pose. The digital era, indeed, implies a new *digital repertoire of contention*, but a new context of contention as well. Therefore, it calls on us to consider the fact that transnational citizen activism remains limited by the elements that have fostered it.

Eventually, before introducing our case study, we will identify the causal model of our analysis, through the identification of its main independent and dependent variables.

CAUSAL MODEL OF OUR ANALYSIS

In our attempt to set a conceptual framework for our analysis, we went through important concepts that emerged from the theory on transnationalism. In this last section, we will identify the elements that will constitute the causal model of our analysis.

In the first section ("Approach to Transnationalism, Global Citizenship, and Global Norms"), we outlined the rise of information flows, through the development of new technologies. Roseneau's analysis of micro-macro interactions suggests a shift from a state-centric to a multi-centric global politics, where non-state actors are able to challenge the state. Information flow has also enabled the transmission of values and norms that foster global citizenship. Thereafter (citizen engagement at the age of globalization), we came to see that citizen global engagement is a consequence of a skill revolution that gave birth to skillful individuals. We noticed that these skillful individuals have benefited from the rise of information flows and transnational connections. In a third step (the development of transnational activism and advocacy networks), this

led us to address the ongoing development of transnational activism networks. Through these webs of connections that “multiply the channels of access to the international system” (Keck and Sikkink 1998), shared values and information, activists are able to influence far beyond their borders. Eventually (“citizen activism in the digital era”), we suggested that the digital revolution has changed the scale of activism and offered a new repertoire of contention.

In the end, we have four elements that we will consider as our independent variables: information flow, skillful individuals, the density of transnational activism networks, and digital connections. One can notice these variables influence well each other. On the one hand, the rise of information flow permitted the emergence of skillful individuals. On the other hand, skillful individuals along with the rise of information flow enabled the development of transnational advocacy networks. Finally, digital connections have facilitated information flow, fostered skillful individuals and increased the density of transnational advocacy networks. Regarding our dependent variables, the presumed effect of the aforementioned elements is the rise of new models of citizen participation on the global stage, particularly through what we called digital transnational activism.

In the light of this, we will introduce our case study, based on the work of two Canadian entrepreneurs. In the context of the Syrian civil war, their vision is to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource for all civil society. Through this project, we will see how information flow, skillful individuals, the density of transnational activism networks and digital connections can explain the rise of a new model of citizen participation, which illustrate well digital transnational activism.

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: THE DEFINING CONFLICT OF THE DIGITAL AGE

It has now been around six years since the Syrian crisis began. From its start, it has been particularly marked by the use of digital tools as means to mobilize people, communicate, share information and even fight.

In March 2011, the Assad regime faced pro-democracy protests in Deraa, following the arrest and torture of young Syrians. What

started as peaceful demonstrations shifted to more violent ones when the governmental forces opened fire on their own people. Following the Arab Spring events elsewhere in the region, local mobilization rapidly transformed into nationwide protests asking for President Assad's resignation. Hundreds of thousands were taking to the streets across the country. At that time, social media were used by the population to drive the protests and shook the Assad regime. *"Facebook provided an invaluable logistical infrastructure for the initial stages of protest [...]. Text-messaging systems fed people in and outside these countries with information about where the action was, where the abuses were, and what the next step would be"* (Howard and Hussain 2013, 23).

As a response to the protest movements, the government used repression. The opposition had no choice but to take up arms, which precipitated the country into a civil war (Belhadj 2013, 9-20). Progressively, rebel brigades were formed to fight government forces for control of areas. But the conflict that involved the rebel and government forces shifted to a much more complex and internationalized conflict acquiring sectorial overtones and including: the Sunni majority, the Alawite minority, Kurdish groups, the Hezbollah, jihadist groups and foreign actors such as Russian troops, the Qods IRGC of Iran, and the international coalition. Social media were a privileged way to mobilize combatants on all sides, and a means for jihadist groups to recruit extremists:

"On Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh), [Ban Ki-Moon] noted that the group raised funds through nefarious activities while using the Internet and social media to radicalize and recruit disaffected youth. More than 30,000 people from around the world had joined its campaigns in Iraq and Syria, representing a significant security threat to their own or third countries upon their return" (UN 2016).

In parallel, digital tools were also used for cyber warfare:

"Over the last four years as the Syrian uprising has grown into a full-blown civil war, a sinister parallel conflict has been fought out in cyberspace, with combatants wielding bytes and software rather than guns as they have battled

for supremacy on Syria's internet frontline. But the consequences of this secret cyber war have been real and deadly - particularly for opponents of the Assad regime who have been targeted for arrest and torture as a consequence of personal information gleaned from their email traffic. In some cases even the military plans of crucial rebel offensives had been hacked. But the opposition has been busy too, leaking President Bashar al-Assad's embarrassing personal correspondence and eavesdropping on government troop deployments amid much else. As a consequence Syria's civil war has become fertile ground for 'hacktivists' from both sides - egged on and in some cases assisted by governments and agencies from outside the region." (Al Jazeera 2015)

But social media were also used by the government to identify its opponents. As Howard and Hussain recall: *"In Syria, the Assad regime had blocked Facebook and Twitter intermittently since 2007, but reopened access as protests mounted, possibly as a way of entrapping activists"* (2011).

As the conflict was frequently marked by war crimes, committed by all parties, and by the use of chemical weapons, social media were also a way to mediatize internationally these crimes. Whether it has had political impact or not, it has at least informed the international scene on what was happening on the ground.

Above all, the ongoing Syrian war has created a complex humanitarian crisis. It can be seen as one of the largest refugee exodus in recent history (UNHCR 2016). More than 4.5 million people have fled the country since the 2011 protests. More than 6 million people are internally displaced inside the country, and 1.2 million were driven from their homes in 2015 alone. At this time, civil populations lack access to adequate drinking water, basic food needs, health care and education. Social media are often used to tell the story of these civilians trapped in the crossfire (B. Rowsell, personal communication, April 2016). Many individuals and organizations in Syria and abroad also use digital tools such as online petitions, crowdfunding and crowdsourcing for many purposes: to protect civilians from war by sharing precious information from the field, to mobilize the international public and encourage it to act, or to collect financial and human resources. Our case study is based on such a project, which aim is to help Syrian civil victims, using digital tools.

THE PERENNIAL PROJECT: DIGITAL TOOLS AS A RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Perennial is a project led by two Canadian entrepreneurs, Farhaan Ladhani and Ben Rowsell, and is supported by a team from the fields of technology, research, and business. Using their experience in digital activism, Ladhani and Rowsell's vision is to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource for all civil society.¹

The Perennial project began with three observations. First, the Internet can mobilize millions and that this mobilization can achieve great impact. But this impact is too often short-lived, and therefore not able to attack long-lasting global challenges. Second, too many organizations are prisoners of their contact lists, to which they must pander to keep them active. Lastly, they observed that the private sector has solved the dilemma of distributed action by mastering social algorithms, which is not the case for NGOs. Private companies indeed succeeded in finding replicable patterns in user motivations to act. But civil society groups lack the resources to master these algorithms on their own. Thus, Rowsell and Ladhani seek to apply expertise on the motivations for civic participation to make civic campaigns more effective. Perennial offers a platform that will serve as a marketplace where organizations running campaigns requiring civic action, and citizens willing to act, can meet one another. On the one hand, these organizations propose micro-tasks that collectively deliver their campaign objectives. On the other hand, citizens engage in direct actions that are immediate and concrete (B. Rowsell, personal communication, April, 2016).

Perennial's first campaigns will crowdsource engagement to support movements working to save lives in Syria. To do so, Perennial is building partnership with organizations in Syria and elsewhere. As an illustration, it has reached the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), which organizes distributed action to provide Syrians access to health care. Programs range from primary care to more specialized treatment in order to provide effective and needs-based healthcare in Syria. Perennial has also reached an organization called Questscope. It organizes distributed action to reach internally displaced persons. Questscope provides critical assistance for food, water and sanitation, medicine, shelter, and psychosocial counselling and support for tens

of thousands of internally displaced persons (B. Rowswell, personal communication, April, 2016). Perennial partner organizations' members are spread in different countries such as Syria, the United-States, Jordan and Lebanon.

Perennial engages itself to build a microtasking application to specifications provided by its partners. If they agree to host this microtasking application on Perennial's website, Perennial will seek users for the microtasking application by distributing emails and social media content. In return, partner organizations engage themselves to provide detailed specifications on their requirements for crowdsourcing participation, to contribute to the promotion effort Perennial will run to maximize participation in the microtasking application. They will also amplify the reach of email, social media and broadcast communications related to the microtasking application (B. Rowswell, personal communication, April, 2016). The Perennial project will benefit from a team volunteers based internationally (Caracas, San Francisco, Toronto, Ottawa, and Paris).

As it needs funds to undertake this project, Perennial will launch a crowdfunding campaign at the beginning of fall 2016. It aims to gather approximately \$100 000, which will mostly be used to distribute the software to the widest possible set of activists around the globe. This campaign will be run on the crowdfunding platform Indiegogo. The choice of crowdfunding is not meaningless. As part of the Direct Diplomacy project, Rowswell has been particularly interested in learning more about this tool. As we can see in one of Direct Diplomacy articles on the subject, crowdfunding appears to be more than a funding tool:

In a digital world where we are only just starting to discover the possibilities for new forms of mass collaboration, some defy easy categorization. We had always thought of crowdfunding as, well, a funding mechanism. If your cause can't get government grant or a gift from a wealthy benefactor, ask the crowd to pay for it. That's why were we surprised to see the U.S. government turn to crowdfunding to help Syrian refugees. Why would the government with the largest budget in the world need to ask the internet for money?

Our last blog post explored this campaign and identified some tips for successful crowdfunding campaigns. There was so much rich material that emerged from our interviews with activists about their crowdfunding activities, though, that we

now offer this blog post to shed light on how the tactics helps mobilize global citizens to fight global challenges. The tool is much more powerful than a mere fundraising operation. In our research, we limited ourselves to large campaigns (with goals over \$100,000), all linked to the Syrian refugee crisis. The key question we asked activists was "how did you mobilize citizens online?" The answers we heard offer lessons for any kind of online civic participation campaign. [...]

Through our research and interviews demonstrated that crowdfunding creates a real link between the donor and the beneficiaries. The donor participates in its way that directly contributes to youth education, charitable works, or the promotion of values that he or she shares with the organization. And for its part, the movement gains a lot more than cash. Crowdfunding can help it forge a community of activists (John, 2016).

Crowdfunding is a digital tool used by many organizations working on the Syrian crisis. Some of Perennial partners are actually using crowdfunding to finance their project. During Perennial campaigns, they will also be contributing videos and multiple images to post to the Indiegogo campaign profile. In the end, there are two phases in which individuals will be able to engage themselves. During the crowdfunding campaign, people interested in encouraging Perennial project will be able to give a financial help. But more than a financial contribution, it aims to create links between donors, the project members and partners, and the beneficiaries. During the second phase of the project, which is the crowdsourcing campaign, individuals will be able to engage physically. For instance, doctors or surgeons from all parts of the world may engage in a medical campaign run by SAMS.

Perennial's impact on the ground would be double. It would directly help organization on the ground to carry on and develop their activities. And it would indirectly benefit the civilians in need. There are already many organizations working on the ground. We could cite few of them. One such group, the "Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently," which is a group of citizen journalists in Syria: "*secretly film(s) and report(s) from within the city and send the information to members outside of Syria, who transfer the news to local and international media*" (CPJ 2015). This is a concrete illustration of existing form of digital activism in Syria, but there are other organization which could or do benefit from digital

tools. For instance, the Syria Campaign, which organizes distributed action to make Syrian voices heard in peace negotiations. The Syria Campaign runs large-scale campaigns that elevate the voices of Syrians to ensure their perspectives are factored into any political solution. We also have the Karam foundation, which organizes distributed action to grant Syrian youth access to education. The Karam Foundation has many ongoing campaigns in Syria, which address basic needs as well as educational issues. They seek to create a community centre in Rihanle, Turkey, close to Idlib, which would provide creative therapy sessions for kids, vocational training, English and Turkish classes, and preparation to access universities abroad. Last, there is the Rahma Relief Foundation, which organizes distributed action to provide aid to young and affected Syrians. The Rahma Relief Foundation's mission is to provide aid to the Syrian people affected by the current crises through orphan, education and container programs. They also run a summer camp project (B. Rowswell, personal communication, April, 2016). As we said earlier, civic organizations often lack the expertise, resources, and opportunities to foster motivations for civic participation and make civic campaigns more effective. This is something Perennial has to offer to civic organizations on the ground. It has the human and digital resources, it is about to obtain the financial resources, and it is not subject to all the abovementioned constraints that limit citizens and citizen activism in Syria. On the other hand, such organizations in Syria and in the region are essential for the development of citizen activism toward Syrian victims, hence arises the importance of both actors in this context.

Following this introduction to Perennial, let us now look at it through the theory on transnationalism.

PERENNIAL AND THE THEORY ON TRANSNATIONALISM

In the first part of this work, we brought four elements in our causal model that we consider as our independent variables: information flow, skillful individuals, the density of transnational activism networks and digital connections. We understood that the rise of information flow has enabled the transmission of values and norms that foster global citizenship. But we also noticed that global citizenship is a consequence of a skill revolution that gave birth to skillful individuals that engage

themselves globally. This global engagement has benefited from the rise of information flows but also from transnational connections. Indeed, through transnational activism networks, activists are able to influence far beyond their borders. The digital revolution has changed the scale of activism but it has also offered a new repertoire of contention (Earl and Kimport 2011, 177-192).

Above all, it is important to remind that the context in which Perennial was born is highly transnational and highly mediatized. The conflict itself is by nature transnational. We saw that the Syrian crisis quickly moved from a civil war to an international one, with international governmental and non-governmental actors involved in it. And the media has had a great role in the transnationalization of the conflict. As we said earlier, the crisis has indeed been largely mediatized since its inception in 2011 and the pro-democracy protests. At that time, social media were a way to communicate at the local level, for instance to mobilize people. At the international level, social media were used for the transmission of information and the mediatization of events. In the months and years that followed, they were used to denunciate war crimes, to share information from the field, for humanitarian purposes, for cyber warfare, etc. The aggregation of information flows that emerged from the conflict has led citizens, in Syria and abroad, to act as transnational entrepreneurs. This impact on citizens recalls Rosenau's [a] concept of "distant proximity" and the fact that we now have to "use the local and the global as prisms for looking at the same thing" (2003,.4). To understand Perennial, we also need both the local and the global prisms.

We identified three kinds of actors in our case: Perennial, its partners, and individuals based internationally. It is first interesting to look at Perennial on the light of Rosenau's [b] notion of "skillful individuals" (1997, 655-686) and Sydney Tarrow's "rooted cosmopolitans" (Tarrow 2005, 42). The key actors involved in Perennial, Ben Rowsell and Farhaan Ladhani, are two Canadian citizens who engage themselves in a transnational issue, the Syrian crisis, and seek impact at a global scale. In the end, they act through the mobilization of individuals, networks, financial and human resources. The development of global transnational connections indeed enabled domestic-based activists to form a spectrum of what Sydney Tarrow calls "rooted cosmopolitans." Actors involved in Perennial may be seen as rooted cosmopolitans, in the sense that they mobilize their domestic and international resources and opportunities in favour of Perennial's goals. These resources

may include digital expertise to develop Perennial's software, social networks to develop partnerships or opportunities to find funding. For instance, as ambassador and entrepreneur, Rowsell benefits from various networks and resources in Canada and internationally spread. Our study of Perennial also recalls Tarrow's definition of transnational activists that are "*individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies*" (2005,43-48). Through Perennial's objectives in Syria, and Perennial members, it is clear that information flow and the commitment of skillful individuals enabled such a project. But one could not look at Perennial without exploring the impact of digital connections. As we were looking at the implication of digital tools in transnational citizen activism, we suggested that they offer transnational citizen activists a new repertoire of contention. That is to say, a new digital set of tactics available for use. Perennial is using digital tools to operate its mission, from the development of a microtasking application to the use of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing to run its campaigns. If we come back to Earl and Kimport's notions, the Perennial project is characterized by a collective action without participant copresence, and apolitically oriented tactics (2011, 177-192). The founders of Perennial are indeed based in Venezuela and Canada, the volunteers are located internationally, and partner organizations are spread among Syria, the United-States, Jordan and Lebanon. Regarding its tactics, Perennial does not have any politically oriented way of working. Perennial's objective is, indeed, to help Syrian civil victims and more generally, to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource for all civil society. We also note that the development of information and communication technologies has made it possible for Perennial to use this repertoire of contention. Through the development of digital tools, the project is able to act and increase its reach and speed of communication, and reduce its costs. We could also look at Perennial through Earl and Kimport's illustrations of the use of the Internet: "e-tactics", "e-mobilization", and "*e-movements*" (Earl and Kimport 2011, 4-20). First, Perennial seeks to use crowdfunding and crowdsourcing as "e-tactics." As we saw, it is a good way to forge a "community of activists." Then, through its crowdfunding and crowdsourcing campaigns, it will run what Earl and Kimport consider as "e-mobilization." They will conduct a collective action on an

international scale, quickly (campaigns usually last 60 days) and at low cost. Lastly, their project may generate an “e-movement” if it succeeds in reaching large communities of transnational activists. In the end, Perennial is what we could call a “digital-enabled project.” The use of digital tools has been a necessity to develop the application, build partnerships, run campaigns, communicate, and share information. More generally, it is able to mobilize a community of global activists willing to help. We thus need to have a broader picture of Perennial by looking at it as part of a network of activists.

Perennial has indeed benefited from the high density of transnational advocacy network working on the Syrian crisis. As we saw with Finnemore and Sikkink, if the rise of international norms has weakened the state, it has empowered individuals and non-governmental organizations (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). In the context of the Syrian crisis, Perennial works with other global citizens and skillful individuals, whether they are partners, volunteers or donors. This network of activists shares values, such as humanitarian values, and act in order to protect or advocate them. Activists in Syria face a situation in which the channels between the Syrian government and Syrian domestic actors have been blocked since 2011 or what is called as a *boomerang pattern* (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Therefore, it led to the development of networks of transnational actors that work in Syria and abroad. Perennial can benefit from it, as they offer a large range of resources and possibilities. But in what extent can we talk of Perennial as part of a transnational advocacy networks? Keck and Sikkink describe transnational advocacy networks as networks that “*multiply the channels of access to the international system*” by building links among actors of civil societies, states and international organizations (1998). It is interesting to see that through its founders and volunteers, Perennial is active both in the governmental, non-governmental, diplomatic and academic spheres. Through its partners, it has a foot in the non-governmental organization sphere. And through its members and partners, it has contact in international organizations and civil society. It creates a web of local, regional and international actors, governmental and non-governmental agents that indeed multiply the channels of access. In its networks of partner organization, Perennial uses digital tools to increase participation in civic campaigns and reach civil victims. But eventually, Perennial advocates for new models of civic participation, as to master social algorithms of civic participation and turn them into a public resource.

To conclude, we observe that information flow and skillful individuals can explain the genesis of Perennial's founders and members, and more broadly, citizen engagement in the Syrian crisis. We also note that the density of transnational activism networks and digital connections can explain the development of a project such as Perennial, as it needs both these elements to operate. By using digital tools, Rowswell and Ladhani offer global citizens a new way to act in response to the Syrian crisis's consequences on civil populations.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD NEW REPERTOIRES OF CONTENTION FOR CITIZENSHIP ACTIVISM IN GLOBAL POLITICS

In order to understand what explains the rise of new models of citizen participation, we attempted to test if the theory on transnational activism applies to the case of the Perennial project. In our conceptual framework, we identified four elements that we considered as our independent variables: information flow, skillful individuals, the density of transnational activism networks and digital connections. We noticed that these elements influence each other, and enable the rise of new models of citizen participation on the global stage, particularly through what we called digital transnational activism. We also suggested that digital transnationalism activism offers individuals a new repertoire of contention with a broader scale.

We used the project Perennial as a case study, and analyzed it in the light of our conceptual framework. In this context of global transnational connections, the Syrian crisis has been the defining conflict of the digital age, as digital tools have been permanently part of it. As a response to the crisis' consequences on civil populations, Perennial is now trying to use these tools to leverage its impact. On the basis of our independent variables, we are able to explain the birth and development of the Perennial project. These elements enabled the existence of Perennial, and its means of action: crowdfunding and crowdsourcing. Perennial offers global citizens an interesting model of citizen participation, through which individuals that are willing to engage themselves are linked to others that need help and non-governmental organizations that work on the ground.

This case study gives us a good example of how citizens can act at a global scale. And it eventually shows that global citizens have

their role in the development of new models of participation in global affairs. But the limits of our work lie in the fact that we studied specific models of citizen participation in a context that is already highly marked by transnational connections. The digital era offers a multitude of other models of citizen participation. Therefore, it calls for further studies on such models in a more generalized context of global politics.

NOTES

- 1 Farhaan Ladhani is Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs of the University of Toronto. For many years, he has been leading efforts on the use of digital tools to connect people. He served as the Senior Advisor for Digital Outreach in the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada (2014-2015) and Deputy Director for Direct Diplomacy at the Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada (2012-2014). The latter was an initiative focused on engaging with non-state political actors seeking to increase the openness, inclusiveness and responsiveness of their political systems (Munk School, 2016).

Ben Rowswell has been working as Canadian diplomat for more than two decades. He is presently serving as Canada's Ambassador to Venezuela. Six years ago, he began a thorough exploration of the use of digital tools in foreign policy. With this aim in mind, Ben Rowswell has supervised several projects. He launched the research project *Cloud to Street* with several Egyptian activists. He ran the division at the Canadian foreign ministry, which conceived the project *Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran* in collaboration with the Munk School of Global Affairs. It consisted of an Internet-enabled conversation between more than five million unique users inside Iran (B. Rowswell, personal communication, July, 2016). He eventually launched the Direct Diplomacy project, in collaboration with CÉRIUM, the Center for international studies of the University of Montreal. The purpose of this project was to explore contemporary use of digital tools by professional diplomats in order to better understand the growing phenomenon of digital diplomacy. This last year, the project began an exploration of the use and impacts of digital tools by citizens in global affairs. Two of these tools were crowdfunding and crowdsourcing (CÉRIUM, 2016).

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