



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *The indignados social movement and the image of the occupied square: the making of a global icon*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/143472/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Rovisco, M (2017) The indignados social movement and the image of the occupied square: the making of a global icon. *Visual Communication*, 16 (3). pp. 337-359. ISSN 1470-3572

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357217702088>

© The Author(s) 2017. Rovisco, M (2017) The indignados social movement and the image of the occupied square: the making of a global icon. *Visual Communication*, 16 (3). pp. 337-359. ISSN 1470-3572. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

The indignados social movement and the image of the occupied square: the making of a global icon

Introduction

Inspired by the wave of occupations of the so-called Arab Spring, the indignados became known for reclaiming public space through the tactic of long-term occupations of squares. The city emerges as an open theatre or stage (Latour and Hermant, 1998) upon which the protestors perform collective action to articulate new visions of democracy and the practice of dissent. There are already a number of studies looking at discursive media representations of the indignados (García-Jiménez, Zamora-Medina and Martínez-Fernández, 2014), the identity of the movement (Perrugoria and Tejerina, 2013), the mobilising role of social media in the makeup of the movement (Gerbaudo, 2012; Postill, 2014). However, few attempts have been made to explore the symbolic and visual communication dimensions of the 15M occupations of public space, in particular how the indignados used particular urban spaces to articulate their collective self-representation as a movement of global citizens. A focus on symbolic communication is important because, as insightfully argued by Esherick and Wasserstrom with regards to the 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square, ‘we will understand the protesters’ actions better if we focus on their symbolic meanings and intended effects than if we scrutinize their words in search of some coherent political program’ (Esherick and Wasserstrom, 1990: 846). Hence, this paper argues that the iconic image of the indignados - the occupied square - is crucial to understand how they perform opposition to the political and financial elites and their collective self-representation as a movement of global citizens, which connects them to other contemporary activisms. More importantly, this paper seeks to make a contribution to the growing literature on the visual representation of protest by focusing on the production of the

image of the occupied square as a global icon. Most research on iconic photographs is concerned with how such photographs become socially and culturally significant through extensive replication and circulation in traditional mass media institutions. However, as insightfully argued by Boudana, Frosh and Cohen (2017: 2) one must now ask ‘what happens to these images when technologies of image circulation, replication, and alteration are extended beyond the confines of traditional media and become ubiquitous among ordinary individuals’. The argument put forward in this paper is that the image of the occupied square is a global icon that embodies the universal value of democracy. According to Olesen (2015), a global political icon is a social and political carrier – usually an image, event or person – that embodies values and aspirations shared across national borders. Hence, if we want to understand the image of the occupied square as a global icon, we need to understand the ways in which the indignados, as political agents, devised and used particular protest images to develop and dramatize a particular vision of democracy that resonates strongly with global audiences. By arguing that what makes the occupied square a global icon is the ability of the protestors to produce for global circulation a generic and cosmopolitan image of the occupied square, this paper posits that we need to go beyond the mere study of iconic images as selected variations of a single original and concrete image that refer to a single reported event. If we want to take seriously the production and reception contexts of iconic images we need to consider that these images increasingly achieve social significance and uniqueness in the context of a participatory media culture (Jenkins, 2006).

This paper is based on textual and archival data (maps, photos, posters, videos, and manifestos) available in the blogs of the encampments of Madrid, Lisbon, and Barcelona. (#Acampadasol, #Acampadalisboa and #AcampadaBCN)¹. In the first stage of analysis, I read and analysed a selection of publications (i.e., press releases, manifestos, minutes of General Assemblies, maps, guides and all public documentation translated into English) and collected visual materials (i.e.,

photos² and videos of the encampments) that were produced and published during the phase of sustainment of the encampments (May 2011 to June 2011). My aim here was to gain an understanding of the collective self-representation of the protestors and how they communicated their identity to those inside and outside the movement. In the second stage of analysis, I used a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to analyse the manifestos and all those publications translated into English that targeted transnational audiences. CDA is an ideal method for analysing the bottom-up relations of resistance (Dijk, T.A., 1993) of the indignados. This methodological approach allows the researcher to examine the rhetoric and meanings of the protestors' public documentation in order to unfold the discursive strategies of their collective self-representation. I have also conducted a social semiotic analysis of images of the occupied square by analysing two protest images: the map of the encampment, and the gallery of portraits, a slideshow that is displayed at #AcampadaBNC's. A social semiotics approach is particularly useful here because it invites one to consider who makes the rules of particular forms of visual communication and who has the power to break these rules with novel modes of production and interpretation (Jewitt and Oyama, 2000: 134-135). As we will see, the protestors used innovative and creative strategies of visual communication to produce alternative meanings of the square as a site of active democracy.

Taking the square – dissent, publicness and democratic struggles

On the 15th of May 2011 the platforms Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) and Jovenes sin Futuro (Young People with No Future) organized a demonstration in Madrid's square Puerta Del Sol that attracted unexpectedly large numbers of protestors (around 20.000 people) through a call for action that went viral on Twitter. At the end of the demonstration, a group of about a hundred protestors decided to occupy the Puerta De Sol. This occupation was followed by a violent eviction attempt by the police that has the effect of attracting thousands of protestors and wide popular support. This event marked the birth of the indignados social

movement which is also known as 15M movement. Coined by the Spanish press, the term ‘indignados’ was borrowed from the title of the pamphlet *Indignez-Vous!* written by French Resistance hero, Stéphane Hessel. Inspired by the Arab uprisings and the struggle for democracy that dramatically unfolded in Tahrir square, the movement went on to spark a wave of occupations throughout Europe (especially in Greece and Portugal) and inspire the Occupy sit-in protests in the U.S. The indignados explicitly acknowledge ‘being inspired by the example of what was happening in Tahrir Square, including the symbolic value of ‘square’ politics’ (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013: 551). Yet, the Spanish indignados’ struggle for a more participatory democracy was also inspired by the so-called ‘Geração À Rasca’ protest (the Precarious Generation Protest) - on the 12 March 2011 around 300,000 people gathered in the streets of Lisbon to protest against the precarious working conditions of a generation of university-educated young people (Jornal de Notícias, 2011). At the heart of the grassroots mobilization of the indignados – that reportedly drew up to 8% of the Spanish population (see Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2012: 111) – was the protestors discontent with the crisis of representative democracy (Roos, 2012) and the failure of the political elites to represent the interests of the people. While the indignados defined themselves in their public communication as global citizens who are part of a leaderless and non-partisan global movement of ordinary citizens, their struggle for new forms of political participation and democracy – what they call ‘real democracy’ - takes place against the backdrop of the loss of trust and faith in party-political systems, media manipulation, precarious working conditions, and voter apathy that are primarily experienced at the national level. Even when they target supranational structures of governance – like the EU, the European Central Bank, or the IMF – the protestors explicitly make visible ‘the role of national political classes in fomenting the transnational and global dimensions of power associated to the neoliberal capitalist agenda (Flesher Fominaya, 2014: 187).

Similarly to other social movements (e.g., the European social forums and the European counter-summits) whose grassroots models of political participation the indignados adopted, the fight for social justice and democracy 'from below' are at the heart of the narrative frames and collective action employed to express grievance and discontent. But while the protestors involved in the European social forums and counter-summits were open to representatives of all civil society groups and emphasised mobilization for concrete demands, the indignados embraced the principles on non-partisanship and advocated locally-rooted forms of citizen participation and face-to-face communication through long-term occupations of public spaces – streets and squares (Rovisco, 2016). The fact that they define themselves as global citizens who see their goals and struggles connected to those of other protestors in other world sites is important to understand how the indignados seek to address global publics constituted by disaffected ordinary citizens. As stated in the English version of the First Manifesto of Rossio Square (2011) in Lisbon:

'We, citizens, women and men, workers, migrants, students, unemployed and retired people, united by our indignation in front of a situation that we refuse to accept as inevitable, have taken our streets. We thus join those that around the world today fight for their rights against the constant oppression of the ruling economical-financial system' (italics added for emphasis).

Their collective action is one that rejects association with those traditional political actors (political parties, civic associations, unions) who they see as unable to defend the values of liberal democracies or respond to the caprices of the world's financial markets. Unlike the Occupy Movement whose identity is underpinned by emblematic slogans – e.g., 'we are the 99%' – the indignados actively rejected banners representing organized groups or unions in their collective self-representation as a global non-partisan movement of ordinary citizens that speak and act for themselves (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2012: 115). Perhaps not surprisingly, few

efforts were directed at devising a coherent political programme which could represent the interests of different organized groups and institutional structures and categories (e.g., class).

In the remainder of this section, I want to show how the iconic image of the movement – the occupied square – is linked to the symbolic appropriation and mediatisation of the square as a place where active democracy happens – i.e., as a place where people can meet and act as citizens.

The 15M movement went on to subvert the organization of urban public spaces – as spaces where people go purely for business, leisure and consumption, not for the practice of government (see Hartley, 1992: 36). This is particularly consequential in terms of facing their opponents – the corrupt financial and political elites – as they challenge their authority over the control of public space through practices of urban communing, i.e., modes of sociality that offer alternatives to the production and realization of capital accumulation (Parr, 2014). Arguably, then, the occupied square illuminates the tension between the view of the square as an urban public space destined to spectacle and capitalist consumption (Debord, 1967) and devoid of meaningful interactions (Sennett, 1977), and the urban square reimaged as the site of active democracy. As noted by Madden (2010: 190), ‘cities often turn toward neoliberal policies that emphasize the control of public spaces for various reasons: to symbolize the pacified city’s receptiveness to local and global capital; to capitalize on various sectors of the tourism industry; to contain or displace political conflicts stemming from revanchist policies themselves’. By reclaiming the square as a place where citizens can congregate again the indignados are trying to reinvent democracy as a practical, performative and participatory component of publicness (Parkinson, 2012: 10, 16; Hartley, 1992: 37; see also Rovisco and Ong, 2016). This is particularly significant when we consider that, historically, the place of citizenship has shifted out of the classic agora, i.e., from participation in judgement and decision by the assembled public, to the realm of representation and discourse via the mass

media (Hartley, 1992: 35-36). In response to what they perceive to be the profound disconnection between the citizens and politicians, the indignados' reinvention of city squares as sites of public debate and meaningful intersubjective communication is consequential for how one understands the relation between publicness and the democratic struggles of the indignados. This suggests that the 'public space is not given and guaranteed; rather, it is struggled over and earned by the concerted efforts of people'. (Lee, 2009: 33).

The occupied square becomes a physical-cum-symbolic stage (Alexander, 2011: 43) in which the indignados perform their democratic struggles for a new politics from below in a better world, one that is not subsumed to neoliberal economics and policies, and one that empowers individual citizens. The actual organization and architecture of the encampment was crucial in forming and shaping the collective identity of the protestors and their public image (Feigenbaum, A., Frenzel, F and McCurdy P., 2013). The camp was organized like 'a city within a city' (Feixa, 2012) where different areas were identified as spaces for walking, sleeping, eating, and leisure. 'As "spaces of experience", protest camps and squares have constituted spaces to experiment with alternative practices. Food was distributed to everyone, whether activists or homeless people; camp libraries relied on free exchange; written and video productions are copy left, to ensure that they are freely available to all' (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013: 559). Diverse commissions, assemblies and working groups were created to organize the camp. As a model of participatory democracy, the assemblies are highly ritualized events with a horizontal structure and offering opportunities for consensual decision-making for collective action. Participants invented a code of gestures to show agreement (holding hands up and twinkling their fingers) and disagreement (crossing their hands).

Despite their grievances and discontent being directed primarily at national actors against the backdrop of the EU-debt crisis and nationally-imposed austerity, the universalization of the experience of the locally-rooted occupations is a very important feature in the self-definition

of the indignados. As Perrogoria and Tejerina (2013: 426) put it, ‘15M participants have been able to universalize their personal experiences, understandings, and emotions related to the crisis and the actors responsible for it’. In so doing, they reinvigorate the political imagination by suggesting that alternative forms of democracy and practices of citizenship are possible beyond the local and the national. Arguably, then, the collective identity of the 15M movement is symbolized by the iconic image of the occupied square as a model of dissent that is not purely situated and localized, but one that can be made available for global circulation via a range of mainstream and alternative media platforms. In this sense, the square politics of the indignados is distinct from the square politics that underpinned the uprisings and occupations of the so-called Arab Spring which had a more concrete agenda of social change (see Alexander, 2011) and set of political demands (i.e., regime change, democratic transition). What the indignados have in common with Arab uprisings of 2011 is the way in which occupations challenge everything the political establishment stands for and reshape public life.

If we accept that citizenship can be performed in public, then public spaces – parks, squares, streets – also provide conditions for performing citizenship beyond the specific places occupied by the national state (Clarke et. all, 2014: 159). In order to challenge the conventions through which urban public spaces are regulated, managed and policed by the state, the protestors also had to challenge the architecture of public power and authority that regulate the vertical relations between citizens, public and states. For their occupation of public squares to be sustained and meaningful for those ‘inside the movement’ and those ‘outside the movement’ (bystander publics, opponents, disaffected citizens), the indignados used a number of innovative and creative strategies of visual communication.

Picturing the square – maps and the gallery of portraits

Alongside the use of corporate media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook which attracted thousands of ordinary citizens and many first-time protestors to city squares (see e.g., Gerbaudo, 2012), the encampments extensively documented in their dedicated blogs collective action taking place in each encampment. Recent research has also emphasised that protest images (e.g., image memes, photographs, posters, videos) have the potential to generate creative public debate and send messages that cannot be conveyed by words, contributing, therefore, to a more vibrant public sphere (Milner, 2013; Olesen, 2013). The blogs of the acampadas of Madrid, Barcelona, and Lisbon that I analysed contain extensive visual and audio-visual archives documenting the occupation with photos, videos, illustrated pamphlets, and maps of the squares. In this section, I undertake a social semiotic analysis of two protest images: the map of Acampada del Sol that was produced by the protestors and published in the online edition of the Spanish broadsheet *El País* on the 20 May 2011; and the gallery of portraits, a slide show that is displayed at the website of Acampada Barcelona (#AcampadaBNC's). My aim here is to shed light on the strategies of visual communication that the indignados used to convey alternative meanings of the square. A social semiotic approach to visual analysis enables us to understand how particular 'social actors (...) have the power to establish as well as break the rules of visual representation (Aeillo, 2006: 90-91; see also Jewitt and Oyama, 2000). We will see how both through subversive uses of place, and symbolic manipulation, the indignados went on to break certain rules of visual representation of the public square and produce the iconic image of the occupied square. By illuminating both the material and symbolic practices that underpin the production of particular protest images, such as the map and the gallery of portraits, my aim is to show how through symbolic manipulation the occupied square went on to symbolise the goals and identity of the movement and achieve an iconic status.

The indignados' visual representation of the city square relies on strategies of representation similar to the techniques of detournement devised by the Situationists who used and manipulated symbols, cultural artefacts and visual conventions of the dominant order to their own ends (see Ross, 1988:42 cited in Hershkovitz, 1993: 398). Such subversive symbolic uses of place were crucial to produce alternative meanings of the square as a site of active democracy, which can also be read as a strategy of resistance to the ways in which 'increasingly, urban change is managed through public/private partnerships whereby government entities and the corporate sector work together to distribute the costs and benefits of the urban commons' (Parr, 2014: 9). Subversive uses of place and symbolic manipulation are important features of dissident political practice (Hershkovitz, 1993 397). But, more importantly, the manipulation of symbols intensifies the conveyance and heightens the impact of meanings, which cannot be easily conveyed by words (Merelman, 1969: 225). This is particularly significant in communication that stretches beyond national borders.

Maps of the occupied square define the architecture of the occupied square by means of a visual representation of its organisational infrastructure. They are also significant in terms of translating the new meanings of the urban square - no more an urban commons dominated by the status quo and corporate power, but a place where citizens can gather again to reclaim the commons and put into practice new forms of democratic participation. Maps of the encampments became a distinct feature of the occupations and an image meme prolific in the blogs of the encampments. I have selected for detailed analysis the map of Acampada Sol published in the electronic version of the newspaper El País (2001) because this was specifically devised and designed by Commission of Communication of Acampada Sol for circulation in the major broadsheet in Spain.

Insert Figure 1 here – Map of ‘Puerta del Sol’ encampment published in El País by Samuel Sánchez and Heber Longás (El País). Source: Comisión de Comunicación y elaboración propia

This map features the collective of protestors in the form of a slightly blurred photography, the square is represented as packed with human bodies, while a number of arrows and numbers highlighted within a red spot, note the actual location of different working groups and commissions (Action, food supply, sanitation, medical support, maintenance of common and private space, communication, legal aid) in the space of the square. The stylistic option to blur the photo picturing a mass of protestors is interesting because the realistic representation of the protestors as a collective of unidentifiable individuals conveys a visual message of unity and common purpose. The landmark at the centre of the square – the statue of King Carlos III – is represented in a stylised fashion and highlighted in pink with a caption indicating that the statue is the nucleus of the protest, while the local government building – the headquarters of the Community of Madrid – is represented in a realistic fashion. The names of the streets offering access to the square are also clearly noted in the map. These landmarks and monuments act as reminders of how monuments historically embody the hegemonic political power of the state.

The map is accompanied by a number of captions, a text that compounds a new narrative about Puerta del Sol: ‘Puerta de Sol de Madrid: un espacio para la indignación’ [Puerta de Sol of Madrid: a space for indignation] appears at the top as a title. Under the map of the square the different commissions noted in the map are listed, identified with the respective number that features in the map, and their roles briefly explained. The caption for the list of commissions reads in Spanish: ‘Various commissions have been organized with specific functions as part of a small society without hierarchies’³. The source of information displayed on the map is noted

as being the Commission of Communication of Acampada Sol. What is interesting in this map, and other maps produced by the indignados, is the way in which the indignados use a traditional artefact of political power – the map - to challenge the status quo. Maps as cartographic representations are also ‘narratives with a purpose, stories with an agenda’ (Short, 2003: 24). Not surprisingly, as a form, expression, and organization of information, maps are valuable to those who take decisions, and these are usually the wielders of power (Black, 1997: 163). The maps produced by the indignados can be seen as a visual communication strategy for producing a new and radical message about the new architecture of the square – the city square as a place where ‘the people’ (the demos) can gather and interact to discuss issues of common concern - rather than an ‘empty space’ (see Lee, 2009: 33) - in ways that subvert the conventions that govern urban squares to demand and embody different social and political relationships. The map dramatises and signifies the possibilities of the square as a site of active democracy and DIY citizenship (Ratto and Boler, 2014). It suggests that city squares, like streets and parks, have always been resources for citizens in their search for recognition and equality (Clarke at all, 2014: 161; Arora, 2014). Arguably, then, in the public visual communication of the indignados, the map emerges, ultimately, as a symbol of their collective identity, of the power of the people to reclaim public space to enact opposed conceptions of belonging and citizenship.

Yet, one of the most prolific visual representation of the indignados appears in the image of a mass of people sat in a circle or a small group of protestors engaged in vibrant and theatrical performances. This is evident, for example, in Figure 2 that portrays a mass-gathering at Puerta de Sol. There are thousands of photos portraying the occupied square in this fashion in the blogs of the encampments.

Insert Figure 2 here – Mass gathering at Puerta del Sol (15 May 2011) © Daniel Lopes

Garcia available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dntrotamundos/27015263780/in/album-72157666431338433/> (under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

While, as noted by Arora (2014: 9), ‘mass performance is a way of communicating efficiently across a diverse public, unifying and making visible common messages directed to the authority of concern’, it can be argued that the political performances of the indignados are about developing shared and translocal ways of thinking and acting in public, rather than a manifestation of the multitude. The latter has been understood as the new revolutionary actor of a post-national empire that Hardt and Negri (2000) see as a rising emancipatory force in its opposition to global capitalism. This is also to say that the collective self-representation of the 15M movement as a movement of global citizens, is not predicated on the image of the multitude, but on individual agency, responsibility and collective solidarity.

The gallery of portraits displayed in the blog of the Acampada de Barcelona illustrates well this dimension of the collective self-representation of the indignados. The gallery of portraits is a slideshow that includes hundreds of portraits of protestors taken against a white background (a large white sheet) during the phase of sustainment of the encampment in May 2011. As a protest image, the gallery of portraits is also significant to the extent in which it clearly inspired the 99% image memes of the OWS movement, which typically feature a handwritten story of hardship, held up to the camera (see Milner, 2013: 2371). All photos are accompanied by a caption indicating only the date and the number of views (ranging from hundreds of views to 1000 to 2000 views). Most photos portray ordinary citizens – families, pensioners, students, or the common working person - expressing a variety of moods from pensive and defiant to

celebratory and mocking. The joyful mood of ordinary citizens is well illustrated in Figure 2 and offers an interesting contrast to the more serious tone of photos portraying **what appear to be** experienced activists.

Insert Figure 3 here - Photo displayed at the Gallery of Portraits, Acampada Barcelona, ©

Fotomovimiento available at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/acampadabcnfoto/5776389478/in/album-72157626783708762/> (under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>)

In many of the photos the protestors hold banners representing their views and grievances (not those of particular interests groups). For example, one banner held by a young male teenager reads in Catalan ‘I am neither represented nor defended, this is not a democracy’⁴, another banner held by a middle-aged woman reads ‘I do not want to impose my ideas, I want you to think by yourself’. Some photos deploy protestors who, in their attire and posture appear as experienced activists. Such as, for example, the photo (Figure 3) portraying a woman and a young girl, with serious and defiant expressions and painted faces, holding a banner that reads in Catalan ‘Igualtat de Condicions’ [Equality of conditions].

Insert Figure 4 here – Photo displayed at the Gallery of Portraits, Acampada Barcelona ©

Fotomovimiento available at

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/acampadabcnfoto/5775836017/in/album-72157626783708762/> (under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>)

As a protest image, the gallery of portraits illuminates the subjectivity, individual agency and diversity of the collective of people that make up the occupied square. Significantly, the stylistic option of abstracting the protestors from the vibrant environment of the occupied square is consequential in terms of suggesting that the gallery of self-portraits represents the 15M protestors as an inclusive and diverse collective of people who speak for themselves, and challenges, therefore, the idea of abstract and homogenous citizenship. This approach to portraiture fits in well with what Aeillo (2011: 60-65) describes as an analytical approach to portraiture that is designed to bring out the most essential identifying traits of a given subject, while other aspects of the image such as background, light and settings are significantly simplified and stylised. It is noteworthy that the social and ethnic diversity of the collective of people who posed for these photos is not representative of the fabric of the national demos, but of an idealized cosmopolitan public (see Stevenson, 2006). As producers of protest images, the indignados go on to disrupt some of the conventions of portraiture photography by changing the representational meaning of the portraits; rather than highlighting the existence of particular types and categories of people - such as lunatics, criminals, indigenous people or celebrities - that are commonly found in early portrait photography (Hamilton and Hargreaves, 2001) - the portraits of the indignados represent an imagined and idealised 'demos'. The portraits depict the protestors performing a particular kind of identity – the identity of the engaged citizen. This can be seen as a form of activist engagement with the urban (Rose, 2014: 10-11) in which the protestors use city squares to perform their identity as active and engaged citizens. In so doing, the protestors end up enabling a different form of place representation in which the urban square is evoked rather than the subject-matter of the portraits.

The image of the citizen deployed in the gallery of portraits is one that contrasts – and coexists - with the image of the vibrant and carnivalesque interactions of the multitude represented in the many photos, videos and broadcasts of Tv.sol that documented the political theatre of the

15M movement across a range on alternative and mainstream media platforms. As a strategy of visual representation of the identity of the indignados, the gallery of portraits connotes the refusal of the protestors to be treated by the political establishment as an abstract entity - the oppressed national demos reduced to their status as consumers, statistics, and public opinion - and the invention of a different mode of political agency underpinned by non-violent direct action in public spaces. As the English version of the Manifesto of Acampada Barcelona puts it: ‘they thought we were asleep. They thought they could carry on cutting our rights without finding any resistance. But they were wrong: we are fighting – peacefully, but with determination – for the life we deserve (Manifesto Acampada Barcelona) (italics added for emphasis).

The making of a global icon – the globalisation of the occupied square

As we have seen, there is not a single image that encapsulates the identity and values of the 15M movement, but several images, which include the map of the encampments symbolizing the collective social experiment in direct democracy and the gallery of portraits embodying individual agency and active citizenship. This section shows how the indignados enacted a trans-local politics that transgresses place not only by universalizing their experiences of protest, but also by taking the scale of protest onto the world stage through their distinctive communicative practices. Square politics is important in two ways; one the one hand, the square works as a political theatre where the individual and collective identities of the protesters are formed, changed and performed via a kind of theatrical and ritualized interaction in public - which is constitutive of what Eyerman (2005) calls the inside of the movement; on the other, by regaining control over city squares the indignados recreate the square as a model for an open and inclusive site of democracy ready to be diffused around the world. This latter dimension of square politics suggests that the protestors’ attempt to move a global audience by enacting a political theatre that draws on a spatial model of mass demonstration that elicits

identification from a global (western) audience habituated to see occupations of public space – squares, streets and parks - as a symbol of democratic struggles. This was the case in the sit-ins of the American Civil Rights Movement, in the rebellious student protests of May 1968 in Paris - which involved symbolic manipulation of the meanings of public space inspired by the Situationists – the events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in Chinese students’ pro-democratic protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. As noted by Sbicca and Perdue (2014: 322), ‘the reclaiming of space as a social movement tactic became common place in the mid-20th century as civil rights activists sat at segregated lunch counters, refused to give up seats on buses and marched on public thoroughfares’. Perhaps not surprisingly, and inspired by these earlier occupations, the Chinese students who occupied Tiananmen Square in 1989 ‘borrowed symbolic gestures and clothing used in other countries by grassroots movements. They sang American folk songs from the 1960s as they camped out under makeshift tents. They wore headbands, flashed two fingered peace signs and experimented with casual intimacy’ (Adams, 1996: 426). It is not accidental that the protestors at Tiananmen Square appropriated gestures, symbols and movement tactics associated to the American Civil Rights Movement and other counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s to stage their own democratic struggles. It is noteworthy that the American Civil Rights Movement’s sit-ins launched the direct-action phase of the movement and became one of the most significant examples of civil disobedience in modern American history. The movement created a new form of protest and tactics that were then well documented in photographs and television news reports. The sit-in demonstrations began in the spring of 1960 with African American students taking their seats at “whites only” lunch counters. The sit-in protests soon spread across various cities in the thirteen Southern states. What is interesting about this new social movement tactic is how the sit-in demonstrations shifted the focus of the civil rights agenda from voting rights, educational equality and work-place rights to a much more publicly visible struggle that was fought in

public, rather than in the Courts. These public struggles attracted wide public attention to the equal treatment in privately operated public accommodations (see Schmidt, 2015: 101-102). This form of non-violent mass participatory direct-action protest became the leading edge of the movement's demand for social and political change (Schmidt, 2015), but, arguably, also a model of dissent for democratic struggles that is today part of Western public memory. In their public communication, the indignados do not explicitly acknowledge the legacy of these democratic struggles. Yet, it could be argued that the occupied square of the indignados works well as a model of dissent to move global audiences and inspire occupations in other world sites because it can be situated in the stock of culturally shared knowledge about historically-situated non-violent occupations of urban space in the twentieth-century, one that is deeply embedded in western public memory, and, as such, constitutes a political resource for those who want to change social and political conditions through new forms of democratic struggle (see Adams, 1996: 420).

While one can easily accept that social media allowed new scales of connection beyond the city, one must ask how the occupied square becomes a global icon for the value of democracy in the twentieth-first century. How does it become a spatial model of protest that can be easily diffused and adopted across the world? To answer these questions, we cannot lose sight of how contemporary forms non-violent direct action and their public representation draw from the memory of earlier occupations of public space as a social movement tactic.

Notably, the generic image of the protestor (Ruiz, 2014: 151), which is well depicted in a photo-essay published in the online edition of Time magazine when the magazine nominated the protestor as person of the year of 2011, strongly resonates with the iconography of the protestor used in the gallery of portraits of Acampada Barcelona. In the Time's photo-essay, protestors who had been involved in a range of occupations, from Tahir square to the Occupy movement sit-ins in the United States, also use a white background as a semiotic resource,

which abstracts them from the lively environment of streets and squares. Importantly, as noted by Ruiz (2014), the representation of the protestor in the cover of Time magazine signals a shift in contemporary understandings of non-violent political protest: ‘the protestor’s masked face speaks for all those who perceive themselves to have been excluded from the process of democracy’ (Ruiz, 2013 cited in Ruiz, 2014: 151). The legitimization of the protestor as a beholder of the values of citizenship and democracy in a mainstream publication such as the Time magazine goes in tandem with the magazine’s attempt to connect the experiences of the new generation of protestors with experiences and democratic struggles associated to earlier occupations of public space. As Kurt Anderson (2011) puts in the cover story of the Time magazine issue dedicated to the figure of the protestor:

‘Once upon a time, when major news events were chronicled strictly by professionals and printed on paper or transmitted through the air by the few for the masses, protesters were prime makers of history. Back then, when citizen multitudes took to the streets without weapons to declare themselves opposed, it was the very definition of news — vivid, important, often consequential. In the 1960s in America they marched for civil rights and against the Vietnam War; in the '70s, (...) they spoke out against nuclear weapons in the U.S. and Europe, against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, against communist tyranny in Tiananmen Square and Eastern Europe. Protest was the natural continuation of politics by other means’.

In his discussion of the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989, Adams (1996: 425) argues that in the case of the 1989 occupation of Tiananmen Square the occupation by protesters was ‘a deliberate attempt to transcend the Square’, to use it to open the internal situation in China to the gaze of distant bystanders. In a similar vein, by gaining control over public space, the 2011 15M movement transformed city squares, from Plaza de Sol in Madrid to Rossio Square in Lisbon, into a stage for the performance of a political theatre targeting two kinds of audiences: other ordinary citizens who may want to join the movement locally or equally disaffected

citizens and protestors from around the world – those like ‘us’ – and the corrupt political and financial elites at both national and global levels. Against the grain of the so-called protest paradigm, there is evidence that mainstream media’s coverage of the indignados did not demonize and delegitimize the protestors by emphasizing their deviant behaviour (Veneti, Poulakidakos, and Theologou, 2012). The indignados’ occupations of public space received, in fact, considerably more coverage than traditional protests, and attracted more sympathy and public attention. For example, the website Sol.tv reported receiving almost 10 million of visits during the first week of the protests (Gerbaudo, 2012: 99). As pointed by Biekart and Fowler (2013: 531), ‘if we look at the rapid expansion of Occupy or the emergence and spread of the indignados originating in southern Europe, it is clear that political parties as well as the mainstream press have to engage with these campaigns and with a potent mix of campaigners, which gives activists increased credibility’ (*italics added for emphasis*). How can we understand this increased credibility and public visibility of the 15M movement, especially considering that the blogs of the encampments use a national language, which accords the protestors limited public visibility in a fragmented and discontinuous digital public sphere (Dayan, 2009)? The indignados used corporate media platforms – such as Twitter and Facebook – as much as they developed alternative media practices and platforms (e.g., blogs of the encampments) that attracted the attention of those dispersed sympathisers, supporters and activists that make up a putative global civil society, but not necessarily a global mass audience. This is apparent, for instance, in the limited number of views of the content of the archives of photos, manifestos, pamphlets, and videos displayed in the blogs of the encampments I analysed.

What made images of the occupied square a global icon that is recognized by global publics as a symbol of democracy from below, is the ability of the indignados to produce for global circulation a generalised image of the occupied square, one that becomes easily disembedded

from its original referent, and one that strongly resonates with the collective memory of earlier non-violent occupations of urban public space as being tied in to democratic struggles. The protestors not only defined themselves as global citizens in their public communication, but they also borrowed from a recognizable iconography of protest certain stylised and tactic actions (e.g., the sit-ins) and objects (e.g., the mask of V for Vendetta) (see Rovisco, 2016). Furthermore, they drew upon a shared visual language and established repertoires of peaceful protest in public space to produce a plethora of protest images which were quickly picked up and reproduced by the mainstream media around the globe. The efficacy of these symbolic performances in questioning, subverting and undermining official uses of urban spaces depends on the protestors' ability to move global audiences (see Hariman and Lucaites, 2007: 222) in a transnational public sphere. The fact that there is not a single iconic image of the occupied square adds to the understanding of the 15M movement as a global movement addressing shared global problems despite the local specificity of the protests and occupations. My conception of iconic image draws upon Hariman and Lucaites (2007: 5) definition of iconic photograph: iconic photographs need no caption because they 'provide an accessible and centrally positioned set of images for exploring how political action (and inaction) can be constituted and controlled through visual media. They are the images that you see again and again in the historical tableaux of the visual media'. The iconic image of the man standing in Tiananmen Square bears resemblance with the iconic image of the occupied square to the extent in which both images draw their social and moral significance from their relation to a particular kind of referent: a public square that is occupied for the staging democratic struggles. However, unlike the iconic image of the man standing before the tanks in Tiananmen square which, for Hariman and Lucaites (2007: 222-223), displaces other images of the occupation to become a symbol of the Chinese struggle for democracy, the indignados go on to produce a cosmopolitan and generic image of the occupied square that stands for the defence of

democracy and social justice as a universal values. These are values that they see threatened by the corrupt practices of the financial and political elites from national to global levels. The occupied square becomes a global icon not by concentrating the energies and experiences generated by a specific protest event into a concrete, specific image (as is the case with the image of the man standing in front of tanks in Tiananmen Square), but encourages a different kind of loss of information and alteration of political agency within public memory – it encourages a multiplicity of images that erase many of traces of the original context of reference (i.e., a particular city square). In this sense, the occupied square is not reduced to a single and situated iconic moment of dissent but becomes a universal model of citizen protest to be used elsewhere in the world in struggles for a better democratic politics. The multiplicity of images of the occupied square, made available in the websites of the encampments of Madrid, Barcelona or Lisbon, bears witness to the attempts of many ordinary citizens and first-time protestors to fight for new modes of political participation and a better democracy. Drawing upon Olesen (2015: 39), it can be argued that the image of the occupied square only acquires recognition as a global icon when the icon is appropriated and circulated by mainstream media and acquires meaning for audiences across multiple national contexts.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the indignados extended their political struggles beyond a locally-specific urban context through the production and circulation of the image of the occupied square as a global icon that resonates with global audiences. Through social semiotic analysis of a map of Acampada Sol and the gallery of portraits of Acampada Barcelona, I argued that the image of the occupied square is both a material and a symbolic resource that expresses the goals and identity of the movement, while also connecting the protestors to a range of audiences in a transnational communicative space. We have seen that, as a global icon, the image of the occupied square is produced for transnational circulation by the protestors in

a participatory media environment that bypasses the power of traditional gatekeepers (i.e., publishing and editorial personnel). The paper has also argued that the image of the occupied square resonates with global audiences because its meanings tap on a repertoire of culturally shared representations of non-violent occupations of urban space in the twentieth-century that is powerfully embedded in western public memory.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback. I also wish to thank, for their insightful comments and questions, the participants in a research seminar at the School of Media and Communications, University of Leeds, where I presented an earlier version of this paper.

References

- Adams, P. (1996) 'Protest and the scale politics of telecommunications' *Political Geography* 15(5): 419-441.
- Aiello (2006), 'Theoretical Advances in Critical Visual Analysis: Perception, Ideology, Mythologies, and Social Semiotics' *Journal of Visual Literacy* 26(2): 89-102.
- Aiello, G. (2011), 'The 'other' Europeans: the semiotic imperative of style in Euro Visions by Magnum Photos' *Visual Communication* 11(1): 49 –77.
- Alexander, J. (2011a) *Performative Revolution in Egypt – an Essay in Cultural Power*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Anderson, K. (2011), The Protestor, Time Magazine,
http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132,00.html,
accessed 30/06/2016.
- Arora, P. (2014) 'Usurping Public Leisure Space for Protest: Social Activism in the Digital and Material' Space and Culture DOI: 10.1177/1206331213517609.
- Baiocchi, G. and Ganuza, E. (2012) 'Politics without Banners. The Spanish Indignados' Experiment in Direct Democracy'. In E. Stetter, K. Duffek, and A. Skrzypek (eds.) Building New Communities - Notes from the Transatlantic Dialogue of Dialogues. Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, Renner Institute, pp. 110-117.
- Biekart, K. and Fowler, A. (2013) 'Transforming Activisms 2010+: Exploring Ways and Waves' Development and Change 44(3): 527–546.
- Black, J. (1997) Maps and Politics London: Reaktion Books.
- Boudana, S., Frosh, P., Cohen, A. (2017), 'Reviving Icons to Death: when Historic Photographs become Digital Memes', Media, Culture and Society DOI:
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0163443717690818>
- Clarke et al (2014) Disputing Citizenship. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Dayan, D. (2009) 'Sharing and Showing: Television as Monstration' Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 625: 19-31.
- Debord, G. (1984) Society of Spectacle. Black & Red, U.S.
- El País – Actualidad, 20 May 2011, Puerta del Sol: un espacio para la indignación,
http://elpais.com/elpais/2011/05/20/media/1305889033_720215.html
accessed 28 June 2016.

Esherick, J. and Wasserstrom, J. (1990) 'Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 49(4): 835-865.

Eyerman, R. (2005) 'How social movements move: emotions and social movements'. In H. Flam and D. King (eds.) *Emotions and Social Movements*. London: Routledge, pp. 41-56.

Feigenbaum, A, Frenzel F and McCurdy P (2013) *Protest Camps: The Political and Organisational Form of Protest Camps*. London, Zed Books.

Feixa, C. (2012) The #spanishrevolution and beyond, *Cultural Anthropology – Hot Spots*, 23 July 2012, <http://culanth.org/?q=node/629/>, accessed 05 March 2013.

First Manifesto of the Rossio Square, Acampada Lisboa, 22 May 2011, <https://acampadalisboa.wordpress.com/manifesto/>, accessed 28 June 2016.

Flesher Fominaya, C. (2014) *Social Movements and Globalization - How Protests, Occupations and Uprisings are Changing the World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

García-Jiménez, L., Zamora-Medina, R., and Martínez-Fernández, R. (2014) 'The Construction of Symbolic Power: Comparing Offline and Online Media Representations of Occupy the Street in Spain' *International Journal of Communication* 8(2014), 2540–2560.

'Geração À Rasca é referência para Espanha', *Jornal de Notícias*, 20 May 2011, <http://www.jn.pt/mundo/interior/geracao-a-rasca-e-referencia-para-espanha-1857358.html?id=1857358>, accessed 14 February 2017.

Glasius, M. and Pleyers, G. (2013) 'The Global Moment of 2011: Democracy, Social Justice and Dignity' *Development and Change* 44(3): 547–567.

Gerbaudo, P. (2012) *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Hamilton, P. and Hargreaves, R. (2001) *The Beautiful and the Damned : the Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography*, National Portrait Gallery.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2000) *Empire*. Harvard University Press.

Hariman, R. and Lucaites, J. L. (2007) *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hartley, J. (1992) *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media*. London & New York: Routledge.

Hersiikovitz, L. (1993) 'Tiananmen Square and the Politics of Place' *Political Geography* 12(5): 395-420.

Jenkins H (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jewitt, C., & Oyama, R. (2000) 'Visual meaning: a social semiotic approach'. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *Handbook of Visual Analysis* London: Sage, pp. 134-156.

Latour, B. and Hermant, E. (1998) *Paris: Ville Invisible*. La Découverte, Paris.

Lee, N. (2009) 'How is a political public space made? – The birth of Tiananmen Square and the May Fourth Movement' *Political Geography* 28 (2009) 32–43.

Madden, D. (2010) 'Revisiting the End of Public Space: Assembling the Public in an Urban Park' *City & Community* 9 (2): 187-207.

Manifiesto Acampada Barcelona, AcampadaBCN,

<https://acampadabcn.wordpress.com/documents/declaracion-de-principios/>, accessed 28 June 2016.

- Merelman, R. (1969) 'The Dramaturgy of Politics' *The Sociological Quarterly* 10(2): 216-241.
- Milner, R. (2013) 'Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement' *International Journal of Communication* 7: 2357-2390.
- Olesen, T. (2013) 'Dramatic Diffusion and Meaning Adaptation: The Case of Neda', in (eds.) Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni, *Spreading Protest: Social Movements in Times of Crisis*. Colchester: ECPR Press: 71-90.
- Olesen, T. (2015) 'Global Political Iconography : The Making of Nelson Mandela American' *Journal of Cultural Sociology* 3(1): 34-64.
- Parkinson, R. (2012) *Democracy and Public Space – The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parr, A. (2014) 'Urban Debt, Neoliberalism and the Politics of the Commons', *Theory, Culture & Society* DOI: 10.1177/0263276414536234.
- Postill, J. (2014) 'Democracy in an age of viral reality: A media epidemiography of Spain's indignados movement' *Ethnography* 15(1) 51–69.
- Perugorría, I. and Tejerina, B. (2013), 'Politics of the encounter: Cognition, emotions, and networks in the Spanish 15M', *Current Sociology* 61(4): 424–442.
- Roos, J. (2012) 15M: a year on, the struggle of the indignados continues. ROARMAG.org – Reflections on a Revolution, 25 May 2012, <http://roarmag.org/2012/05/15-m-indignados-crisis-bankia-bailout-euro/>, accessed 22 February 2013.
- Rose, G. (2014), 'Visual Culture, Photography and the Urban: An Interpretive Framework' *Space and Culture* 2(3): 4-13.

- Rovisco, M. (2016) 'A new 'Europe from below'? Cosmopolitan citizenship, digital media and the indignados social movement' *Comparative European Politics* 14(4): 435-457.
- Rovisco, M. and Ong, J. C. (2016) *Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupations of Public Space* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International).
- Ruiz, P. (2014) *Articulating Dissent – Protest and the Public Sphere*. London: Pluto.
- Sbicca, J. and Perdue, R. (2014) 'Protest through Presence: Spatial Citizenship and Identity Formation in Contestations of Neoliberal Crises' *Social Movement Studies*. 13(3): 309-327.
- Schmidt, C. (2015), 'Divided by Law: The Sit-ins and the Role of the Courts in the Civil Rights Movement', *Law and History Review* 33(1): 93-149.
- Sennett, R. (1977) *The Fall of the Public Man*. New York: Knopf.
- Short, J. R. (2003), *The World Through Maps: A History of Cartography*. Toronto: Firefly Books.
- Stevenson, N. (2006) 'European cosmopolitan solidarity: questions of citizenship, difference and post-materialism' *European Journal of Social Theory*. 9(4), 485-500.
- Ratto, M. and Boler, M. (2014) *DIY Citizenship – Critical Making and Social Media*. Cambridge: MA and London: MIT Press.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993), 'Principles of Discourse Analysis', *Discourse & Society* 4(2): 249-283.
- Veneti, A., Poulakidakos, S., Theologou, K. (2012) 'The Greek Indignados through the domestic TV news bulletins', *Revista Estudos em Comunicação*, 12: 107-134.

¹ The blogs of the encampments I analysed are the following: <https://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/>, <https://acampadalisboa.wordpress.com/> and <https://acampadabcn.wordpress.com/>.

² The photos were compiled and archived under three categories: multitude, maps and portraits.

³ Translation from Spanish to English is the work of the author.

⁴ All quotes from banners were translated from Catalan to English by the author.