# The Indignados of New York

## How Ideas from Spain Diffused to Wall Street

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#### Introduction

The Indignados movement of Spain, also known as either: 15-M due to its occurrence on May 15th, or the anti-austerity movement of Spain, was large, complex and innovative. It was, at the time, one of the greatest internet-sprung movements to occur. Because of its size, novelty, and newness, scholars have extensively studied various aspects of the movement. Academically, this movement is known not only for its effects on Spain as a country but also the United States, China, and the rest of Europe. One movement in particular has a notably close relationship with 15-M; this relationship is complex and unique to other movements. Because of this complexity, it is interpreted in many different ways. That movement is Occupy Wall Street. This paper - building on McAdam and Rucht's theoretical framework introduced in "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas" - will disrupt any dichotomy possibly derived from their work. That is, although McAdam and Rucht (1993) describe two distinct ways in which movements spread ideas, this paper will suggest that between these methods - direct and indirect or dialogic and transnational there is another: rhetorical framing. I will use the case of 15-M and how their ideas spread to Occupy as an example of this. Where ideas can be spread via the rhetorical framing of different actors and phenomena within the movement. Thus, both directly and indirectly; intentionally and unintentionally, communicating movement ideas cross-nationally. First will be a brief historical review of the movement, followed by a literature review. Then I will cover the relationship between Occupy and 15-M, the public sphere, and argue for rhetorical framing as it exists as a diffuser between these two movements.

### History of the 15-M Movement in Spain

The 2000s in Spain was a decade of increasing inequalities between the increasing elitist state and the citizens. Austerity from federal and local authorities was ever growing, and along side saw an

increasing reaction of anger from the citizens. The anger of the Spanish people was encouraged by an organization known as Real Democracy Now, who successfully organized a massive social movement and subsequently large encampments throughout Spain's major cities. The movement's fruition were mass protests and public square encampments that officially began on May 15th, 2011. What was evident in this movement was its response to something ongoing. That is to say, this movement was not so much an act of pushing new boundaries for citizen rights, but in fact regaining old ones that had been lost over time. The 15-M movement, popularly known as the Indignados movements (meaning angry people in Spanish), was a push back against the infringing power of the state. This brief historical review of Spain and the Indignados movement will first examine the details of the movement, then draw on the experiences of the state and citizens leading up to the movement.

#### **Details**

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011, over 20,000 protestors gathered in *Peurto De Sol* square in Madrid and 15,000 protestors in Plaza Catalunya, Barcelona, seeking reformations to counteract inequalities, and protesting anti-social reforms. These gatherings famously came to fruition with the use of the internet. Using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and SMS messaging, Real Democracy Now and other activist groups at their assistance mobilized over 50,000 Spanish folks in over 50 cities<sup>1</sup>.

Madrid and Barcelona are particularly interesting, and both cities have formidable stories that followed their protests:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://elpais.com/elpais/2011/05/15/actualidad/1305447428 850215.html

#### Madrid

Following the protests of 20,000 people, over 2,000 stayed and camped in the square for three weeks<sup>2</sup>. This encampment was a collective responsive backlash to the police brutality and violence used during the initial protest. The cause of the encampment reflected the adaptability of the movement as it reacted to counteracting phenomena. This is important because adaptability is what allowed 15-M to grow so large. Furthermore, this Madrid encampment demonstrated formidable organizational and assembly skills. The encampment was set up as a village with diverse and complex system of living, security, and communication. There were public meetings, communal decisions, plans, and events to mobilize action. The encampment was a living organism and a dynamic space.

#### Barcelona

Much like in Madrid, Barcelona's Plaza Catalunya hosted thousands of campers that would actively participate in complex networks of planning and communication<sup>3</sup>. Unique to Barcelona's protest was the formidable design of space that allowed for swift inner-encampment communication. It was so robust people would come just to network for employment.

#### **Indignados**

The pre-condition for protesting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, or identifying with this movement, was that you were angry, or fed-up with government and/or Spanish life. This universalistic condition, what led to the grand size of the movement, is that: there was no central issue – everyone was welcome. This movement was not for activists, not for tree-huggers, not for women, not for men, not for the

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  https://www.france24.com/en/20110612-protestors-leave-madrid-square-encampment-indignados-puerta-sol-spain-protest

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283754949\_Open-ended\_urbanisms\_Space-making\_processes\_in\_the\_protest\_encampment\_of\_the\_Indignados\_movement\_in\_Barcelona

poor, the rich, or minorities or any particular group. This movement was for anyone that felt angry, fed-up, bored, restless. This movement was for anyone while being a demonstration of people coming together to simply be together. Organizers strategically rooted the movement in openness. In his work *Debunking Spontaneity*, C.F. Fominaya points out the novelty of this movement. That is, the organizers avoided any affiliation. This was fundamental in keeping the movement universal and thus so large. Those identified with the movement, protestors, and supporters, felt it was inevitable to mobilize as the movement was needed to demonstrate the resilience and intolerance of the Spanish people. Thus, it wasn't simply about the struggle then, but also the struggle later.

#### Unforeseen

Leading up to the beginning of the Indignados movement the state was losing the trust of the people. It was a movement that, although understood by scholars to be inevitable, still managed to blindside the state. This was due to the increasing power of the state and the lack of visible opposition<sup>4</sup>. The austerity of the government was resulting in figures of Spanish unemployment to be over 20%. Older history of the Spanish government is argued to be fundamental in the recipe of the 15-M movement, including the *Post-Franco Transition* in 1977. This transition was one that responded to the government's need to mitigate social backlash and promote political consensus. In his study of the Indignados Rebellion, Josep Antentas believes this transition gave too much power to the governing political blocs and lead to the ample mistrust in 2011. During the protests, the fear of the state rose due to the success of the similarly motivated Arab Spring. This likely motivated the authorities to resort to police brutality.

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<sup>4</sup> https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18070246

#### Literature Review

The Indignados movement's connection to Occupy Wall Street is currently best understood by discerning the pre and post phenomena including collective shifts of identity, and movement continuity. Alternatively, 15-M has been argued by scholars to have a more direct communicative connection to Occupy. The literature on 15-M and its connection to Occupy is best divided into two categories: *global continuity theories* and *dialogical connection*. With both sides of the narrative we can accumulate a holistic array of research and understanding; uncovering the pre-history, conditions, feelings, processes, and effects of the Indignados movement which impacted Occupy.

#### Language

On language, what is common in the following works is that either: the work was researched in both English and Spanish and written in both English and Spanish, researched in Spanish and written in English, or are primary materials written in both English and Spanish.

Because of this, there may be missing pieces of the detail puzzle... but as one comes closer to understanding the movement, they will find details matter less – which is due to the lack of direct change that occurred from 15-M within Spain. The movements main consequences were, as argued by both mobilizers in Spain and the scholars below, a change in collective identity and a domino like effect in a global movement against austerity. Language and translation of small details matter less in this type of discussion.

#### **Global Continuity Theories**

With 15-M occurring in 2011, scholars, particularly sociologists, began working to understand what exactly this movement implied. The approach of understanding the global dynamics of anti-austerity became popular. Cristina Fominaya started an important discussion in

2014 on the continuity of 15-M as it relates to Verta Taylor's work on continuity in the women's movement (1989). Importantly, she makes the distinction between *unexpected* and *spontaneous*. That is, to be *spontaneous* is to say the movement's origins were unpredictable - to be *unexpected* is to not expect the magnitude of the fruition of the movement. 15-M was unexpected, but not spontaneous. This article was published 3 years following the movement, which gave Fominaya time to properly analyze the movement. She was the first to discuss the movement continuity of 15-M and connect that importance to the anti-austerity in European political culture and more particularly Spain post 1980. Fominaya uses studies of movement continuity, famous social movement works (ie. Melucci's "A strange kind of newness"), news from Madrid, blogs, and analyses of similar movements (ie. Goodwin on Arab Spring) to make her case. She has been inspired by anti-austerity movements across Europe. Fominaya's argument is a conduit into a trope of continuity ideas. That, movements proven to be continuations as in the framework of Verta Taylor, are no exception to being continued. Without the fundamental work on 15-M as a continuous movement, the premise that Occupy even connected to it would be much more challenging.

Her work was built upon but with another intention by Garcia Ruben in "The "Indignados" in Space and Time: Transnational Networks and Historical Roots". Instead of focussing on the *origin* he instead focuses on the implications of what comes after. That is to say, Garcia believes this movement is a lesson in understanding two key issues that mobilizers should pay attention to when trying to make a difference wherever they may be. Those issues are: drawing on the lack of public belief in oligarchic leadership and highlighting the issues of over-functionality in the state. He makes this argument by building on the work of Fominaya and connecting it to

local perspectives during the protest. Together Fominaya and Garcia relay a central discussion on the movement continuity of 15-M. Then Garcia provides a conduit into transnationalism.

This conversation is continued by Maria Rovisco who argues that 15-M was a catalyst of cosmopolitan identity and left a network in which people may communicate with each other in an attitude that encourages such identity. 15-M did this in a similar fashion to many other European social movements, that Maria argues, were fundamental in creating a transnational public sphere across the continent. Maria argues this by studying the rhetoric of the movement's organizers. That is, the organizer's "Real Democracy Now" emphasized their interest in being part of a global movement – they were fighting for and against something that was bigger than Spain. By analyzing rhetoric, she was able to discern the appropriate attitudes within the movement that supported her argument. Rovisco merely limits her scope to Europe albeit her work on the public sphere will prove useful in my conversation on Occupy. The public sphere, and Maria's interpretation of public sphere perception ('s of the individual) diffusion, is crucial. Later in this paper will be a more extrapolated discussion on public sphere perception diffusion between 15-M and Occupy.

Her argument reads similar to that of Josep Antentas, in his article "Spain: the indignados rebellion of 2011 in perspective", where he delves deep into the international cycle of anti-austerity and how 15-M fits into that global context. This argument is different from Maria's in that, he is focusing on the movement as opposed to the individual. He also argues that the Indignados movement held centrally the idea of reclaiming the public square's purpose. That is, a place of democracy and participation – as opposed to a beautified cityscape commodity. He does this by reviewing literature from the actual event itself and reflecting on it theoretically. Published in 2015, this work fits well into the understanding of 15-M as something grander than Spain. What is

missing from his work is something that links his ideas to substance. In later discussion, I will build upon his ideas as they relate to Occupy - which will be the substance needed here.

#### A Dialogical Platform

The next category is *dialogical connection*, in which two ideas – although relatively small in scope when compared to the aforementioned ideas – seem to contribute well to the academic scope of this paper. That isn't to say their ideas are lacking – if anything, the empirical work that follows is formidably useful in understanding alternative possibilities of diffusion between 15-M and Occupy, and perhaps a more tangible framework than continuity. This framework suggests that movements themselves contain and also are themselves, the transmitters, receivers; leaders and followers of movement ideas (p 5, Chabot, 2012). The communication is thus horizontal instead of the vertical diffusion in the continuity/transnational literature. That is to say, there is no cloud in the sky that maintains the conversation. Instead, it is direct.

Eduardo Romanos in his work "Immigrants as brokers" (2015) builds on dialogical models theorized by Chabot to argue that 15-M and Occupy are connected by brokerage. That is to say, Romanos believes there was a high degree of influence from Spanish immigrants who acted as brokers of ideas that informed the Wall street encampment. He is responding to the transnational literature on 15-M, who he believes are infatuated with theories that are grand but not necessarily accurate. 15-M, he further argues, diffused directly into Occupy.

A dialogical platform was also assumed in the analytical work of Ernesto Castaneda who observed and depicted the similarities between the two movements in his work "The Indignados of Spain: A Precedent to Occupy Wall Street" (2012). Castaneda accepted that immigrants are conduits of ideas between movements, saying that actors in anti-corruption movements of South America brought ideas to 15-M (p 316). He goes on to say that the way in which Occupy is

connected to 15-M is not necessarily in their connection to a network of anti-austerity continuity movements. His connection is much more direct – that occupy learned the importance of the public square solely from the use of space in Spain. That, it was through agents of media and social media where ideas were shared.

Again, on this dialogical platform of diffusion is the work done by Y. Theocharis et al on the use of Twitter in communicating movements transnationally. In their article "Using Twitter to mobilize protest action", they discuss how twitter and social media as a basis of inner-movement communication – with Indignados and Occupy as case studies – is the fruition of a movement that is prepared for their ideas to spring into other movements (p 204). The premise of their argument is that the movement itself is using social media to not only connect to their audience but also make the entire world an audience.

The academic literature on this subject as discussed here is trying to connect 15-M to Occupy, with works on the global anti-austerity movement, and direct communication by the movements themselves. Both are important in order to understand the more tangible operational aspects of diffusion. The lack of congruence is important however; that there are contradictions between the two frameworks. Importantly, my argument throughout this paper is seemingly situated between the two extremes presented in this literature review. Where on one hand, there is the idea that 15-M and Occupy are connected through a mass network of anti-austerity ideas and waves (Díez García 2017, Fominaya 2014, Rovisco 2016). On the other hand, scholars argue on a dialogical framework that there is direct communication occurring through actors within immigration and the internet (Theocharis, et al. 2014, Castañeda 2012, Romanos 2016).

#### **Analysis**

It would be restricting to put this movement, or any movement for that matter, into a box in which only one way of spreading ideas was actual. That is to say, the Indignados movement from an academic standpoint deserves a more holistic understanding than just direct or indirect. In fact, the way in which the Indignados were spreading ideas globally and consequently to Occupy was so uniquely robust that even after the introduction of a new category, which this paper will suggest is *rhetorical framing*, there is still likely more work to be done on categorization. Before describing the diffusion of rhetorical framing, it is important to first understand the relationship between 15-M and Occupy. The public sphere is the setting in which rhetorical framing actualized in Spain, thus will be discussed as a premise to the central argument that follows. Then I will delve into rhetorical framing using 15-M as a case study.

#### Relationship Between 15-M and Occupy

Both 2011 anti-austerity movements 15-M and Occupy Wall Street are not only similar but also meaningfully connected. Across the Atlantic, the relationship between these two movements is strengthened directly and indirectly. Occupy Wall Street was called-for by Vancouver-based art activist group *Adbusters* in July 2011, just two months after 15-M began. This timing was no coincidence. Both movements were responding to the same thing, in the same era, by the same types of groups. The movements carried the same message – to restore real democracy, end inequalities, and the less obvious, tacit message of these movements was to reclaim the public square. In my research on these movements I found remarkable similarities and contextually understandable differences. This is the starting point for deciding on a framework of understanding the connection between these two movements. To many scholars, the resemblances almost scream "One movement! This is one movement!", who go on to research the movement as

something transnational. To be critical of something that seems so obvious perhaps requires a more analytical tendency in academic work. Therefore, to be critical of the 'one movement' theory is to say Occupy was a distinct movement that substantially learned from 15-M. Again, this comes from the starting point of understanding the vast similarities and subtle contextual differences. Thus, to see a possible third category of communication and connection between movements we need to step back to the starting point. Yes, there are incredible similarities. Of those similarities are time, people, ideology, tactics, and purpose which have been looked at extensively (Hopke 2016, Fernández-Savater, et al. 2017, Ancelovici, et al. 2016). The current way of looking at the diffusion is thus, picking out the nuances that are too similar to be a coincidence and understanding how they were communicated. Instead, however, in the coming paragraphs I will point out that some ideas are not communicated, but already exist in the minds of whoever. That, although 15-M was deliberately providing important encampment information, tutorials and guides in English to Occupy organizers (Hopke 2016, 602-603), they were simultaneously promulgating an innate desire for restoring the rights of humanity. They did this by rhetorically framing public space and the state in a strategic manner.

#### The Public Sphere

In his encyclopedic entry *The Public Sphere* (1964), Jürgen Habermas discusses the philosophy, setting, history, and function of the public sphere; which is in-short, an openly-framed freedom space for thought and discourse. Habermas claims the public sphere can actualize in many hosts that belong to parent categories; media and space are of the largest, but not the limit. Within the media: avenues such as radios, newspapers, and magazines can uphold the public sphere. Then spatially: public spaces, laissez-faire semi-private spaces, and homes. The public sphere - Habermas implies throughout his work - is not something of ordinary shape. That, in any

fruition, the public sphere of scope is better understood by its meaning and purpose as opposed to its physicalness. Thus, despite the former tidbit on different physical *hosts* of the public sphere (which are useful when relating the subject to examples – hence the early discussion), it is best going forward to allow the ambiguity of the sphere help explain its complexity.

For Habermas - who is the pioneer of this term - there are core tendencies of which are used to discern whether or not phenomena - be it discussion, communication, movement, or relay - is or has features occurring within the public sphere. Of these core tendencies is the use of the public sphere in communicating alternative ideas to the state. These are ideas that directly respond to policies, status, or activities that are unruly to public opinion. (*On public opinion*, Habermas marks it as the fruit of the public sphere. It is the collective disagreement of the public; the life, substance, and power of the ongoing public sphere phenomena. That isn't to say where lies a public sphere lies public opinion - as the public sphere can occur and be used with no tangible end. Public opinion can still, however, be the visible goal of the public sphere despite it being unreachable.) Another core tendency that - although mentioned second may be just as important - is that the public sphere in any shape, will have no literary or direct participation by the state.

Who, Habermas mentions, will respond to the public opinion thus try to influence it in this way - vet will have no direct participatory role.

#### **Rhetorical Framing**

The following discussions are dealing with a tactic of movement organizers – strategic rhetoric and framing – that has been analyzed extensively as a tool for attracting large followings and number of participants (Rovisco 2016, Zald 1996), but instead will argue this tool also works in parallel to empower other movements. Within Habermas' definition of the public sphere are two actors: the public square and the publicly opinionative. Those who collectively form an opinion that tries to

escape the patterns of the state are included in this sphere. In terms of 15-M, the public sphere is a vitally important concept to apply in this regard.

#### Space and State

The reclamation of the public square is a fundamental feature of 15-M that created the tensions necessary for traction (Hopke 2016, 601). The encampments of Madrid and Barcelona reinforced this idea substantially and also built a memorable identity for the movement. The essence of these encampments was a relentless commitment to openness. That, through openness, all Madridians and Catalonians were more than welcome to participate in the occupation of the public squares. It formulated a public opinion of restoration (Olga Abasolo 2014, 5). The rhetoric is crucial here. This was not framed as Spain vs Spanish Government – it was framed as people vs the state. We have to pay close attention to the literature of the movement organizers themselves – as well as participants who were taking to social media to declare their positions.

"We are not against the system, the system is against us" - Occupiers in Madrid, 2011

"Puerta del sol is on the Cañada Real grazing paths; we have the right to sleep there"

- Campers in Madrid on Twitter, 2011"

Work has been done to meticulously analyze the slogans used by the movers – what was found was that slogans were engineered to be polysemous (Montessor and López 2015). The language and messages were agents of openness. Meanwhile, however, this openness was also channelling outwards. This type of diffusion is neither direct or indirect – as the intention was clearly to make this larger then Spain exemplified by the subsequent translations of encampment tutorials to over 7 different languages (Hopke 2016). It is important to note I am not using the translation of literature as an example of a rhetorical device – it is solely meant to demonstrate the underlying intention.

Thus, while we know the intention is one that is universal, we can then see the rhetoric to be somewhere in between direct and indirect diffusion. That is, they are not directly communicating to one movement in particular through rhetoric, nor are they indirectly communicating their ideas to a transnational network of anti-austerity. Instead, they are strategically stating: *the public square is for the people*. The message is relayed in Occupy – who wake up to this idea as diffused through intentional rhetoric. The essence of 15-M is then mirrored in Occupy, who reclaim the public square (Hopke 2016). Then, simultaneously, the indirect and direct forces of diffusion continue onwards from Spain to reinforce Occupy Wall Street. This process occurred in both the view of the state and the view of public square. Rhetorical framing occurring within the public sphere is substantially more impactful than when not occurring within the realm of the public sphere. That is because, according to Habermas, the public sphere is the place in which alternative views to the state are developed and portrayed.

#### Conclusion

Framing, within the nucleus of public contention: *the public sphere*, against state is known to be effective in communicating within a movement – yet this paper is suggesting it can also be effective in outwardly diffusing to other movements. That, if organizers can frame things to be bigger than their own movement – it may spark something larger than themselves. This paper ties together the current academic understanding of 15-M diffusion to Wall Street, breaks down the categories and introduces *rhetorical framing* as a third category. The reason a third category is necessary is to capture the robust strategy of social movement organizers. That, with just two forms of communication, the holistic picture is missing a route of discerning reality. This method of diffusion transcends the relationship between Madrid/Barcelona and Occupy. It is something much more universal and that is the essence. This can provide a future category for other social

movements in study, as well as provide a tool for movement organizers wishing to see their movements grow larger than themselves. This work would not be possible without the formidable folks in Spain during 2011 who's impact is still being reaped internationally.

#### **End Notes**

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Montessor and López 2015, Multimodal Narrative as an Instrument for Social Change: 212

<sup>\*</sup> https://www.thenation.com/article/spains-indignados-take-square/

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