Multimodal Narrative as an Instrument for Social Change: Reinventing Democracy in Spain—The Case of 15 M

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Abstract

This article provides a description of the emergence of the Spanish 'Occupy' movement, Democracia real ya. *The aim is to analyse the innovative discursive features of this movement and to connect this analysis to what we consider the innovative potential of the critical sciences. The movement is the result of a spontaneous uprising that appeared on the main squares of Madrid and Barcelona on 15 May 2011 and then spread to other Spanish cities. This date gave it its name:* 15M. *While the struggle for democracy in Spain is certainly not new, the 15M group shows a series of innovative features. These include the emphasis on peaceful struggle and the imaginary of a new democracy or worldview, transmitted through innovative placards and slogans designed by Spanish citizens. We consider these innovative not only due to their creativity, but also because of their use as a form of civil action. Our argument is that these placards both functioned as a sign of protest and, in combination with the demonstrations and the general dynamics of 15M, helped to reframe the population's understanding of the crisis and rearticulate the identity of the citizens from victims to agents. In order to analyse the multimodal character of this struggle, we developed an interdisciplinary methodology, which combines socio-cognitive approaches that consider ideological proposals as socio-cognitive constructs (i.e. the notion of narrative or cognitive frame), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the analysis of discourses related to processes of social imagination and transformation. The socio-constructivist perspective is used to consider these discourses in relation to their actors, particular contexts and actions. The use of CDA, which included a careful rhetoric analysis, helped to analyse the process of deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction that 15M uses to maintain its struggle. The narrative analysis and the discursive theoretical concept of articulation helped to methodologically show aspects of the process of change alluded to above. This change was both in terms of cognition and in the modification of identity that turned a large part of the Spanish population from victims to* indignados *and to the neologism* indignadanos, *which is a composition of* indignado *and* ciudadano *(citizen).*

Key words: multimodal narratives, cognitive frame, discourses of social change, social movements' discourses, Critical Discourse Analysis, emotions, socio-cognitive approaches, constructionism

"Be indignant! After ninety-three years, I am coming close to the end. The end is approaching. But please let me remind those who acted upon my political commitment. This happened during the years of resistance against the occupation by the Nazis, and the program of social rights which was elaborated sixty-six years ago by the National Council of Resistance... These principles and values are what we need more than ever..." (Stephane Hessel, *Indignez-vous*).

1. Introduction

This article is the result of the personal and academic interest of the two authors in discourses on alternatives to present day society and processes of social change. We have followed the 15M uprising in Spain, also known as the *Movimiento de los indignados*, with particular interest. We have attended various meetings across the country and are aware of the new practice of community reunions in Spanish cities.

While mainstream media ignored the movement in its early days, or depicted it in negative terms, its membership created highly innovative messages through diverse slogans and placards. These were posted in the various camps (*acampadas)* in many cities and circulated through social networks: personal blogs, videos and websites (Castells 2012: 120; Castañeda 2012). In this sense, the struggle of the *indignados* has been depicted as a *post media struggle*.

The particular purpose of this paper is firstly to analyse a great number of these slogans and placards posted in the different *plazas*. We also added to this data other slogans taken from the Internet and songs recorded during the demonstration that took place in Barcelona on 15 October 2011. Common to most of these slogans was their creativity and the unexpected nature of their messages to either the Spanish political class or to the citizenship. In this sense our second objective is both the interpretation of this data in relation to its potential for social change and an explanation of why this creativity and innovation emerged in relation to the socio-political context of the moment. To do this, we have developed an eclectic theoretical and methodological perspective based on critical discourse analysis (CDA), especially the discourse-historical dimension within CDA, Discourse Theory (DT, as developed by Laclau and Mouffe 1985), and a socio-cognitive constructivist perspective inspired by studies of complexity. The composition of the theoretical methodological framework will be described in detail below. The conflict that 15M seeks to resolve is the experience that the free market economy favours the business and financial private sector at the expense of both the working and middle classes and the public sector. A further concern is that the leaders of the main democratic parties are subdued to the interests of the free market economy.

The development of this article is based on the following assumptions:

- That 15M's spontaneous emergence and its peaceful, pluralist character is a direct response to ways in which the Spanish middle classes (especially young people) have been affected by the 2008 crisis in terms of income reduction, job loss and consequential problems in paying mortgages, and which has led to many families losing their homes. Youth unemployment is extremely high in Spain (46.1 per cent in 2011,

the moment of the 15M's irruption).[2]

- That there is a specific significance to democracy in Spain, which has a resonance in earlier situations: poverty during and after the Civil War (1936-1939), hardship under Franco (1939-1975) and the transition to a democracy which was, once again, the result of a civil struggle. 15M tries to prove that democracy in Spain cannot be taken for granted and needs a profound revision in a more participative direction.

- That the placards and slogans play a central role in delegitimising the present day economy and political system in Spain, while envisioning the perspective of a sustainable, shared political, social and economic space.

First, we present a short description of the socio-political context of the movement and a description of one of 15M's demonstrations held on 15 October 2011, in Barcelona. We then explain the theoretical framework and methodological approach for this research. This is followed by an analysis, interpretation and evaluation of results.

1.1 Socio-political Context

The recent crises (financial, credit and banking) felt in the capitalist world have mainly affected the southern, 'peripheral' countries in Europe.[3] In Spain, the crisis is disrupting the democratic system that has been constructed over the past forty years, in the sense that politicians behave like the allies of the financial sector, rather than represent the people. The movement of the *indignados* was one of the first organized movements of public protest against the neoliberal free market economy in Europe, which was later followed by the worldwide Occupy movement. However, the movement claims that it has been inspired by the spontaneous revolt of the Arab spring, especially the struggles in Tunisia and Egypt, and that they acted in solidarity with Greek protests against the severity program imposed by the EU.

Particular demands of the *indignados* (http://www.democraciarealya.es) in Spain are:

- The reform of the electoral law in order to spread power to all parties and not, as it is under present law, to favour the biggest parties with seats in Congress.[4]
- The internal reform of political parties through open publication lists.
- The establishment of a public bank that provides loans to small entrepreneurs rather than to other banks.
- The full cancelation of a mortgage in case of insolvability, in exchange for the payment of a reasonable interest rate to the bank.
- Participation of citizens in the proposals for new legislation through votes on the Internet (for instance: *Democracia 4.0*, http://demo4punto0.net).

1.2 Description of the Demonstration of October 15 2011

It is remarkable that in other studies of 15M little systematic attention has been paid to the demonstrations and even less to the semiotic aspect of events such as those in Barcelona on 19 June and 15 October 2011 (Castells 2012; Castañeda 2012; Fuster Morell 2012). Following the work of Castelló and Barberá-Tomás (2012), we consider these demonstrations as occurring at the meso-level of the *indignados* struggle. The macro-level refers to the emergence of the worldwide Occupy movement in protest against the global economy, and the micro-level to the struggle of specific neighbourhoods regarding, for instance, the policy around mortgages and the subsequent practice of disowning people who can no longer afford payments. These demonstrations became a podium for widespread support from the masses who then actively produced their own messages. The creation of placards shows similar expressions at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of social reality. As will become evident below, certain placards refer to the global economy, others to situations in local neighbourhoods and many to the daily life of the citizens. We will return to this layered aspect of the struggle in our analysis and interpretation.

The demonstration on 15 October 2011 started at 5 p.m. in Plaza Cataluña, the main central square in Barcelona. Representatives of different social groups gathered registration signatures and at five the crowd started to move in the direction of Passeig de Gràcia. Police and other officials helped traffic to get out of the crowd's way, and soon this central street, consisting of six parallel lanes, became the platform for the demonstration. Huge commercials from shops such as Armani achieved a sense of irony as the very symbols of present day capitalism against which the movement was directing itself. As the demonstration moved forward it spread into parallel streets, and the principal avenues of Barcelona become more and more crowded with people carrying placards. The protest changed rhythm and intensified as it passed by significant buildings, such as the Barcelona stock exchange, politicians' houses and banks. At the stock exchange, the demonstration stopped, and a well-known Spanish children's song was turned in a protest song. The demonstration was peaceful and familiar: parents participated with their children, and people of all ages and from many sectors of society, including workers, intellectuals, trade unionists, nurses, doctors, hippies of all ages, young people and students, took part. It also appeared to be a social affair, with people happily meeting up and chatting.

After about an hour, the demonstration split into three directions according to three themes: education, health and housing. A paper had been handed out at the beginning of the protest, so that people could make a choice about which route to take. We had opted for education, and soon a carriage showed up carrying a giant *chorizo* (a typical sausage in Spain, but also slang for corruption), which was sliced into pieces by a guillotine. Each time a slice came off it showed the head of one of the *culpables* (guilty): a banker or a politician.

We consider that this demonstration was representative of the entire 15M movement. It shared the characteristics of spontaneous emergence and it did not have official leadership. The movement in general is inclusive in nature

and calls on the population to participate. It is a pluralist movement that involves people from all social classes. Also, at this particular demonstration placards were written in both Spanish and Catalan. This is noteworthy because of the usual emphasis on the exclusive use of Catalan in institutional events in Barcelona.

2. Theoretical Framework

In order to relate the semiosis of 15M—on the Internet, in the camps and during the demonstrations—to its social and political context, we propose a multifaceted theoretical framework, which consists of a brief explanation of Gramsci's (1971) approach to hegemony, followed by the further elaboration of this theory by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and a particular view on state theory (Jessop 2002; 2004), which emphasises the dynamic role of narrative in times of crisis.

We were also inspired by a socio-cognitive constructivist perspective, defended by authors assigned to what is known as complexity studies (Maturana and Varela 1990; Varela et al. 1997; Maturana 1996; 2006; Capra, 1996; Bruner 1991; etc.), but whose origin can be traced to classical authors such as Bateson (1972), Goffman (1974) and Gumperz (1982), among many others (Morales López 2013). In this constructivist approach, reality does not exist independently of social actors. The reason is that these social actors rearrange reality to fit their perception of the world. It is, therefore, a worldview that is discursively constructed both individually and socially, in relation to the subjects' embodiment and emotion (Bateson 1972), and finally in relation to human action and their socio-cultural context (Bruner 1991; Scollon 2008).[5] In this sense, we agree with Nerlich, Clarke and Dingwall (2000: 236-237) who claim that while the importance of metaphoric constructions is widely acknowledged and studied, the employment of other rhetoric-discursive resources such as polysemous words and phrases, textual and image references to fictional narratives, alliteration and metamorphosis of expressions and clichés are equally widespread and important, and should receive more attention. This article makes a move in that direction.

The analysis of the data is based on the discourse-historical methodology proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001), which implies a three-step analysis, consisting of a content analysis, the analysis of discursive strategies and the analysis of linguistic features.

We acknowledge that this mosaic of approaches hinges on different ontologies: constructivist in the case of Maturana and Varela and Discourse Theory and critical realist in the case of CDA. In earlier work, Montesano Montessori (2009, 2011) has defended putting DT and CDA to work together, since they have enough in common in terms of their basic assumptions and enrich each other in important aspects. For instance, DT provides tools to analyse the dynamics of a society, whereas CDA provides tools to analyse these dynamics. Furthermore, while we agree with the constructivists (including DT) that people build their perception of the world and shape their world in contact with others and with their actions, we also agree with CDA that structure and agency are mutually constitutive; the power of agents is not

unlimited.

The eclectic perspective we adopt serves to develop a holistic approach that takes into account discourse, emotions, and interactions in their socio-political context. This eclecticism provides theoretical and methodological tools not only for a more complex analysis, but also asks why certain discourses arise in particular social times, what the discursive force is that has generated them, and if this force can produce a persuasive effect. That is, it is capable of inducing action in the particular context in which those discourses have emerged (Pujante and Morales López 2013). For these reasons, we draw on the discourse theoretical concepts of 'myth' and 'social imaginary' as explained below.

2.1 Theories on Hegemony

The Gramscian approach to hegemony holds that power can never be maintained by force or repression alone. It depends on coercion and consensus, which are dialectically related. Gramsci distinguishes regressive hegemony as coming from the state, and progressive hegemony as the result of the popular collective spirit (Ives 2004: 12, 30). In this sense, hegemony does not necessarily reside in the realm of the state or a dominant elite; it can emerge in subordinate classes, if these are capable of sharing a new ideology, thus creating a new 'collective will'. This new strategy is what Gramsci calls a 'war of position'. It is different from a 'war of movement', which is a confrontation between opposed forces. In Gramsci's view, leading ideologies are not dictated by the economic model, but originate in culture and in the will of the people who can constitute a new historic block which consists of alliances that proclaim and implement this new will of the people (Gramsci 1971). This approach helps us see that 15M, potentially, formulates a profound revision of present day democracy and economy in Spain, and creates massive acceptation of this revision within the Spanish population.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have further developed Gramsci's theory on hegemony (but see Ives 2004: 146 for a critical perspective). It is based on a socio-constructivist ontology, emphasising that all social and natural phenomena acquire meaning through discourse. Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 93-149) abandon any class-based conception of social change, as well as economic determinism. In addition, they present a detailed account of hegemony. These authors emphasise antagonism as a necessary element of the social world. Social and political life acquires its meaning through discourse, especially through the articulation of meaning and identities. The process of establishing meaning is a political process, entangled by pluralism and struggles for power (Mouffe 1993/2005). However, not any one particular discourse can ever be complete. There are always realms that remain beyond a particular discourse and there will always be competing discourses that prevent a dominant discourse from closing. Discourse theory (DT) recognises an ongoing struggle for a discursive definition of social life as the primacy of politics. It takes political power and acceptance to fix the meaning of a subject. DT refers to this process as articulation: 'We will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). Processes of articulation, then, are political processes. In this context, DT defines a series

of linguistic concepts which turn out to be crucial for the analysis of hegemony, and of which we selected for the purposes of this study the concepts of myth and social imaginary. Myth represents 'an alternative to the logical form of the dominant structural discourse' (Laclau 1990: 62). A social imaginary has been reached when the alternative represented in myth becomes a horizon in which any social demand has been inscribed, as was the case with the Enlightenment, or communist society (Laclau 1990: 62-4). Montesano Montessori (2009, 2011) further developed this definition in stating that an imaginary requires having impact at the structural level of events, for example causing a modification of the political system, or the Constitution. If the imaginary remains at the discursive level, it is to be considered a myth, rather than an imaginary (Montesano Montessori 2009; 2011).

2.2 A Dynamic Perspective on State Theory: the Relevance of Narrative

Jessop (2002) envisions the capitalist state as a succession of accumulation regimes, along with the social and political projects that sustain these regimes. In times of crisis, different agents will present narratives in order to gain universal acceptance for their particular vision:

> 'In periods of major social restructuring there is an intersection of diverse economic, political and socio-cultural narratives that seek to give meaning to current problems by construing them in terms of past failures and future possibilities' (Jessop 2002: 92).

Narrative or semiosis in general allows for the imagination of a new political space in which identities can emerge in new ways. Semiosis plays a constitutive role in economic and political institutions and activities and in the social order in general (Jessop 2004).

It is now possible to suggest that 15M, to gain hegemony and to obtain the support and participation of a majority of the people, needs to create narratives that envision a myth: a desired future that fills the lacks of the present-day situation, (a lack of a true democracy that serves the people rather than the global economy). It will also need other groups to engage with this myth in order to create a social imaginary in terms of discourse theory.

We also agree with a suggestion of Jessop (1982: 201) that, in the end, effective hegemony always involves a hegemonic project that impacts on social reality through means such as specific political programmes.

2.3 A Multi-facetted Approach to Narrative

In the last few decades in social science theory, it has been widely acknowledged that narrative[5] plays a significant role in the realm of social struggle. This is partly because in narrative agents represent their own ontological beliefs, and they give shape to their own identity as well as to an envisioned plot and desired future (Somers 1994). Furthermore, narrative is a useful tool to evaluate existing (economic) models and depict desired alternatives (Jessop 2002). In our view, Somers' notion on narrative is closely related to the concept of 'framing'. Framing derives from the American socio-

constructivist approach (Bateson 1974; Goffman 1974; among others), and is defined as the expectation as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into any activity (Goffman 1974: 345). It is found as much in everyday communication (see Hample, Warner and Young 2009: 23) and was further developed by Lakoff (2006) as mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality and sometimes to create what we take to be reality (Morales López 2011; 2012; Chilton 2004). From the corporate social-cognitive approach adopted in this paper, the notion of framing allows us to analyse simultaneously not only the embodied dimensions of time, space and cause-effect relations, but also emotions (in the way suggested by Bateson 1972; Damasio 2010; among others). To conclude, narrative is seen in this article as a powerful tool to depict a desired world or to envision alternatives to the status quo of any particular organization, community, economic or political system (Jessop 2002). As long as this construct envisions a desired alternative, the use of narrative plays a role in constructing myths in a discourse theoretical sense of a 'filling of a lack' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Seen from this perspective, narrative helps to *rearticulate* the status quo from an undesired version to a desired version, in which identities and concepts acquire new positions and new mutual relations. Narrative is a powerful tool in creating a new community and gaining its support or enthusiasm for a certain cause. This would bring it close to a Gramscian formation of a new historic bloc, or at least bring about wide acceptance for a project.

3. Methodology and Data

As explained above, the data consists of a great number of slogans and placards posted in the different *plazas* that could also be downloaded from different websites, as well as photographs and songs recorded during the demonstration in Barcelona. When looking at the results, it was recognised that the placards, slogans and songs described processes of disrupting the dominant economic and political reality in Spain, identified signs of transformation, and proposed imaginaries of a new and desired future. It was then decided to use Wodak and colleagues' discourse-historical methodology to perform the analysis, due to its analytical focus on diverse strategies to do with dismantling, transforming and constructing socio-political space (Wodak et al. 1999/2009).

The discourse-historical approach to analysis consists of the analysis of both discursive strategies and the discursive and rhetoric features that were used to construct these strategies.

Finally, we refer to content analysis that relates to the construction of frames and/or narratives. For this, we have adopted Somers' proposal for analysing narratives or narrativity (1994; see also Montesano Montessori 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014). Somers distinguishes three dimensions of narrativity within any particular narrative: the ontological, the public, and the meta-narrative: the ontological narrativity dimension contains the stories which define the identity of social subjects and a particular vision of the status quo; the public narrativity dimension concerns cultural and institutional formations such as the family, the church and the nation; the meta-narrativity dimension concerns the master narratives in which people are embedded as

contemporary actors in society. Somers states that meta-narrativity has the paradoxical quality of denarrativisation in that it backgrounds human agency in the light of more abstract forces; in this case the free market capitalist economy which invades and appropriates the political system.

4. A Discursive Analysis of the Selected Data

4.1 Discursive Strategies

We have identified the three macro-strategies that Wodak et al (1999: 33) distinguish in their study; the discursive strategies of dismantling, transformation and (re)construction.

4.1.1 Strategy of deconstruction (dismantling)

The aim of this strategy is to dismantle or disparage parts of an existing national identity construct (Wodak et al 1999: 33). The following data clearly represents this function, covering two distinct topics: the deconstruction of the political power of the two main parties (a) and that of the financial sector (b). This is achieved through the employment of a various rhetoric-pragmatic resources, which help construct these micro-narratives or slogans.

Some of these slogans were written by hand or on the computer, while others were sung during the assemblies and/or demonstrations and then uploaded to the Internet on sites such as YouTube. Some of these expressions are multimodal, using both written texts and images. Observing the demonstration as a whole clearly showed that it represented a semiotic landscape: 'the place of visual communication in a given society [which] can only be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society, and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations' (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 33). Hence, the demonstration is considered a semiotic landscape due to the Internet, the placards, television, photos, songs, etc. *and* due to its uses and valuations.

The dismantling of the political power of the two main parties

A salient way to achieve this function has been to use different discursive resources to construct a deictic opposition between the political class and the citizens' voices and behaviours. One example can be observed in the recontextualisation of a popular song, which became famous with the text: *Lo llaman democracia y no lo es*, 'They call it a democracy, but it is not a democracy'. This utterance presents a deictic opposition between *they* (the political class) and the voice of the citizens. The coordinated conjunction (*y*, 'and') with an adversative value expresses antagonism in the sense that it contrasts the perspective of the political class as that of an agent indicated explicitly with the third person plural (*llaman,* 'they call'*),* with what is considered a general truth with an implicit agent (*no lo es*, 'it is not'). The voice of the movement expresses disagreement, but lacks explicit agency; it anonymously states a general claim using the verb *ser* (to be), which expresses a general truth (an existential clause which implies 'general existence' in Hallidayan terminology).
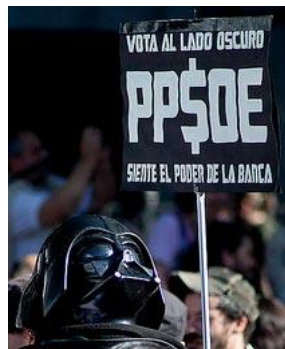
The following placards show the division between the main political parties'
world and citizens' behaviour:

Figure 1. "Si es bueno para ti, no es bueno para nosotros"
(If it is good for you, it is bad for us)

Figure 2. "Del absolutismo al bipartidismo"
(From absolutism to the two-party system)

Figure 3. "Vota al lado oscuro"
(Vote for the dark side)

Photograph [1] shows the face of two politicians: the left side represents the
former president Zapatero (PSOE, Socialist Party), who was in power from
2004 to 2011. The right side of the portrait represents Mariano Rajoy, a right
wing politician of the Populist Party (PP) who won the elections in Spain on
20 November 2011. The photograph visually represents a metonymy of the
political policies of both parties, which both contradict the interests of the
citizens. The slogan says *Si es bueno para ti, no es bueno para nosotros*, 'If it
is good for you, it is not good for us'. This shows, in an ironic way, the huge
gap between the political class and the citizens. The irony is situated in the
explicit deconstruction of the common expectation that a democratic

politician would serve the interest of the citizens. This statement makes explicit the alleged corrupt character of present day politicians.

The second picture shows the transition from the dictatorship under Franco to the dictatorship of the two-party system: from absolutism to the dual party. It shows two heads under the same crown: presumably one head belongs to the leader of the Socialist Workers Party and the other to the Populist Party. The political performance of these politicians is metaphorically compared to the absolutist rulers of the past. This expression is a recontextualisation of earlier slogans such as 'from absolutism to democracy' or 'from fascism to democracy' that were so popular after the death of Franco. In fact, it is a negative recontextualisation of these slogans: 'from absolutism to the two-party system'. The crown on the heads of the supposed leaders indicates that even now it is impossible to see authentic democratic consolidation in Spain, just as in the era of the unsuccessful First (1873-1874) and Second Republic (1933-1936). Both of these periods were followed by periods of dictatorial rule.

The third picture shows a placard that represents both parties as a singular entity (PPSOE being a mixture of the Populist Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE)). It uses the dollar sign for the letter 'S', which shows the commitment of this party to the international economy. The text states: 'vote for the dark side, PPSOE, feel the power of the bank'. The title has created intertextuality with the movie *Star Wars,* because the 'dark side of power', represents a prominent ethical and psychological concept in this universe.[6] This image is reinforced by the dark colour of the placard and the mask. This recontextualisation, which simultaneously serves as a metaphoric projection, activates another cognitive framework, that of the hidden power of that other agent in the neoliberal economy: the power of the bank and its impact on the policy of these two parties.

These three examples all show the protest played out at the macro-level: it is the national political and financial sector that needs to be dismantled.

Strategy of dismantling of the power of the financial sector

During the demonstration, this strategy was evident when passing banks or the homes of the Catalan elite who have dominated political and economic circles for decades. The crowd shouted *culpables, culpables*, 'guilty, guilty', while collectively pointing fingers. This collective chant and gesture started when the crowed reached the building of the stock exchange, close to the start of the demonstration route. Possibly initiated by a small group, the chant was collectively adopted by everyone that passed by, and obtained a strong persuasive power. It symbolised the power of the united common citizens against the corruption of the financial sector.

 These are examples at the meso-level: the local representatives of the financial and political sector that had been opposed in the earlier examples at the macro level. Here it was possible for people to literately point their fingers at those whom they considered guilty, thus making the protest more concrete. It is at this point that collective emotions were easily perceived: both the shared conviction that these were the *culpables*, and the perceived joy that this was collectively recognised, and that it was possible to give physical expression to this conviction.

The following two slogans make the same point in different ways. Placard [4], *No hay pan para tanto chorizo,* means 'there is no bread for so much sausage'. The meaning of this is layered: *chorizo* is not only a popular sausage in Spain, but also a slang metaphor for 'corruption'. 'Bread', in turn, is slang for 'money', operating as a metonymy in linguistic terms. Therefore, this slogan activates the following inferences: at one level, 'the basic layers of society cannot carry the weight of the new elite with its greed, bonuses and anti-social behavior', a claim made by, for instance, Andrew Sayer in his recent book *Why We Can't Afford the Rich* (2015). At a second level, it means that society at large will not survive present day corruption due to the erosion of the public sector. It is an interesting example of a slogan that operates at the three levels (making manifest the corruption at the local and/or national levels, but also at the micro level: there is no bread for so much 'chorizo'; we cannot carry the burden on our budgets). This political/financial practice of corruption deprives us of our basic needs. The creative use of slang brings the protest back to the day-to-day living experience of the Spanish people.

http://www.letra.org/spip/IMG/jpg/41.jpg

Figure 4. "No hay pan para tanto chorizo"
(There is not enough bread for so much sausage)

Figure 5. "No nos falta dinero..."
(We do not have a lack of money, we have too many crooks)

Placard [5] means 'we do not have a lack of money, we have too many crooks'. The linguistic strength of this particular slogan consists in the syntactic structure, which opposes the lexemes *faltar* ('to have a shortage of') and *sobrar* ('exceed'). This alludes to the well-known level of corruption found in various governments that colluded with the construction sector. Eventually, the bubble of the real estate sector broke and everything dissolved. At the

same time, it represents an antithesis to the *topoi* in everyday speech in which people frequently lament a lack of money: *me falta dinero*, 'I don't have enough money'. Therefore, this slogan shows the same integration of a protest being played out at both the macro- and the micro-level and represents again the power of a language easily understood by the people through the metaphor *ladrones*, which brings politicians and financial people to the semantic domain of criminality. In terms of the theory of Maturana and Varela, this stage of the analysis shows an awareness that the status quo was a social construct, serving only a small sector of the Spanish population. 15M now expresses the destructive effects felt in the lower strata of society, and expresses a sense of solidarity with the working classes.

4.1.2 Strategy of transformation

The macro-strategy of transformation represents the discursive function of transforming the status quo.

As an example, we will analyse two placards that explain the imagination of new forms of democracy, as in the time of the transition (from Franco's dictatorship to democracy in the late seventies).

Figure 6. "Indignados y organizados"
(Undignified and organised)

Figure 7. "No somos antisistema"
(We are not against the system, the system is against us)

The placards say: [6] 'Indignant and organised', and [7] *No somos antisistema, el sistema es anti-nosotros*, 'We are not against the system, the system is against us'. These examples show salient characteristics of the new democratic era that the movement aspires to and are therefore important parts of the new myth that is being created collectively. Placard [6] creates an implicit lexical antithesis (Pujante 2003: 269): it brings together two values

which at first appearance might seem antagonistic to the majority of the population, who would associate the concept of *indignados* with values such as 'violence' or 'being unpredictable'. The contrast with the concept of organization, however, shows the pacific character of the movement that controls its sentiment of indignation through discursive, argumentative participation and assemblies on public squares. Finally, in [7] *No somos antisistema, el sistema es antinosotros*, 'We are not against the system, the system is against us', we see the use of the rhetoric resource of antithesis again: the creation of the neologism *antinosotros* ('against us') as a variation on the lexeme *antisistema,* creates a paradox which clearly represents the inhuman behaviour of the elites who exclude real people from their policies. It echoes the expression in the first placard [1], which referred to the same alleged hostility from officials to the population they are supposed to represent.

4.1.3 Strategy of reconstruction

This strategy attempts to construct and establish a certain identity by promoting a new society. Here are two examples:

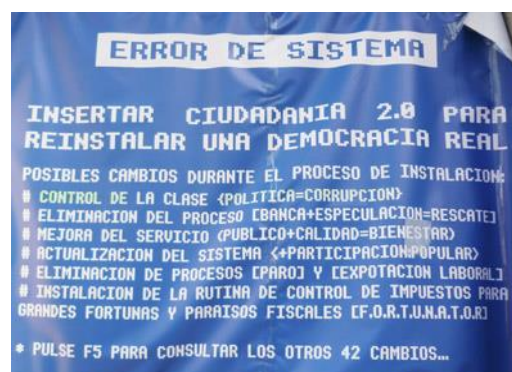**Figure 8.** "Spanish revolution" (Spanish Revolution)

Figure 9. "Error de sistema" (A systemic error)

An interesting feature is the contrast between the two pictures. On the one hand, [8] represents a profile of the slogans spontaneously placed on public walls around campsites, either elaborated on a computer or written by hand. This particular example lists the demands previously discussed. The placard in [9] shows a metaphoric creation based on computational skills: the new democracy requires the reinstallation of an operative system, *ciudadanía 2.0,* 'citizenship 2.0'. This image imitates the numeric sequence of new versions of computer programs to symbolically indicate the need for the reinvention of democracy, discursively referred to as *democracia real* or 'real democracy', because the previous version *da error* or 'provides errors'. During the process of installation of this new era, a list of changes is presented, but these are notably preceded by the word 'possible', which emphasises the assembly-oriented character of the envisioned transition. The group that expresses these changes does not impose its own will, they listen to citizens at large, and decisions are taken as part of a participative process.

These two examples demonstrate another specific characteristic of the actions and discourses of 15M, namely the mix between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, citizens occupy public spaces to discuss and construct democratic values, which parallel the practice found in the transition after the Franco dictatorship. On the other hand, new discourses are created by the young generation, and are based on their own experience (in illustration 10, the world of computation). These new metaphors indicate that younger people (with their emotions, positive values and modern abilities) feel that the new democratic era belongs to them and are taking conscious decisions about their future.

For adult generations, 15M implies a revindication of the struggle of the 1970s, while for younger generations it represents a new form of democratic participation in which they are active agents. Young people know how to manage and organize the new multimedia communication within social groups, and in this sense new emotions have been activated, such as reconciliation between generations, solidarity, a joint enthusiasm for social change, and respect for the voice of the assemblies. Creativity and articulation of new voices stands in strong contrast to the stagnant status quo of the power elite in Spain and the EU.

4.2 Narrative Analysis

As indicated in the theoretical and methodological sections, the eclectic perspective that we adopt is not only interested in analysing and explaining the meaning of these slogans and their various functions (which in turn has led us to analyse the various communication strategies), but above all to try and answer a crucial question: Why did this creativity and ability to arouse attention of the majority of citizens emerge throughout the weeks this movement remained in public squares? In order to answer this question, we need another level of analysis to account for the different narratives (or cognitive frames) built by their social actors across multiple slogans; i.e. to show the diverse imaginaries or worldviews that they proposed to the citizenship.

The placards analysed demonstrate the rich variety of rhetoric-pragmatic resources employed, and the discursive creativity of the slogans. These

resources include the recontextualisation of popular songs and proverbs, contemporary movies, metonyms and visual metaphors, and semantic resources, among others.

We claim that this variety of rhetoric-discursive resources fulfils a symbolic role. Taken together, they build new types of narratives, following Somers' proposal (1994). First, a *meta-narrative* which constructs a different interpretation of the final years of the first stage of Spanish democracy (1975-2011): that of a mediocre and bureaucratic political class, wrapped up in the power structure of the dominant parties who divided power between themselves and the bankers. This particular political class proved itself incapable or unwilling to resist the increased power of present day capitalism, hence reconstructing traditional ways to resolve the crisis, by imposing budget cuts in public spending while protecting the rights of the social and political elites.

Second, the *ontological dimension* contrasts the present situation of the free market economy with a desired imaginary of a sustainable world. The present situation is characterised by an elite that looks after itself at the expense of the public sector. The imaginary of a new society involves a reinvention of democracy, and an inclusive world that provides a basis for the middle and working classes to live their lives, to have jobs, and to enjoy public services such as healthcare and education.

Finally, the *public narrative* shows a world in which banks and politicians are expected to play a social role in sustaining society, having previously turned to enterprises that support the private sector and the global economy at the expense of public funding and sustainability. 15M calls for a reconsideration of politics and of the financial system. The political system should be more inclusive for smaller parties, while the financial system should separate responsible, state guaranteed banks from speculative banks that take risks.

Until the appearance of 15M, Spanish citizens had been unable to tackle this problem. With the emergence of these creative slogans during massive assemblies in the main squares of the majority of Spanish cities, the cognitive framework of Spanish citizenship has changed. 15M helped to construct a public understanding of the power of neoliberal capitalism (allied with the traditional economic oligarchy) in a Spanish-specific context, and the danger it represents to the stability of daily life. It showed how social rights, achieved after decades of struggle, had been destroyed. The data indicates that the status quo in Spain is now understood within the framework of the free market economy. Part of the struggle of the *indignados* is to 'reframe' Spanish society and politics in the direction of a new democracy and a new economy. The slogans and placards played a central role in this process in that they activated a 'renarrativization' in the understanding of the status quo. This new construction is rooted in a new temporal and spatial frame (sometimes referred to as a second stage in the Spanish democracy), while simultaneously evoking, as already mentioned, emotions strongly related to the Spanish context and to previous moments of social struggle.

5. Interpretation and Evaluation of the Results of the Analysis

5.1 Interpretation

The analysis of the semiotic expressions of 15M in combination with the narrative analysis has shown that a large part of the struggle has been a process of publicly making sense of the crisis. The intriguing point is that this was not a pre-planned activity by the leadership or a new presentation of an account of the crisis performed by leaders. It was an ongoing process, sparked off by the first major *campamentos* on the main squares. The entire semiotic landscape that emerged made it possible for people to start understanding the causes, and then insert their own causes, accusations and interpretations of the crisis. More importantly, it helped them understand that any political system is a social construct that can be replaced by another construct. More importantly, 15M gave each and every citizen a chance to participate in the process without having to recur to violence or radical forms of protest. The process of meaning making happened throughout, and people created their own expressions at macro-, meso- and/or micro-levels of abstraction.

In interpretive terms, 15M citizens rearticulated themselves in at least two significant ways. One was their increased understanding of the crisis as described above. In discourse theoretical terms, we can state that a myth (in Laclau's sense of filling a lack in the status quo) was created; a public space was opened in which all citizens had equal access to promote their own views and actions. The 15M organisation helped make sense of the status quo and the different powers operating in it, which helped citizens rearticulate the future and their own place in that future. This process of a new cognitive understanding went hand in hand with the development of a new communality: people came together on the plazas and in the streets and neighbourhoods. During the process, new emotions evolved, such as the loss of fear, the sensation of increased empowerment, a shared concern about democracy in Spain, solidarity with the working classes and a sense of solidarity and shared involvement between older and younger generations. In the process, citizens rearticulated from mere victims to *indignados* and finally to *indignadanos*. They were able to do so in a form of collective protest that was played out at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of existence, as other researchers have observed. We have demonstrated that this multi-layered perspective of the struggle is also present in the slogans created by the people. The persuasive effect of this form of ideological meaning construction is therefore the result of a complex process that simultaneously relates discourse, socio-political context, and actors' emotions and actions.

5.2. Tentative Evaluation of the Level of Social Innovation of the Discourse of 15M

Let us now use the theoretical framework to evaluate innovative characteristics of 15M in terms of the movement's relation to social change in Spain. We have seen that 15M has constructed a new narrative to make sense of the past, present and future of the socio-political landscape. Seen from a Gramscian perspective, the *indignados* in Spain are well on the way to gaining

hegemonic acceptance of their ideas. A study by Metroscopia (23 October 2011) performed for the national newspaper El País stated that 73 per cent of the population agreed with the *indignados*.

Nevertheless, the fact that a majority voted for the PP, the right wing party (in the subsequent elections, November 2011), suggests that this majority has been unwilling to vote for a left wing alternative. As explained, this may be due in part to the electoral system in Spain, which is not organised by a system of direct representation. An additional problem is that the PSOE (the Socialist Party) has lost the confidence of large sectors of the population, since the party is accused of cooperating with the PP in a joint effort to serve the markets rather than the people. Furthermore, the left is split between different parties, which fragments the progressive sector of the electorate.

Spanish citizens, as well as the mass media and the political parties, were surprised by the coherence of these demands, given the spontaneous character of 15M and the lack of an official leadership. However, little by little, it was recognised that the proposed change coincided with the recent ideas of certain NGOs, intellectuals such as José Luis Sampedro, Manuel Castells, and Arcadi Oliveres, among others, and other groups such as ATTAC (www.attac.tv). These groups, as well as the left wing minority parties, massively supported 15M (in contrast, for instance, with the syndicates, which initially felt that 15M intruded on public spaces that they considered as their own platform).[7]

Seen from a discourse theoretical frame, it is obvious that 15M has created a myth, an alternative to the existing dominant political and economic situation. The question remains, however, whether the movement has the strength and power to recontextualise the political and economic arena in Spain. So far, 15M has not been able to disrupt the traditional electoral procedures. It did not stop Rajoy from winning the elections in November 2011 and imposing a new austerity regime on the country. So far, 15M has not been successful in resisting the power of the financial markets and it has not changed the economy.[8] The difficulty may lay, in part, in the roots of their grievances: the strength of the market in the present-day economy and the commitment of Spain to the EU, which imposes budgetary austerity on all member countries. In this sense, it is safe to conclude that 15M constructed a powerful myth. Though its views were shared by a large percentage of the population, the movement has been unable to turn this into a social imaginary (especially not according to the definition of this concept as described above by Montesano Montessori). 15M has been unable to gain full hegemony, but remains a counterhegemonic movement that protests against the economic and political status quo.

However, we consider that the process of the rearticulation of civil society has had strong effects. At the local level, civil society has shown examples of organizing itself differently. The best known and most successful has been the Platform of People Affected by Mortgage (http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com), which has succeeded that many peope across Spanish territory avoid eviction. One of the most famous leaders of this movement, Ada Colau, succeeded in creating a citizen platform in Barcelona that will participate in the next elections (24 May 2015). She managed to unite various leaders from leftwing parties and other social groups in town, which shared the vision of 15M. At the national level, Podemos emerged

under the leadership of Pablo Iglesias, who now counts with five seats in the European Parliament and forms a real threat to the PSOE.

6. Conclusions

This article contains a detailed analysis of the discourse of 15M, with the intention of showing the relationship among the narrative content of its placards, the discursive strategies found and the use of rhetoric-discursive and semiotic resources as a semiotic part of the rearticulation of the Spanish people from victims into empowered citizens. These three levels of analysis, performed in connection with the socio-political context in which they emerged, have revealed that this spontaneous group has constructed a completely new message to the rest of citizenry, in protest against the status quo and a reframing of the previous interpretation of the crisis. The new framework rejected earlier versions of understanding the crisis as an inevitable event and reframed it in terms of a conscious social construct of the financial and political sectors to follow the EU policies at the expense of the masses and in favour of the interests of the ruling elite. They also disseminated the belief that a powerful civil society is capable of constructing a distinct and more inclusive and socially just perspective.

This new message turns out to be innovative not only because of its content, but also due to its continuous construction and reconstruction through demonstrations, meetings, messages that go back and forth through cyberspace, and the way it simultaneously involves and is produced by people of all ages, who in the process have reconstructed their identity from victims to political agents. Throughout this process, the population has been able to experience positive emotions, such as a shared, collective protest against the ruling classes, a new sense of defending Spain's democracy—so difficultly achieved in the first place—as well as a sense of solidarity with the working classes. These emotions may have disappeared into the background during the era of consumerism in previous decades. The movement also differs from previous protests through its pacifism and the absence of leadership and hierarchy.

Notes

[1] Morales-López's research is part of the CEI project, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, and Feder Funds (HUM2007-61936FILO). More information in http://cei.udc.es.

[2] Juan Ramón García (2011) "Desempleo juvenil en España: causas y soluciones", *Documentos de Trabajo*, BBVA Research, downloaded (23 March 2012) from http://www.bbvaresearch.com/KETD/fbin/mult/WP_1130_tcm346-270043.pdf?ts=2332012).

[3] In August 2011 some of these countries, such as Portugal, Italy, Spain, Greece and Ireland, suffered major effects as a result of market responses by the financial speculators based on high private debts, and some also due to public debts (though this was not the case in Spain).

[4] A major instrument to achieve this has been the present electoral law, which helps to exclude minority parties from the political arena in favour of the principal parties who

maintain their privileges. The electoral law is the *Ley Orgánica 5/1985, de 19 de junio, del Régimen Electoral General.* More information on http://www.publico.es/30838/las-verdades-y-mentiras-de-la-ley-electoral (accessed 30 January 2013)

[5]   From a rhetoric tradition (Pujante 2003) and based on Labov's account on the structure of narratives (summarized in Georgakopoulou 2011), a narrative corresponds to a macro discursive genre, which can contain several subgenres, such as personal narratives, autobiographies, etc. (Bruner 1991: 4).

[6]   See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_side_(Star_Wars), uploaded April 21, 2012.

[7]   However, in new demonstrations of the main unions, 15M called on the participation of the general public. Morales López attended various demonstrations. It was easy to distinguish members who identified with 15M, because of the use of creative slogans and popular protest songs, in contrast to the formality of the placards of the unionists.

[8]   Unemployement has risen in 2014 to 26%.

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