The Indignados and Occupy Wall Street Social Movements: Global Opposition to the Neoliberalization of Society as Enabled by Digital Technology

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Abstract

The paper explores two recent social movements that show signs of global resistance to the ideology of neoliberal polices and values; the Indignados uprisings that took place in Spain, Greece and Mexico, and the Occupy Wall Street protests that broke out across many parts of the United States. It argues that to understand contemporary social movement activity and protest politics, it is crucial to update social movment theories to include analyses of how the digital revolution has categorically changed the way that activists express grievances and share information, strategize and for on-the-street forms of contentious politics, and challenge the narratives put forth by authorities and the mainstream media when there are confrontations between peaceful protesters and the police force.

Introduction

Over the past several years there has been an explosion of protest activity among young people around the globe demanding radical changes in the existing economic and political systems as they embrace a new vision of the future. They are in many ways embodying what Pilger (2011) refers to as the "theater of the impossible," i.e. challenging the neoliberal policies that have created the most recent global economic crisis and are jeopardizing their livelihoods. This paper examines two episodes of such social movement activity in response to the neoliberal project -- the Indignados movement throughout parts of Europe and Mexico, and Occupy Wall Street (OWS) which erupted in the United States. These case studies provide instructive examples of how activists are making strategic decisions and carrying out acts of political dissent that rely heavily on new forms of digital technology (the Internet, the World Wide Web, and social networking sites and other media platforms).

Both cases also make a contribution to the literature on social movement theory. They do so by illustrating that, with the digital revolution, the parameters within which groups and individuals can voice concerns, share information, and organize protest activities have expanded dramatically. They also suggest that because the resources, organizational

processes and structure, and sources of connectivity and communication that activists rely on are different than in previous eras, we must theorize and conceptualize collective behavior in new ways. In sum, these analyses refine our understanding of how the new media landscape can accelerate social movement activity, play a role in decentralizing mobilizations, facilitate recruitment efforts through virtual forms of collective identity, assist in the sharing of grievances that leads to contentious politics on the streets, and can be used to hold authorities accountable for their responses to protest activity and acts of civil disobedience.

I situate the mobilizations within a theoretical framework that encompasses an interdisciplinary approach. This includes aspects of political science (political process and political mediation theories), sociology (resource mobilization theory, culturally oriented theories that emphasis processes of framing and collective identity, and "new" social movements), and media studies (theories of the Internet and social media). I contend that by applying the theoretical paradigms in a complimentary fashion we can best understand contemporary outbreaks of contentious politics and address the complex ways in which structural- and micro-level mobilization efforts are interconnected as afforded by new media.

The New Neoliberal Political and Economic Climate and Its Impact on Citizens' Lives

In order to make sense of the emergence of the Indignados and OWS social movements we must contextualize them within the framework of the drive toward neoliberalism that began in the 1970s. This is an economic and political model that advocates privatization, commercial values, deregulation of markets and trade, and an increasingly important role of financial institutions in society accompanied by a smaller role of the government's ability to steer economic operations; i.e. market fundamentalism (Duggan 2003; Chomsky 1999). In synch with an emphasis on privatization is a push to disinvest in social programs through the promotion of austerity measures. These, in turn, deprive governments of revenue for social programs such as access to adequate healthcare and housing, employment opportunities, education, and other public goods. These once guaranteed provisions that were established during the 1950s and 1960s were, for decades, considered public responsibilities and part of the social contract (Giroux 2012). Many of these critical provisions, however, have been privatized over the past few decades and at an accelerated rate over the last several years. One of the results of prioritizing the private over the public sector is that it allows private interest to control much of social life in the pursuit of personal profit and destabilizes the safety net, making citizens increasingly vulnerable to economic hardship (Chomsky 1999). As summarized by Bourdieu (1998), "Neoliberalism…reifies and glorifies the reign of what are called the financial markets. In other words the return to a kind of radical capitalism, with no other law than that of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism without any disguise, but rationalized, pushed to the limit of its economic efficacy by the introduction of modern forms of domination"…. (35).

Youth is particularly hard hit by the dismantling of the welfare state because in the new economic landscape they face a staggering level of uncertainty (a sharp decline in job opportunities) and vulnerability (student loan payments), and at the civic level are subject to unprecedented forms of social control (violent actions by authorities when they participate in protest activities and exercise their right to freedom of speech and assembly). Giroux (2012) elaborates on this condition, stating: "Neoliberalism thrives on a culture of cynicism, boredom and despair. Americans are now convinced that they have little to hope for - and gain from - the Government, non-profit public spheres, democratic associations, public and higher education, or other non-governmental social forces…The consequences include not only a weakened state, but also a growing sense of insecurity, cynicism, and political retreat on the part of the general public. The incessant calls for self-reliance that now dominate public discourse betray a weakened state that neither provides adequate economic and social safety nets for its populace, especially those who are young, poor, or marginalized, nor gives any indication that it either needs or is willing to care for its citizens…The liberal democratic vocabulary of rights, entitlements, social provisions, community, social responsibility, living wage, job security, equality and justice seem oddly out of place….(pg. 15).

Despite this grim scenario citizens are indeed finding ways to collectively reject cynicism and despair and are striving to regain their public voice. Before engaging in an analysis of how they are resisting the neoliberal paradigm the next section first provides a brief overview of social movement theory within which we can contextualize the analyses. It also includes theories of the Internet and new media which compliment traditional social movement theories and calls for an update of certain aspects of the various social movement theoretical frameworks.

Social Movement Theory

Theories that attempt to explain the *why* of social movements include political process, political mediation, and resource mobilization theories and are oriented toward macro-level dynamics at the societal and/or state level. Political process theory contends that agents evaluate the political environment and make calculations about the likely impact of

collective action prior to their engagement in the struggle. It is also the political context which influences the claims they will pursue and the strategies and tactics they choose (Amenta and Caren 2004). Additionally, it argues that political opportunities, which refer to the receptivity or vulnerability of the existing political system to challenge, must be relatively open (Tarrow and Tilly 2006). This paradigm, however, disregards activists' *perception* of available opportunities and the lenses through which they view potential opportunities for participation in contentious politics, i.e. their subjective perceptions of reality and interpretive frameworks. The political mediation model expands on political process theory by recognizing that opportunities are situational, fluid, and volatile because they depend on the way actors *perceive* and *define* the situation before deciding what action, if any, should be taken (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Another mediating signal that this model takes into consideration is public opinion and the ability of social movement actors to influence it in a way favorable to their cause (Soule and King 2006).

Resource mobilization theory has also traditionally argued that social movements are formed by rational social actors who engage in strategic political action and rely on well-established social movement organizations (SMOs) to further their agenda (McAdam 1982; Tilly 2004). In addition to SMOs, other resources include knowledge, expertise, money, media attention, time, allies, and support from political elites. This framework suggests that individuals often share grievances but they cannot act collectively due to a lack of these types of resources.

More culturally centered theories, on the other hand, focus on the *how* of mobilization efforts, or the dynamics of social movement activity by paying attention to processes of collective identity and framing at the micro-level of analysis. These suggest that actors are not merely utility-maximizers but are often immersed in commitments to others, and it is broader ethical or moral sentiments, typically rooted in a strong sense of collective identity, that lead to participation in contentious politics. Cultural explanations of social movement activity also highlight the importance of framing and assert that key to forging collective identity and articulating shared meanings is the way organizers "frame" their issues to resonate with potential recruits and linking activists' grievances to mainstream beliefs and values (Snow et al. 1986). Frames are commonly referred to as "injustice frames" that contain implicit or explicit appeals to moral principles (Ryan and Gamson 2006).

Theories of "new social movements" vary, but for the purposes of this analysis a few are worth noting. Tomlinson (1999), for example, describes new social movements as those based on "distantiated identity" whereby individuals embrace a sense of what unites us as human beings, of common risks and possibilities, and of mutual responsibility and shared morality. In other words, new social movements are indicative of an increased consciousness that embraces a global, compassionate perspective and involves grassroots activities across disperse geographical locations. For others, new social movements are viewed as a convergence of multi-class and multi-identity struggles in reaction to the colonizing intrusions of states and markets (Johnston et al. 1994). In terms of tactics, new social movement theorists emphasize the decentralized nature of power and resistance. Melucci (1996) observes that the organizational features of many contemporary forms of collective behavior are constituted by loosely articulated, decentralized, egalitarian and pluralistic networks, and there is little if any distinction between leaders and rank-and-file members, which in turn, magnifies the horizontal nature of social movement activity. Finally, Mann (2000) describes these networks as "interstitial locations that consist of the nooks and crannies in and around the dominant institutions" (57). He argues that groups that are marginal and blocked by the prevailing institutions can link together and cooperate in ways that transcend these institutions.

Theorizing Social Movements in the Digital Age

The introduction of digital technology has led to new forms of activism that challenge some aspects of the theoretical paradigms outlined above. All social movements are shaped by the technology available at the time and influences the tactics that social movement actors pursue, how they share and distribute information, and the terms under which they mobilize support. New media platforms are providing an innovative communication field that gives activists additional resources in their repertoire of contention and helps them to create and sustain different types of connective capabilities.

For example, theorists have long noted that social networks, relational ties, and friendships are an invaluable resource by serving as a conduit of information and as a channel through which to recruit people to a cause, and especially for high-risk protest movement actions (Diani 1995; Verba and Brady 1995). Other research has found that an invitation through a personal (preexisting) tie is one of the strongest predictors of individuals' engagement in activism (Gould 1991), which in turn fosters collective identity. New information communication technologies (ICTs) expand the potential of these

networks to develop and mutate exponentially, and especially through weak ties across diffuse networks and among individuals who might not receive this information through any other communicative format (Giungi 1998).

Contrary to what some theorists feared, that the advent of digital information communication technologies would replace collective identity and weaken the capacity for collective behavior in real communities (for example see Hindman 2007; Jordan 2001; Habermas 1993), mediated forms of communication often complement those based on face-to-face interaction and have a positive effect on political participation (Boulainne 2009; Jenkins 2006). The instantaneous peer-to-peer sharing also allows technologically-enabled networks to serve as hybrids in that they do not result in mere "clicktivism" but rather encourage viewers of information to engage in contentious politics. New media technologies also substantially shift the way that activists can create, distribute, and consume information. This broadens the public sphere of communication because they allow organizers to quickly and cheaply reach a critical mass, in contrast to the one-to-many flow of information through mainstream media (Kahn and Kellner 2003).

New ICTs also facilitate the development of community in spite of physical distance, creating virtual public spheres and encourage new organizational structures of social movements. Tufekci (2012) contends that this new media ecology, and its virtual infrastructure, helps to build networks of coordinated action that are loosely articulated, decentralized, egalitarian and pluralistic. Social movement actors, therefore, are no longer reliant on well-established SMOs, access to mainstream media or professional leadership, but instead, are supported by informal and grassroots networks (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

The Indignados Mobilization

One of the precursors to OWS was the Indignados uprising. This is a social movement that coalesced in response to the global economic crisis that began in Europe and the austerity measures that were imposed by governments to address the financial fallout. Displays of collective behavior against the austerity program originated in Spain with the M15 (May 15th) movement, and eventually became part of a broader, global movement. The organization began two weeks before the national elections in Spain in resistance to both of the two final candidates who Spanish citizens feared would further the neoliberal agenda (Goodman 2012). More specific concerns were lack of political accountability among elected officials and representation of citizen concerns, high levels of unemployment, cuts to public services, bank bailouts, and home foreclosures.

Some of the original organizers of the Indignados movement, under the name Ya Democracia Real, called for an uprising via the #spanishrevolution hashtag on Twitter after a few friends met in a local bar and shared their opinions about the dysfunctional political and economic systems in Spain (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012). Truly grassroots in nature, and representative of a new social movement in terms of organizational structure and what Wollenberger (2006) refers to as "social movement communities," the participants were not affiliated with or supported by any political party or civic organization. As summed up by one of the protesters in explaining the Indignados mobilization: "We are not a party. We are not a union. We are not an association. We are people. We want to expel corruption from public life…now, today, maybe something is starting to happen" (Goodman 2012).

Networking with other groups helped build alliances and jettison the movement in both cyberspace and the real world. For example, joining forces with Youth without a Future (Juventud Sin Futuro), the two entities put out calls on Twitter and Facebook announcing protest events (Rainsford 2011). Dozens of groups gathered in fifty-eight cities throughout Spain to demonstrate, primarily against the lack of job opportunities. At the time Spain had a 21% unemployment rate and a youth unemployment rate of almost 50% (Escobar 2011). In terms of framing their concerns, the first M15 protest put forth the slogan, "we are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers." This framing used by the Indignados served as a critique of the 2010 bank bailouts that coincided with cuts in social programs, and later expanded to broader issues under the tagline, "without work, without home, without pension, without fear." Signs also read: "if we can't dream, you won't sleep," and "It's not a crisis, it's the system" demarcating a vision of a better future among young citizens despite the values and ideology promoted by neoliberalism (Escobar 2011). Other participants painted the word, GUILTY on bank offices and ministries as they marched, using the tactic of visibly shaming their target.

Activists also occupied public spaces for months. Approximately 50,000 demonstrated in Madrid alone on May 15th and after the march they carried out a sit-in on a busy street and were met with police violence. Twenty-four were arrested following the melee (El Mundo 2011). Another rally took place after the arrests in opposition to the police response and about twenty remained to camp out in Madrid's main plaza, Puerta del Sol. They stayed overnight but were removed the next day. Word spread about the occupation through the hashtag #acampadasol and this fast-paced flow of information led

to further political strategizing (Day and Cobos 2012). Thus, the spontaneously open-ended sit-ins led to a month's long self-governing encampment and served as a template for a new type of communal resistance. On May 16th two hundred people had gathered in the square, and after the police removed them once again activists used Twitter and Facebook to call for another occupation the next evening. On May 20th more than 10,000 camped out in Puerta Del Sol. The events were live streamed through the Web site Ustream.tv as they unfolded in real time and this served to enhance recruitment efforts (EFE 2011).

Two days later almost a thousand Spaniards occupied the plaza, which was followed by a judicial injunction against the encampment (Burns 2012). In retaliation, tens of thousands of Indignados marched in eighty different cities across Spain and an estimated 20,000 showed up in solidarity to defend against the injunction and police aggression (Silva 2012). The squatters were soon accompanied by other tenters across Spain who gathered in Barcelona, Seville, and thirty other cities throughout the country in local acts of solidarity. The movement quickly garnered international attention and support. In acts of global solidarity demonstrations were held in London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Lisbon and elsewhere (Silva 2011).

The Indignados movement continued to press on as Spain's economic situation worsened. On February 19th of 2012 hundreds of thousands protested across the nation in fifty-seven cities against economic reforms that would decrease workers' bargaining rights and social services (Burns 2012). Long-established squatter networks also joined forces with members of the M15 movement in protest of the hundreds of thousands of evictions that have taken place across the country over the past few years (Burns 2012). Overall eight million people had stated that they participated in at least one event hosted by the Indignados (Day and Cobos 2012).

The contagion of unrest extended to Greece. Sparked by similar economic factors as those which Spain was experiencing, 80,000 citizens congregated in Athen's main square in June of 2012 in opposition to the proposed austerity measures by the government. They waved banners in solidarity with the Indgnados of Spain and other European countries (Ouziel 2011). Organizers used Facebook and other social media sites to organize the efforts. This then spread to Mexico when Indignados travelled to various city squares throughout the country to engage in grassroots organizing. Combining new and old types of media and tactics, as well as cyberactivism and street protest, students collected proposals and suggestions, using blackboards to allow people write their ideas or proposals, and then took photos of the suggestions and posted them on social network sites and in street exhibitions (Bacon 2011).

The Indignados activists in Mexico expressed grievances that were similar to those articulated in the Spanish and Greek outbreaks of collective behavior. Over seven million young people in Mexico are unemployed, and the country has the third highest rate of unemployment among 15-29 year olds in member countries of OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). The Indignados in Mexico spent two months camping in front of the Mexico Stock Exchange following a forty-two day hunger strike by University professor, Edur Velasco, who set up a tent outside of the building on October 11th (Appel 2011). He demanded that the government guarantee greater access to higher education among youth, and a few days later he was accompanied by students and other activists who also set up tents. Highlighting the significance of the marches and the role social media played in their organization and turnout through horizontal information exchanges among peer-to-peer networks, one high school student explained: "This is the digital age, and you don't find out about leaders appearing on the television; you hear about it from the Internet and your friends on line" (Kennis 2012). This statement also illustrates the tendency of contemporary social movements to forego vanguards or spokespersons, and to be sporadic in nature – representative of a new social movement.

Occupy Wall Street in the United States

In light of the Indignados uprising (as well as Arab Spring that broke out across parts of North Africa and the Middle East), the former New York Mayor, Michael Bloomberg anticipated similar protest activity in the United States and warned: "You have a lot of kids graduating college, can't find jobs. That's what happened in Cairo. That's what happened in Madrid. You don't want to those kinds of riots here" (Einhorn and Siemasko 2011). The members of OWS did not riot but they did protest and engage in acts of civil disobedience by establishing encampments across the country. Similar to the Indignados movement OWS activists utilized digitally-based technologies to organize, share grievances, and plan strategies that would spill over into local communities.

The Occupy Wall Street social movement was made up of an assortment of activists. Many were young, many had been foreclosed upon, and many were unemployed or underemployed. The lack of any central form of leadership or concise diagnostic frame was a strategic tactic because it welcomed inclusivity, participatory democracy, and an

enhancement of the public sphere. Under the rubric of the "We are the 99%" campaign occupy participants began discussions about the essential nature of the political and economic systems that they participate in and thus help legitimize. The U.S. economic and political climate was ripe for protest at the time. For example, at the start of the 2008 recession the collective wealth of the wealthiest 1% of Americans was greater than that of the 90% combined (Sherter 2011). The United States now has the largest concentration of wealth since 1928 and is the most unequal of any industrialized country. While CEOs' compensation rose 36% during 2010, wages stagnated for the rest of the population and people were losing their homes at alarming rates due to ponzy schemes carried out by the major banks (Sherter 2011). Additionally, in the midst of the economic crisis major banks were bailed out by the very taxpayers who were suffering most from the economic collapse while being denied extended unemployment insurance by the government.

In September of 2011 the OWS campaign swept across the country with hundreds of occupations in various forms. The first to take place was the occupation of physical spaces including parks, plazas, and outside of Federal buildings. These forms of nonviolent civil disobedience resulted in over 7,000 arrests in 114 cities as citizens engaged in large-scale disruptive activities (OccupyArrests.com). It only took a few months (in some cases weeks) however, for most tenters to be forcibly removed by the police. It was in late July of 2011 that the soon-to-be occupiers (mostly young and with little social movement experience) met with veterans and organizers of the Indignados and Arab Spring to begin planning the protests in the United States (Milkman et. al 2013). They held a conference a few days later encouraging people to meet at a park near Wall Street to begin the more formal and broader strategy of OWS. The encampments were also inspired by the Canadian magazine, Adbusters when the editors put out a call to occupy Wall Street in their July edition. The ad asked: "WHAT IS OUR ONE DEMAND? #OCCUPYWALLSTREET SEPTEMBER 17TH. BRING TENT" (Milkman et al. 2013). The same message was sent to the 900,000 people on its listserv. Taking a cue from Arab Spring Adbusters also sent out an email that read: "America needs its own Tahrir," and on July 4th it tweeted: "Dear Americans, this July 4th dream of insurrection against corporate rule." On August 30th the hacktivist group, Anonymous released a video in support of the call by Adbusters. It called its members to "flood lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and Occupy Wall Street" (Milkman et al 2013).

Social Media Fuels the Flames: 2.0 Tactics

It was ICTs that enabled citizens across the United States to share their stories, break out of their isolation, raise awareness of the issues that concerned them, and then later to express their grievances on the streets in a collective cause. Tumblr.com was exceptionally instrumental in sparking the protests. Its "We are the 99 percent" blog published personal stories of lost jobs, lost homes, crippling debt, and a lack of government support or accountability to its citizens (Jacobs 2011). Tumblr, therefore, provided citizens with a sociological imagination -- understanding their personal problems as rooted in social issues and structural flaws in the economic and political systems. In addition to Tumblr there were dozens of wikis and Web pages where citizens could further engage in the discussions and planning of Occupy Wall Street. Three of the most popular were OccupyWallst.org (which raised thousands of dollars from dozens of groups and hundreds of individuals who supported the activists in terms of providing food, shelter, and gas mask protection), howToOccupy.org, and takethesquare.net, both of which provided similar information (Preston 2011b). To organize the various protests activists also used Meetup.com and Foursquare, two location services that people can download and use on their cellular devices to track schedules of marches, location changes and alternative routes (Glantz 2011).

Online activity quickly transpired into interest, motivation, and street activity. On September 17th about 1,000 people gathered to occupy the financial district in New York City. One week later they undertook an unpermitted march that began at Zucotti Park (renamed Liberty Plaza by the occupiers) and the number of participants soared to more than 2,500 as marchers made their way through the streets of Lower Manhattan (Moynihan 2011). Signs read, "Wake Up From the American Dream. Create a Livable American Reality," "Lost my Job Found an Occupation" and "Dear Capitalism It's not You it's Us. Just Kidding, It's You" (occupywallstreet.com), thus reflecting a rejection of the neoliberal model. There was also a yearning for new ways of living by establishing novel types of relationships and ways of interacting. For example, General Assemblies consisted of meetings in which everyone could have a voice in the decision-making process (Preston 2011). There were other concrete forms of creating community as well. For example, basic needs like food, shelter, medical care, sanitation, security, education and culture were handled by working groups. This copied the organizational structure of the Indignados encampments in Spain and Mexico.

Riot police met the demonstrators and in the first incident of police violence a commander was filmed pepper-spraying women in the face who were standing on a public sidewalk after being kettled (this refers to ordering protesters to disperse

but leaving no escape route and using orange nets to capture small groups of demonstrators). The video of the women falling to the ground and screaming in pain went viral, triggering sympathy and support for the activists. Thus, the aggression used by the police authorities backfired and gave the mobilization a boost in terms of recruitment, media coverage and shaming the target of resistance. At the end of the assembly a total of eighty protesters had been arrested (Moynihan 2011). The next major event occurred on October 1st when 700 activists were arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge for blocking traffic (Pilkington 2011). After the mass arrest several major labor movements endorsed the occupiers. SEIU (Service Employees International Union) organizers and healthcare workers (Local 1199) in Manhattan not only marched and camped out with the occupiers, but also delivered blankets, ponchos, food and water to help them sustain the encampment. This fit well with one of the most common signs that were visible throughout Zucotti Park which read, "Compassion is our new currency" (Solnit 2012).

On November 16th police cleared Zucotti Park and acknowledging the importance of media coverage and its critical role in influencing public opinion the police attempted to make filming of the event difficult through physical obstruction and the creation of "frozen zones." These prevented even credentialed journalists from entering the area (Preston 2012b). Reporters were kept blocks away under the guise of security reasons (their own personal safety). However, activists were able to get around police obstacles by live-streaming the events onto the Internet from their cell phones through both Livestream and Upstream, allowing users to watch events as they unfolded (Stelter 2011). In one of the cleverest challenges to the attempts by police to suppress the leaking of information, activist Tim Pool acquired a Parrot AR drone that he named the "occucopter" which is controlled with an iPhone and has an onboard camera so that individuals can view everything on their phone that it points at (Sharkey and Knuckey 2011). Pool modified the software to stream live video to the Internet so viewers could watch the action live. This not only facilitated the distribution of information outside of elite control of mainstream media and provided transparency as events transpired, but also increased support for the social movement actors because the police and other authorities had a more difficult time manipulating the narrative or discrediting the dissenters.

The Occuypystream.com site also provided links to streams following OWS and in total there were over 700 Occupy-related channels; 70% of the live streaming content was created on mobile phones and 89% of it viewed on mobile phones (Preston 2011). Additionally, throughout the encampments New York City organizers continuously updated Livestream news in the form of videos and photos onto the Twitter account, #OccyupyWallST. This had over 90,000 followers and was liked by over 300,000 worldwide on Facebook (Saba 2011). There were also more than 100 accounts on Twitter pertaining to Occupy Wall Street with tens of thousands of followers that collaborated under the hashtag #OWS. The main account, @occupywallstnyc had over 100,000 followers (Kelley 2011). Furthermore, it was the #Occupy and #occupywallstreet hashtags which organized events through Web sites such as Occupytogether.com (Berkowitz 2011). YouTube also helped to keep the Occupy Wall Street movement sustainable. There were 1.7 million YouTube videos tagged with the key world "occupy" in YouTube's news and politics section which were viewed 72 million times (Berkowitz 2011). There were also over 400 Facebook pages for Occupy and 2.7 million fans around the world (New York Times 2011).

On New Years' eve OWS called for Occupy 2012 in an attempt to re-take Zucotti Park. What began peacefully turned into a confrontation with authorities when protesters breached the park's barricades and police arrested several people. On the sixth month anniversary, March 17th police arrested dozens more in Zucotti after hundreds gathered following a march (Moynihan 2012). Though the police seemed to have the upper hand in their ability to take down the encampments, they have not completely escaped accountability due to the work of Mojos (mobile amateur journalists). For example, in April of 2013 Michael Premo, a long-time housing activist was found innocent of charges against him claiming that he assaulted a police officer (Kane 2013). He was proven innocent because of a recording obtained by a citizen journalist. Premo was arrested in 2011 when he, with other members of OWS tried to occupy a vacant lot in lower Manhattan. When police prevented them from doing so they began a march and were subsequently kettled. Though police accused Premo of attacking an officer, the video taken by the amateur journalist clearly displayed the officer tackling Premo as he tried to get up after falling down during the raucous caused by the kettling attempt (Kane 2013). In sum, OWS illustrates that through novel technological devices, social movement actors were able to get around the dominant institutions to voice their concerns, organize their agenda, control the narrative, and politicize issues through dialogue outside of the authorities and corporate-dominated mainstream media.

The Agenda Diversifies and Spreads to other Major Cities

As the movement developed OWS participants splintered into subgroups and began to focus on more concrete issues such as the housing crisis, lack of regulation of the financial system, and student debt. Occupy Our Homes, for example, has occupied hundreds of homes of families facing eviction and has had numerous successes in warding off foreclosures and evictions throughout New York City (Anderson 2011). Another spinoff group, Occupy Wall Street New York, has held "move your money relays" in which activists escort people from Bank of America branches, where they close their accounts to transfer their money into community banks and local credit unions (Maharawal 2012). Supporters of the cause created a Web site called FTheBanks.org which provided instructions for how to transfer money and information regarding when collective efforts to do so were taking place. On another front, the Fight BAC (Bank of America Campaign) morphed into a nationwide campaign after being advertised over the Internet and on the alternative news provider AlterNet.org. During "Move Your Money," or "Bank Transfer Day" activists helped more than 40,000 Americans remove their money from large banks, and more than 65,000 citizens switched to credit unions in October alone (Maharawal 2012). Religious groups moved $55 million out of the Bank of America by November 2012 and a San Francisco interfaith group moved $10 million from Wells Fargo in observance of Lent.

On the opposite coast, Occupy Oakland was the most violent of all the encampments in terms of clashes between activists and police. The first incident occurred on October 15th and gained international attention when an eighty-four year old retired schoolteacher was pepper sprayed at the encampment at Frank Ogawa Plaza and the image went viral and was circulated widely over YouTube (Ash 2012). After police cleared the camp many of those who were ejected planned a street march via the Internet and social media for later that afternoon in protest of the closure. This resulted in another confrontation when approximately thirty thousand protesters tried to re-establish the encampment. Two days later several videos circulated that showed a protester punched in the face at the follow up demonstration by a Deputy Inspector.

Once again the police attempted to clear the area, only to have demonstrators come out in even larger numbers, thus setting into motion a cycle of protest, violence, and retaliation through bigger and bigger demonstrations. Outrage only escalated when Iraq marine veteran, Scott Olsen, was badly injured after being hit by a projectile dispersed by the police. In subsequent marches protesters held signs reading, "We are all Scott Olsen" and this slogan was also all over Twitter and on the Web (Ash 2012). The distribution of the information shared peer-to-peer helped to build collective identity and frame the grievances in a way that would disgrace the behavior of certain members of the police force. For example, the Occupyoakland.com Web site consistently and thoroughly provided details about the events as they unraveled and depicted several members of the force reacting violently to peaceful protest activity (Seltzer 2011).

In a display of international solidarity and collective identity, Egyptian activists held a march from Tahrir square to the U.S. embassy in Cairo to show support for the Oakland protesters (Nir and Flegenheimer 2012). Calls to regroup after the raid went out over Twitter immediately, as did a call to email the office of the mayor with complaints through officeofthemayor@oakland.com. A few weeks later, on November 2nd, more than 5,000 people watched the Oakland Police Department raid during a one-day general strike that activists held thanks to Mojos who distributed the images virally (Romeny et al. 2012). Protesters shut down the port (which is the fifth busiest in the United States) in a protest that included more than 10,000 participants (BBCnews.org). Following the raid of the strike the Occupy Oakland Web site encouraged activists to fight back and reconvene for a second general strike later that day. In support of these efforts thousands of Occupy Wall Street protesters blocked access to several major West Coast ports from San Diego to Anchorage in synchronized demonstrations. This brought work to a standstill in Oakland, CA, Longivew, WA and Portland, OR (Romney, et al 2012).

On January 28th 400 people were arrested once again outside of City Hall after police engaged in a mass kettling maneuver to trap the protesters (Gwyne 2012). In fact, authorities were waiting in riot gear before the activists arrived declaring they were alerted by media sites that described the actions as "anti-police." This exemplifies how digital technology can be both detrimental as well as helpful to activists' mobilizing strategies because authorities are using the very same tools that their opponents are. There are other examples that demonstrate how the authorities too are quite savvy in their own use of new technology in counter actions to contentious politics. Members of the Oakland police department, for instance, collected photos of occupiers at demonstrations and sought out those individuals at subsequent protests, and specifically ones with prior arrests. In one instance, on January 4th an Occupy Oakland media committee photographer, Adam Katz, was singled out by the police at a demonstration. He had been arrested at a previous event while filming the raid of the disencampments and was charged with obstruction of justice. He explains, "Officers who knew my name, and knew that I took pictures, deliberately went after me and arrested me under completely false

pretenses" (Cagle 2012). In another occurrence, during a January 15th General Assembly meeting police approached an occupier and showed him his photo in a book they had and informed him that they knew he was on probation (Cagle 2012).

While the mass arrests in New York and Oakland have gotten most of the media attention, in large part due to the violence that occurred, other actions took place from coast to coast across the United States that received less notice. All in all, over 1,600 cities were occupied during Occupy Wall Street, including major cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Washington, D.C. Charlotte, and Portland.

International Solidarity Facilitated by Digital Platforms

After the tent evictions across the United States the Coalition for the Political Rights of Mexicans Abroad, which is part of the Indignados movement, sent a letter of support to Occupy Wall Street activists under attack. It declared "We greet your movement because your struggle against the suppression of human rights and against social and economic injustice has been a fundamental part of our struggle, that of the Mexican people who cross boarders and the millions of Mexican migrants who live in the United States" (Bacon 2012). In an effort to bolster future transnational collaborative efforts in the occupy struggle there has been much online activity to try to establish a shared, yet loose agenda. Recently, an international assembly that consists of members of Occupy groups in all six continents released a declaration of intent. The meeting was held online and included thousands more over email. The statement emphasized that it is both a work in progress and represents a global movement. It was distributed publicly for more input and suggestions (AlterNet 2012).

Alvaro Rodriguez of the Indignados movement in Spain and one of the drafters of the statement elaborates: "This is the beginning of a new global process of bringing the opinions of many people around the world together. It represents the beginnings of a form of global democracy in its infancy which is direct and participatory – of the people, by the people, and for the people. While the statement does not represent the position of local and city assemblies, the next step is to present it to assemblies around the world for consideration, discussion and revisions, as part of a dialogue of the "Global Spring" movements taking place across six continents…The process of writing the statement was consensus based, open to all, and regularly announced on our international communication platforms, that are also open to all (e.g. the 'squares' mailing list, the weekly global roundtables and the 'international' FaceBook group)."

In a statement printed in The Guardian on October 25th and circulated in cyberspace one Egyptian activist wrote: "To all of those across the world currently occupying parks, squares and other spaces, your comrades in Cairo are watching you in solidarity. Having received so much advice from you about transitioning to democracy, we thought it's our turn to pass on some advice…As the interest of government increasingly cater to the interest and comforts of private, transnational capital, our cities and homes have become progressively more abstract and violent places, subject to the casual ravages of the next economic development or urban renewal scheme. An entire generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally that we have no future in the current order of things" (The Guardian 2012).

Although the political and theoretical ramifications are yet to be sorted out, the OWS social movement has indeed altered the media and political narrative about economic inequality in the United States. A Pew Research Center survey of 2,048 adults, for instance, found that 66% of Americans now believe there are "very strong" or "strong" conflicts between the rich and poor (Common Dreams 2011). This was a 19% increase from 2009. Thirty percent say there are "very strong conflicts" between poor people and rich people – double the proportion that offered that view in July of 2009 (Common Dreams 2011). This shift in attitude is partially a consequence of the media coverage that Occupy Wall Street activists secured. For example, the word "protest" appeared in newspapers and online exponentially more in 2011 than at any other time (Stengel 2012). A Lexis/Nexis search showed that U.S. newspapers published 409 stories with the word "inequality" in October of 2010. In October 2011 it swelled to 2,269. In October of 2010 there were 452 stories that covered issues of greed as opposed to 2,285 in 2011 (Heuvel 2012). Also in October the Nexis news-media database registered almost 500 mentions of "inequality" each week; the week before Occupy Wall Street started there were only 91, and there was a seven-fold increase in Google searches for the term 99% between September and October (Stelter 2012).

Other analyses by Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found that the Occupy Wall Street movement accounted for 10% of national news coverage in the week of October 9th, and 10% of the mainstream media's news coverage in the week of October 10-16 (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011). In November Time Magazine ran a cover story entitled, "What Ever Happened to Upward Mobility?" (Foroohar 2011). In January the New York Times ran a piece on "Mobility and Inequality in Today's America" as well as a front page story entitled, "Harder for Americans to Rise from the Lower Rungs" (Blackwell 2012).

Theoretical Applications

These case studies have implications for theorizing contentious politics and highlight the need to compliment strands of social movement theory with those of new media. In doing so, we can refine our understanding of contentious politics while both challenging and contributing to the literature on collective behavior. Both analyses illustrate the unquestionable role that new digital technology has on contemporary mobilization efforts. It is in this vain that I suggest that social movement scholars rework some of the more conventional explanations of collective behavior that try to comprehend the "why" and "how" of social movements as allowed for by new media communication technologies.

As political process theory recognizes, the political environment in which social movement actors organize influences the strategies and tactics they employ, and is an important factor to consider when trying to understand outbreaks of collective behavior. It focuses on political openings in the formal, institutional arena that activists can exploit. While the United States, Spain, Mexico and Greece are nominally democratic societies that are open to contentious politics, these case studies reveal that in reality, given the social control of contentious politics and acts of civil disobedience, we are urged to question the practicality of this "openness." I argue that because of the kinds of new media technology that activists have at their disposal, we should view these openings in different ways because the digital revolution provides nuanced political and social platforms within which activists can communicate, organize, mobilize, and control the narrative when there are confrontations with authorities.

In other words, the innovative media terrain helps citizens craft new, albeit virtual, political openings which facilitate ways to participate in political discussion that were not available in the past. This can lead to collective behavior in real locations, thus altering the political context and help to sustain campaigns at the grassroots level and increase the vulnerability of economic and political authorities to challenge as activists occupy public spaces and generate support for their cause outside of institutional politics, despite the repressive tactics that authorities often employ.

Cyberspace served as a key resource in other ways as well because for a full-fledged social movement to emerge, it is essential that potential activists realize that others are also willing to join the struggle and particularly so if the struggle may turn violent. Leading up to the mobilizations examined in this paper it was social media that provided the context within which citizens were assured they had unity, numbers, commitment, and therefore a sense of worthiness to their struggle. This new media terrain, therefore, helps to bridge the "how "and "why" of social movement activity by considering the social and political environment in which activists organized (much of it online by opening up new possibilities for discussion) while also providing a key resource, digital media, through which they strategized and mobilized in local spaces.

Political mediation theory nicely complements political process theory with its acumen regarding how activists' perception of available opportunities intersects with the strategic choices they make and the tactics they employ, and that these are indeed fluid and situational. It also points to the critical role of public opinion in sustaining campaigns. New ICTs play a key role in this regard because they allow activists to alter their demands and tactics as protest activities unfold through the transmission of up-to-the-minute information sharing and organizing. Citizen journalists, as these cases illustrate, can influence this perception and therefore public opinion by disseminating live coverage of events on the ground, therefore taking command of the storyline by exposing authorities' response to acts of peaceful assembly in real time. This can both assist them with recruitment efforts and attempts to gain allies. In this way the sovereignty of amateur journalists can successfully contest the physical, and sometimes violent, power at the disposal of state authorities through their use of media power.

We must also rethink culturally-grounded theories of social movements in terms of how we define strong and weak ties, and how activists create and nurture collective identity. In the past, this was typically done face-to-face or through traditional methods such as flyering, formal meetings, assistance from well-established social movement organizations, and having access to mainstream media. Now, however, activists can share information and solidify weak ties in cyberspace through preexisting social connections shared peer-to-peer through ICTs and thus build community online that later erupts into displays of contentious politics on the streets. This exhibits the relationship between information sharing and protest activity in local communities -- the spillover effect -- and new ways of creating solidarity that digital media platforms enable. New media also has on impact on forms of collective identity because it can help to politicize new areas of social life and translate personal troubles (shared in cyberspace) into social issues, which ultimately lead to local organizing in concrete communities.

These analyses further question some of the basic premises that resource mobilization theory has conventionally emphasized, and in particular the importance of social movement organizations and material resources for successful

campaigns. For instance, SMOs have taken on a very new kind of structure as assisted by the Internet and new media. They now resemble social movement communities rather than formal groups based on membership and mandatory membership fees. In this paradigm shift today's mobilizations are much more grassroots in nature, operate on a more spontaneous basis, are relatively leaderless, do not rely on large sums of money, and are less labor-intensive. Finally, the outbreaks of contentious politics examined in this paper illuminate that contemporary social movements, enabled by new peer-to-peer communication flows and Web-based tools, display a distinct organizational structure that allows wired activists to operate through decentralized self-organizing and flexible networks, thus representing a horizontal infrastructure of connectivity.

Conclusion

The arsenal that activists have in their repertoire of contention is a key component to any social movement, and access to the latest technology plays a major role in the likelihood of their success. In the past, it was primarily mainstream media which influenced public opinion in reaction to outbursts of contentious politics. Activists also relied on mass media to get their message out and gain exposure to the cause they were advocating for. Today, however, access to mainstream media, though by no means irrelevant, is no longer the most important ingredient in making for a successful campaign in terms increasing awareness about an issue, getting recognition, influencing public sentiment, achieving legitimacy, and recruiting new supporters.

The newly emerging digital media platforms allow for more accurate and grassroots coverage of events and also provide a new source of political energy and communicative action. Because the communication field is vastly expanding, and sources of connectivity among activists now evolve through diffuse networks, activists are finding new ways to circumvent attempts by the neoliberal project to stifle authentic civic discussion and critical thinking. The Indignados and OWS social movements depict how online tools can play a significant role in community building and serve as an organizing outlet to identify and alert citizens about the high levels of discontent regarding the consequences of neoliberalization, share personal stories online and mobilize in public spaces.

This analysis also demonstrates that an application of the various social movement theoretical frameworks, including macro- and micro-levels of analysis, which can be complimented by theories of new media, are useful for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary social movements. The political and social contexts, as well of the perception of opportunities based on subjective interpretations of the possibility of achieving a successful outcome (which political process and political mediation theories emphasize), the framing of key issues regarding economic and political injustice, establishing key alliances both locally and internationally and a strong sense of collective identity, are all important factors in sustaining political campaigns. What this paper argues is that what is unique about today's social movement activity is that it is now digital technology which plays a crucial role in providing these political openings, influencing the perception of opportunities, assisting with framing efforts, helping to build alliances and collective identity, and facilitating the strategies and tactics that activists carry out.

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