Translocal Frame Extensions in a Networked Protest: situating the #IdleNoMore hashtag

Extensiones del marco traslocal en protestas en red: el caso del hashtag #idlenomore

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to examine how locally situated social movements can use social media to deploy translocally networked forms of protests. The study looks at the Canadian Idle No More movement, an indigenous and environmental grassroots initiative that emerged around the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 as a reaction to previous neglect of indigenous groups and to the omnibus bill proposal C-45 (which threatened both the partial sovereignty of indigenous territories and the Canadian environment). Focusing on the -decentralized and heterogeneous- movement's Twitter use in general, and the employment of the hashtag #idlenomore in particular, the study examines to which extent and how Twitter may be a means for establishing bonds between geographically dispersed social movements.

Resumen

El objetivo del presente estudio es examinar cómo movimientos sociales locales pueden usar formulas de protesta traslocal en red. El estudio trata sobre el movimiento canadiense "Idle No More", una iniciativa medioambiental indígena de base que emerge a finales del 2012 y principios de 2013 como reacción a la marginación de los grupos indígenas y a la propuesta de ley "omnibus" C-45 (que amenazaba tanto la soberanía de los territorios indígenas como el medioambiente canadiense). En relación con el habitualmente descentralizado y heterogéneo uso de Twitter , y en particular, con la forma de emplear el hashtag #idlenomore, el estudio examina en qué medida y cómo Twiter puede ser una forma de establecer lazos entre movimientos sociales dispersos geográficamente.

Keywords
Idle No More, Twitter, issue publics, frame analysis, social movements, translocality, framing theory, hashtag

Palabras clave
Idle No More, Twitter, asuntos de relevancia pública, análisis de marcos, movimientos sociales, traslocalidad, Teoría de los marcos, hashtag

Summary

Sumario

1. Introduction

The aim of the present study is to examine if and how locally situated social movements can use social media to engender translocal/transnational networked forms of protest or issues, or "ad hoc publics" (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). The study looks at the Canadian Idle No More movement, an indigenous and environmental grassroots initiative that emerged at the end of 2012. The study looks at circa 500,000 tweets, all containing the concept idlenomore, produced shortly after the emergence of the movement (1-31 January 2013). First, we use social network analysis to explore and visualize the material, focusing on co-occurrence between #idlenomore and other political and social movement hashtags. Secondly, in order to study how movement-ties are discursively framed by different Twitter-users, we use content analysis to qualitatively explore the content in a number of tweets. We conclude that hashtags can be interpreted as having a potential to align certain political campaigns by the creation of common political frameworks, by which some sort of issue public, that is a public created ad hoc around an specific issue, can be established. We also offer some critical remarks about our interpretations.

Online social media connections have enabled the formation of international networks among social movements. Even though local initiatives and uprisings in pre-Internet times communicated with each other to establish more overarching frameworks of resistance, such as student revolts or civil rights movements, such processes occur much faster and have a much broader reach in the modern age of digital virality and spreadability. The elements of transnational movements such as contention, indignation, solidarity, and support are shared online through social media, and such processes demand further analysis. Such an analysis must focus on both the physical spaces and the relational places in which social movements occur. In the digital age, it is increasingly less important where an activist or site of resistance is geographically located and increasingly more important how networked relationships and a translocal identification with conflicts, communities, and agendas is developed.

In this article, we focus on the Canadian indigenous and environmental movement called Idle No More that emerged in December 2012 and the beginning of 2013. We seek to specifically understand how the movement used Twitter and how the #idlenomore hashtag was deployed during the time just following the group's emergence not only within Canada but also how it surpassed national boundaries as well as certain movement structures. We analysed tweets containing this hashtag to gain a better understanding of how connections can be made during a movement's emergence and consolidation and to better conceptualise

Twitter's potential as a medium for political communication and organization. We also set out to examine what the use and co-occurrence of certain hashtags might signal within digital activist politics. This work seeks to answer the following questions:

- **To the extent that the #idlenomore hashtag co-occurs with other hashtags, what political struggles and movements do these hashtags signify? How can we interpret any ideological or political affinities between them?**

- **How can the diffusion of, and interconnection between, #idlenomore and other co-occurring hashtags be interpreted geographically? Can any translocal or transnational connections or patterns be identified?**

- **How do any such connections relate to processes of framing?**

According to Earl and colleagues (2013), there are too few studies that focus on how social media is used during a conflict or struggle. The most common approach is for studies to analyse how social media is used before or after a specific conflict or protest campaign. Our study, which explores the employment of the hashtag during the movement's initial stages and when it was taking form, tries to contribute to this line of research. We will try to describe how translocal connections were made in order to better conceptualise Twitter's potential as an organizational medium in situ, i.e., during a political conflict.

2. Idle No More

At the end of 2012, the Canadian indigenous protest movement Idle No More was initiated. The movement was born mainly in response to the omnibus bill proposal C-45, which, according to some critics, threatened the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and risked making harmful governmental and corporate interference in nature easier. The grassroots initiative was to become a central pillar in a struggle to secure indigenous rights and to protect the environment (cf. Jarvis 2013, Kinew 2012; Lavoie 2013; Lorenz 2013; Palmater 2013; The Canadian Press 2012a; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013). When trying to explain the movement's impact and why it attracted followers, some commentators have pointed to the movement's online presence and ingenious social media use (CBC

News 2013a & 2013b, The Canadian Press 2012b; Galloway 2012; Groves 2012; Kinew, 2012; Lindell, 2013; McMillan et al, 2013). This is not to say that Idle No More can be reduced to being "merely" a digital movement. Multiple protests and manifestations involving activities such as sit-ins, demonstrations, and roadblocks preceded and followed the initiative (Galloway & Moore 2013; Lavoie 2013). Yet, the movement has indeed taken advantage of the affordances of social media.

Many demonstrations took the form of flash mobs performing round dances, and because video recordings of such events were disseminated via newspapers and social media Idle No More received significant attention from the public (McMahon, 2012; Regan 2012; Lindell, 2013). In addition, much of the information from the movement regarding upcoming protest events, as well as updates on the movement's politics, was distributed via Facebook and other social media platforms. On Twitter, the use of the hashtag #idlenomore has been widespread globally and not just within Canada. In short, much of the movement's impetus seems to have been facilitated by online activities such as social media use.

As stated previously, the aim of the present paper is to gain a more adequate and comprehensive understanding of certain aspects of this social media use. When writing about Occupy Wall Street's early stages, Tremayne (2014: 113) states that "mapping and network analysis", which is the main method used in this work as described below, "may uncover important features of the movement's composition, organization and evolution". Our hope is that our analysis will disclose something similar regarding Idle No More's structural, organizational, and political components and its interconnections with other social and political movements. To do this, we focused on how the movement used Twitter and how the #idlenomore hashtag functioned as a conduit for an array of political voices. While our focus on Idle No More's emerging phase is not reducible to this article's time span, it must be acknowledged that the campaign was, and still is, an on-going movement. Our chosen time frame is a product of our methodological premises, and should therefore not be viewed as a comment on the persistence of Idle No More. Addressing the continuation of the movement is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

3. Previous research

Research on Twitter as a political medium has shown how it has been put to use in a multitude of contexts. Some scholars have focused on how Twitter was employed and what role it came to play in large, well known, and well-reported protest cycles and upsurges such as the Occupy movement,

the Indignados movement in Spain, and the Arab Uprising (Lotan, *et al.*, 2011; Gaby & Caren, 2012; Vallina-Rodriguez, *et al.*, 2012; Author; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Fernandez-Planells, *et al.*, 2014). Others have studied the use of Twitter in more small-scale, less well known, or more temporary expressions of social or political dissent (cf. Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Maireder & Schwarzenegger, 2012; Bastos, *et al.*, 2014). When addressing what the platform actually offers social movements and activists, the research points in a variety of directions. Some researchers have described social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter as potential political tools that have the ability to establish critical communities and create connective structures for action or networked counterpublics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Lindgren, 2013; Maireder & Schwarzenegger 2012; Penney & Dadas, 2014). In particular, Twitter and its onsite features such as retweeting can be used to distribute news or to advocate in support of certain events, demonstrations, policies, or agendas (Enjolras, 2012). They also make it possible to create and disseminate alternative descriptions of social movements that complement or correct mainstream news media representations (Croeser & Highfield, 2014). According to Choi and Park (2014) and their study of Korean "Twitter networks", retweeting can also be a way to build collective identities and can induce collective or social action (cf. boyd, *et al.*, 2010). Twitter can also, according to Gleason (2013), offer intellectual advantages. He contends that a Twitter hashtag can be a means of informal learning, and in his study of the Occupy Wall Street hashtag #OWS he claims that the hashtag enabled those following it to gain multifaceted knowledge about the movement and its principal politics.

Of course, there are opposing or more critical standpoints. In a study focusing on how immigration activists make use of Facebook and Twitter, Harlow and Guo (2014) claim that contemporary forms of contentious social media use and digital activism come down more to communication and connective structures than to creating or simplifying collective action (cf. Gladwell, 2011). Others question Twitter's organizational affordances by arguing that social media and Twitter might emphasize or strengthen protest movements or contentious politics and enable the dissemination of alternative political viewpoints, but that they fail in generating communicative bonds or dialogical and interactional milieus and processes (Vicari, 2013). There are also those who deem social media, or information and communication technology in general, to be the devil in disguise that allows for the creation of tools that can be used for surveillance and repression or the strengthening of corporate power rather than citizen empowerment (cf. Fuchs, 2008; Morozov, 2011).

4. Networked protests and the translocal

Social media have enabled the rapid and nimble diffusion of information and political practices between and within grassroots social movements around the world (Rane & Salem, 2012: 99). Through the use of social media, locally situated activists can connect with actors from all over the world who are involved in similar struggles (Sassen, 2012). This means that the borders between local, national, and global spaces, events and movements, as they all can be viewed as imbricated, are not as clear as they once were, and that it might become more difficult to separate physical spaces from social or political ones (cf. Olesen, 2005). This process allows for the development of transnational forms of activism and movement structures (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Sassen, 2012; Vicari, 2014). In this article, we use the notion of 'networked protests' to refer to such digitally enabled and potentially translocal and transnational arrangements in which activist initiatives and social movements are globally interconnected through various forms of communication.

Of course, a networked protest does not need to utilize social media, but today they often do. In such ecologies, where "Twitter streams can be crosscutting networking mechanisms" (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011) and where the effects of Twitter's organizational flexibility and velocity have significant impacts, the media can bring together different forms of communication and places, in addition to creating relations between online and offline political operations. Thus, notions of place or protests must be considered not as fixed entities but as negotiated processes. Out of such complexity –from which can emerge intricate protest ecologies that contain multiple forms of media and communication, as well as an array of different levels of spaces and places– comes the need to speak of protests not solely as spatially delimited cohesive forces but as potentially translocal ecosystems.

Another key concept is that of the translocal. Although discourses on the global and on globalization often tend to marginalize or disregard the role of the local, the latter is nonetheless still central in political struggles because these struggles are almost always taking place somewhere physical (cf. Hepp, 2004 & 2009). And with current forms of social media, these localities can be joined together and activist politics can take place at multiple sites at the same time. This provides novel issues for researchers in the field. As Olesen (2005: 435) puts it, "Local and national spaces of action are being transformed in the process of globalization, but they are not being eroded or otherwise made irrelevant. The challenge that confronts us is theorizing how social spaces are becoming increasingly intertwined".

The translocal concept addresses the fact that in an era of globalization the local is still important and that media connectivity can establish contacts between separate localities. This emphasizes "on the one hand, that those questions of all that is local still matter, but that on the other hand today's locales are connected physically and communicatively to a high degree" (Hepp, 2009: n.p.; cf. Hepp, 2004). Additionally, translocality, in contrast to the notion of the global or the glocal, promotes a perspective "that allows taking the local as the point of departure, and adding the glocal as a second component" (Carpentier, 2007: 6). Therefore, for any given protest ecology this concept helps us address the fact that not only can several actors or modes of communication co-exist but so can several protest places.

There exists, from this perspective, a myriad of translocalities rather than one global counterpart, and several of them are, via connective technologies such as social media, aligned and attached in different ways by the fact that they articulate similar grievances and create possible translocal or transnational publics (for more on transnational publics, see Olesen, 2005). To understand such transnational connections between different (trans) localities, one can turn to Tarrow and McAdam (2005) and their writings on scale shifts. Scale shifts, which can evolve into transnational contention where different places or struggles that were previously not connected can become interconnected through information "brokerage" or previously connected groups or struggles can become increasingly interconnected through information "diffusion", can have an upward or downward direction. The latter involves, for example, national or international campaigns or struggles addressing specific locales. The former involves the opposite movement, where local information or struggles migrate from the local to a national or global level, or travel to other specific locales. With the notion of translocal publics, we are here primarily interested in upward scale shifts.

Concerning Twitter, it thus becomes interesting to focus on "geographies of communication" (Askanius, 2012: 28) at the same time as one analyses locally situated, physical struggles and their interconnections. Using this concept analytically in tandem with the notion of protest ecologies, we hope to be able to address how, via social media use, physically distant but idealistically and politically adjacent places and struggles can become intertwined as issue publics via the establishment of politically focused and translocal imaginaries. We wish to emphasize, however, that our study does not aim to deny the local character of the Idle No More movement, but only seeks to focus on the movement's transnational and translocal dimensions.

5. Hashtags as frames

One way of studying the interconnections that constitute protest ecologies in social media settings is through patterns of hashtag use on Twitter (cf. Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Poell & Darmoni, 2012; Earl, *et al.*, 2013; Vicari, 2013; Croeser & Highfield, 2014). The main focus of this article is to analyse hashtag co-occurrences in relation to the #idlenomore hashtag in order to map digitally manifested connections between this movement and others. When carrying out a study like this, it is important to reflect upon the fact that such co-occurrences are not unambiguous. For instance, some researchers argue that the use of additional hashtags and URLs increases when a movement loses momentum and its Twitter stream diminishes (Vicari, 2013: 483; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011: 210), thus signalling a movement's demise.

Social movement or activist tweets that bring together several hashtags can also be seen as "attempts at brokerage" as opposed to "simple diffusion" (Tremayne 2014: 115). Using supplementary hashtags can be interpreted as a way to negotiate positions or relations and to gain strength and legitimacy for a movement. In a way, movements can, by including other hashtags, extend their specific politics and localities while at the same time staying rooted. This means that the movements can simultaneously become (or stay) both specific and general. By using hashtags, followers of the movement can become more engaged with the protest without needing to be physically present at the site of the particular struggle. This is because "hashtagged messages work as a channel to bring together users that are sympathetic to the protests but are not attending the demonstrations", and hashtagging can "thus connect regions geographically more isolated to urban centers, while at the same time offering a platform that brings social media users closer to street protests" (Bastos, *et al.*, 2014: n.p.). Thus the use of such technologies allows non-global and non-national relations to be forged.

An example of the relations described above can be found in the Occupy Wall Street protests in which hashtags such as #ows were used not only by protestors who were physically onsite but also by supporters from both near and far. These users included those from politically adjacent movements as well as those somewhat more ideologically dissonant, and this indicated that "the combination of separate hashtags […] is linked to (and reinforces) the complex relationships between local manifestations and the broader Occupy movement" (Croeser & Highfield, 2014: n.p.). To mention and include hashtags linked to movements that are both more or less similar to one's own might thus imply that Twitter can help tie ideas and movements together, diffuse ideas, and lead to scale-shifts in a protest

movement. This does not, however, mean that the different movements' internal differences are underestimated but, instead, that heterogeneous organizational flows can be aided by social media communication.

Through such Twitter scale-shifts (cf. Tremayne, 2014), groupings of activists and movements that share similar ideas or ideological and political rationales can form critical publics that object to certain aspects of a social or political culture. Accordingly, the hashtag can be used to construct a communicative and connective space where movements and publics can be brought together. A similar line of reasoning, which this article will adopt, is that the active combination of hashtags can indicate or even establish what Bruns and Burgess (2011) call "ad hoc publics". Such publics, which represent more or less temporal cohesiveness regarding movement politics and organizational logics, can be engendered by the connective structures that Twitter enables. Such publics –which are temporarily united by grievances and political ideas and by practices that are mediated through a specific hashtag– are ad hoc because they are created at the moment certain connective symbols are put to use and they can, given their connective infrastructure, transgress the perceived boundaries of social movements and countries. Therefore, these structures and relations can, in terms of geographies and spaces, be described to some extent using the notion of translocality.

The translocality of networked protests can be approached from the perspective of frame analysis (cf. Goffman 1974). Since the turn towards meaning work in social movement studies in the mid-1980s (Gamson, *et al.*, 1982, Snow, *et al*., 1986, Snow & Benford 1988), a significant body of literature has emphasised the role of activists as signifying actors. The focus here is on how "collective action frames" (Benford & Snow, 2000:613) are produced as the result of a process of symbolic production. In relation to such literature, one could argue that what is happening on Twitter as movement hashtags are brought together has do to with processes of "frame articulation" (ibid.:623) as well as "frame alignment" (Snow, *et al.*, 1986). That is, it is about formulating relationships between frames/tags and about symbolically constructing how such relationships are aligned.

With regard to the question of how a hashtag can be equated with a frame in this sense, one must be modest. We posit that hashtags, by being jointly articulated in tweets, can create a shared sense of meaning, as well as establishing common political reference structures, discourses, and aims. Yet, one also needs to recognize that such frames are mainly operating on a discursive level and, furthermore, that their concrete existence may be hard to verify. Irrespective of these reservations, we still argue that the notion of frames can prove to be a fruitful tool when studying movement struggles and structures. Using a hashtag,

as well as combining it with others, can be interpreted as an act of framing where the Twitter user engages in the construction of a vocabulary of motive in which some framings are more flexible and inclusive while others are more rigid and exclusive. Some framings –or movement hashtags– might evolve into what Benford and Snow (ibid.:618) refer to as master frames that come to function "as a kind of master algorithm that colours and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements". In other words, the resonance of frames/hashtags might vary considerably, and their degree of resonance is connected to their "narrative fidelity" (Fischer, 1984), that is, how well they resonate with the assumptions and narratives of other movements.

In this article, we first identify hashtag co-occurrences and how they –as an act of movement framing– bring together issues stemming from different parts of the world. We also discuss what such co-occurrences (or framings) actually might mean as we look closer at the content of the particular tweets where certain combinations of hashtags appear together.

6. Data and method

The data for this study consisted initially of a sample of 531,946 tweets matching the search term 'idlenomore' from 1-31 January2013. The tweets were collected in real-time using the *GNIP* service for so-called firehose access to Twitter. The data were archived and downloaded through *DiscoverText* (http://discovertext. com) and were subsequently accessed and analysed using a combination of different strategies. Datasets were prepared with the help of *TextWrangler* (http://barebones.com/products/textwrangler) as well as with custom coding in Python with particular use of the Regex and Pandas modules. Network analyses were performed and visualised with *Gephi* (Bastian, *et al.*, 2009), and the co-occurrence analysis of words in tweets was carried out using *Textometrica* (Author).

The analyses in this paper are structured according to our three research questions. The first question is about the co-occurrence of other hashtags with the #idlenomore hashtag. In order to answer this question, we extracted data about which hashtags –if any– were employed in the sample. We found that 488,569 (92%) of the total sample of tweets included hashtags, and that 224,717 (42%) included more than one hashtag. Data on co-occurrences of hashtags within tweets was used for network analysis and visualisation. Figure 1 in the empirical section of this article shows the most frequently co-occurring hashtags in the full dataset. For the sake of readability, we set a threshold at 480 tweets meaning that the graph shows only those hashtags that appear together with other tags in more than 479 tweets.

The second question concerns the geographical diffusion and interconnection between hashtags. Here it is important to note that we are not looking at the geodata of the tweets. In fact, as few as three out of the 531,946 tweets in the dataset came with public coordinates for where they were posted from (London, UK; Peterborough, Canada; Toronto, Canada). Also, we are not analysing tweet locations but the geographic locales of the *issues* that activist hashtags represent. A set of 68 movement hashtags, apart from #idlenomore itself, were selected manually in the dataset. Two or more of these hashtags occurred together in 18,532 tweets (10,209 of these were retweets and the remaining 8,323 were unique tweets). Figure 2 maps these co-occurrences using a layout based on manually added approximate geocoordinates for the *issues* that the hashtags represent. For example, #idlenomore was mapped to Canada, #arabspring to North Africa, #indignados to Spain, #yosoy132 to Mexico, #aaronswartz to the north-east US (because the acts of hacking happened at MIT, the prosecution took place in Massachusetts, and the suicide occurred in NYC), and #babalkarama to Jerusalem (which is the approximate location of the place where Palestinian activists installed the Bab Al-Karama village). Tags that are harder to map in this way were merged into a 'global' node, and this included overarching hashtags for Greenpeace, Anonymous, Occupy, Wikileaks, and so on. This approach is clearly somewhat subjective. However, because the aim of this process was primarily to give a rough mapping of the international dimensions of the translocal protest ecology that #idlenomore was a part of, and because we performed a qualitative analysis in the final step of the analysis of the textual content of the tweets (and thus focused more on how relations between movements were made and sustained), our approach should not pose any serious consequences for the study as a whole.

The third question is about the framing of connections between these activist hashtags. In order to analyse this, we extracted subsets of the data based on co-occurrences of hashtags for various geographically separated movements. These were then coded and categorised based on the number of hashtags they carried, the amount of text they contained (apart from the hashtags), and how the text was formulated (i.e., whether it was descriptive, diagnostic, or prognostic and whether it merely commented on political issues or also explicitly explained any interrelations between the hashtags). This led to a categorisation of the content that we present later in this article in the section "Frame articulations".

7. Symbolic connections between movements

Our first research question is about mapping the hashtags that co-occurred with #idlenomore to better understand how connections are made at the

symbolic level between #idlenomore and other tagged themes on Twitter. Using the analytical procedures described above, we examined how the hashtag #idlenomore was used in combination with other hashtags and if there were any particular patterns among the co-occurring hashtags. The material initially consisted of 67,148 distinct hashtags, but after applying the threshold as described in the methods section only the top 108 co-occurring hashtags were included in the analysis.

The result of this analysis is presented in Figure 1 where the key hashtag #idlenomore sits at the centre of the image. The sizes of the text labels are proportional to how often a hashtag occurred together with #idlenomore. The existence and width of edges between the hashtags represents the frequency with which they were combined. Note that all tags in the graph co-occur with #idlenomore, even though only the strongest links have been drawn, for improved readability.

FIGURE 1   Co-occurrences between #idlenomore and other hashtags

Even though it is hard to draw any precise and clear lines of demarcation separating the divergent hashtags and their intertwining connections by merely reading the graph, some empirically and theoretically interesting alignments exist. In reading the graph qualitatively –rather than applying any mathematical clustering algorithm– four thematic groups can be identified: 1) at the left side of the network map are hashtags where environmental connotations are coupled; 2) below and around the key hashtag of #idlenomore, one can identify hashtags united by being associated with indigenous issues and Canadian politics; 3) above #idlenomore, to the middle, hashtags that are linked to environmental struggles but also to Canadian, American, and international politics co-exist; and 4) above #idlenomore, in the right corner, hashtags that are addressing or representing both local (North American) and international political struggles and social movements are joined together.

Because Idle No More as a movement is the subject of this study, and because our interest lies in whether the movement was able to establish translocal bonds that transgressed local politics while also being receptive to it, we chose to focus on the last of these four thematic groups. This included hashtags with references to contemporary social movements and political struggles as well as to indigenous cultures that were similar to the ones that were part of Idle No More. The fact that hashtags for social movements and political struggles are bundled together in the figure indicates that Twitter-users often combined them, and this created a symbolic interrelation between the hashtags. Thus, the graph shows that hashtags such as #occupy and several hashtags representing more locally specific occupy movements, for instance, #ows (New York), #olsx (London), and #oo (Oakland), were used not only in relation to #idlenomore but also by users tweeting about #egypt, #tahrir, #anonymous, and #yosoy132.

In other words, there seems to exist some form of symbolic entanglement of movements that is facilitated by the connective structures and the communicational affordances that the Twitter platform offers. How these connective structures are expressed and maintained by interacting actors, and through which procedures of framing –that is, what the connections actually mean– will be addressed in the third step of the analysis. First, however, we will focus on geographic location and map the social movements in question. With this approach, we aim to add a spatial dimension to our analysis.

8. Geospatial connections between movements

To be able to further analyse the diffusion and interconnection of #idlenomore from a geospatial perspective, we widened the scope of the fourth thematic group by including more hashtags that were connected to social movements

in particular, and to social movement rhetoric and discourse in general, before executing the second step of the analysis.

This was done manually. We went through the material and included any hashtags with conceptually and politically relevant contributions that represented, or were associated with, other social movements or indigenous groups from other parts of the world[17]. In Table 1 we list the selected hashtags together with the number of times they co-occurred with #idlenomore.

TABLE 1   Hashtag and number of co-occurrences with #idlenomore

#HASHTAGS	NO.	#HASHTAGS	NO.
#occupy	1609	#osyd	39
#anonymous	757	#yosoy132	35
#manifencours	650	#occupyoakland	33
#oo	234	#indignados	31
#anon	205	#globalnoise	24
#osf	98	#freebradley	23
#babalshams	81	#greenpeace	21
#oatx	73	#ochi	21
#global	53	#ola	20
#tahrir	53	#occupydenver	18
#globaldayofaction	51	#odc	17
#opdx	47	#anonymiss	14
#olsx	45	#occupywallst	11
#occupycanada	44	#ohtx	9
#99percent	42	#opangel	6
#anonfm	40	#avaaz	4
#occupydetroit	40	#anonym	3
#oprollredroll	40	#opthunde	2
#freebrad	39	#onn	1
#occupywallstreet	39		

17   This was done for the simple reason that indigenous groups often face similar problems of political marginalization, economic injustices, and social and judicial discrimination in their national contexts. Therefore, it is not unlikely that tweets containing hashtags relating to indigenous peoples or struggles, even though they are not closely linked to the movement cluster, might focus on similar constructions of translocal solidarity and movement logics.

While some of these hashtags did not co-occur very often, their presence in the material might still represent a certain tendency for broadening movements and for establishing ties among politically contentious organisations that might be enhanced by the use of social media. Continuing the second step of the analysis, we thereafter made a network analysis of all hashtags containing mentions or representations of contentious struggles, social movements, and indigenous cultures and explored the translocal and transnational ties between the hashtags. The result of this analysis is shown in Figure 2[18].

FIGURE 2   Geospatial layout of co-occurrences between #idlenomore and other hashtags

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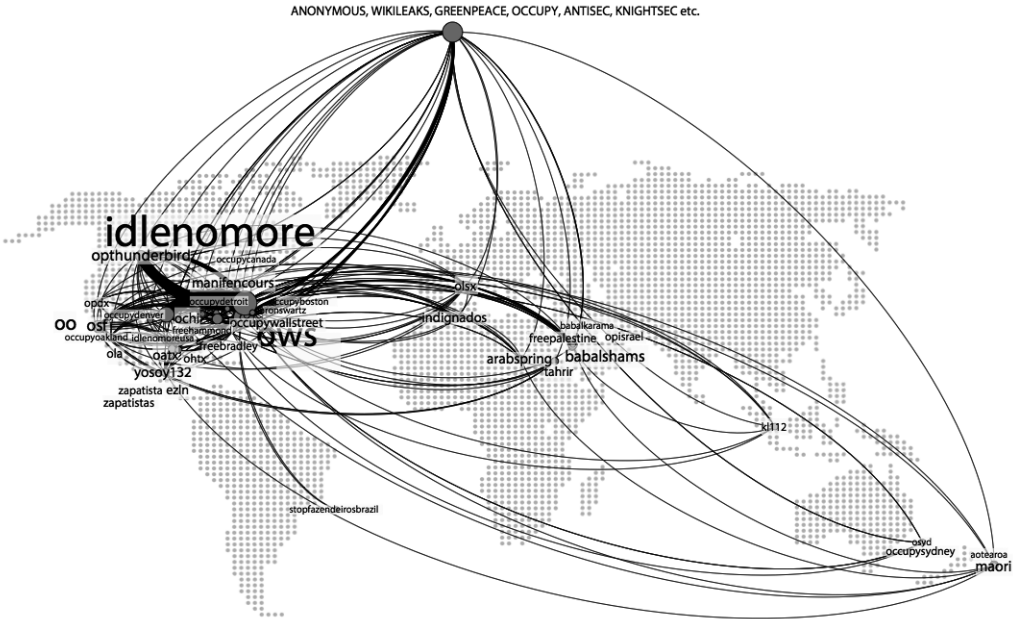
18   Some hashtags that should be on the map have been removed for the simple reason of clarity. These hashtags where all mainly centred in the US (#occupysteubenville, #manning, #hammond etc.). The tweets that contain a reference to these hashtags were included in the material that were qualitatively analysed in the third analytical step.

It was evident that certain relations did exist between the hashtags in the data, and this meant that Idle No More supporters, or external actors using the #idlenomore tag, did form connections with external movements and actors by adding other hashtags alongside it and thereby created the foundation for a movement structure that transgressed the national barriers of Canada.

In Figure 2, both local and non-local movements are shown. Locally, #idlenomore is, of course, at the centre together with the hashtag #manifencours that represents the Canadian student protests of 2012. However, the #idlenomore hashtag has numerous connections with US movements. The Occupy protests and movement of 2011 resides at the centre of the hashtag communication along with hashtags for city-specific struggles within the Occupy network. For instance, hashtags representing Occupy movements from all over the US frequently appear in the material (for example, Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Boston, Occupy Oakland, Occupy San Francisco, and Occupy Houston). But it does not stop there, and other movements from North and South America with which connections are made (in both directions, it should be added) are the Zapatista movement and #yosoy132 (a protest movement that is striving to re-democratize Mexican political structures and media and has been likened to the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring uprisings), both from Mexico, as well as #stopfazendeirosbrazil, which is a hashtag briefly used to describe, and call for resistance against, the violence exercised against indigenous peoples in Brazil.

On a more international level, hashtags representing Occupy London Stock Exchange (#olsx), movements from Palestine that are critically engaged with Israeli politics, the Spanish Indignados movement, the Arab Spring protests, and the KL112 rally in Malaysia (an event where masses of people congregated to express their frustration with the government in an attempt to bring forth political change) as well as Occupy and indigenous politics in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) are included. On the global level (placed above the world map in Figure 2), we brought together political organizations, social movements, critical media institutions, and temporal social and political initiatives and actions that do not have a clear geographic position. These movements (which mainly comprise hashtags connected to Anonymous and Wikileaks as well as Greenpeace) can –despite their "placelessness"– have a prominent role when establishing political identity.

A reasonable question to ask is whether the hashtags actually represent the mentioned struggles or movements. However, it is important to remember that these associations and interconnections –with lesser or greater intensity– might generate a sense of belonging among those using the hashtags as well as those following the Twitter streams in question and bestow them with further internal and external legitimacy. By such processes of framing, through which the Twitter

feature of hashtags can operate as a means by which to (re-)organize, portray, situate, and implicitly describe particular messages, as well as a movement and its contents or borders, supporters and followers of a certain political enterprise can be guided in how to interpret and relate to the political communication they are a part of or are observing. For instance, by perceiving Idle No More as being related to other social movements and cultural struggles, cognitive and socio-political meaning making can be affected, and this can produce, among other things, a sense of political community without neglecting differences in political ideas or scope.

The creation of the connections we have identified is, of course, in no way a consequence solely of networked communications and social media. However, these connections can be augmented through such technologies and platforms. In other words, behind and within the connections in Figure 2, a form of ad hoc issue public might exist that unites divergent actors around discontent toward, and dissatisfaction with, contemporary society's prevailing environmental, political, and economic conditions. However, to be able to say anything about what these relations were actually about, how they were upheld, and under what terms they were implemented, we need to take one more analytical step and examine the content of the tweets that carried the hashtags.

9. Frame articulations and extensions

In this final analytical step, we analysed the frame articulations resulting from users tweeting the #idlenomore hashtag together with other hashtags. The coding procedure described in the methods section led to the identification of the following four main categories (a fifth category could consist of tweets sharing links to news-items, blog posts, and so on; since an examination of such content goes beyond the aim of the present study, we chose not to include this aspect in the analysis):

1) tweets that "merely" added hashtags to each other with little or no other written text to aid the reader in deciphering why these hashtags were articulated and brought into a common frame;

2) tweets that carried a couple or a series of hashtags and, in contrast to Category 1, also added the notion of solidarity that created frame resonance –or narrative fidelity– between

movement hashtags (that is, the tweets indicated that the senders were fighting for similar causes or struggling against similar opponents or structures);

3) tweets that, aside from #idlenomore and one or more of the other social movement hashtags, included short informational sections of text reporting on upcoming or recent events or included very broad messages directed to the general public; and

4) tweets that, in addition to the hashtags, carried text that explicitly portrayed scenarios or offered reasons for why the hashtags represented different social movements were combined.

In the first category, tweets carried up to 12 hashtags but, as stated, had no or only minimal additional text. Some examples are[19]:

> #TwitterStorm #NYCBusStrike ALL DAY! #oo #ows #osf #ola #omn #odc #occupy #anonymous #ohtx #opdx #oatx #idlenomore #solidarity

> #BabAlShams #KL112 #HKR112 #idlenomore #manifencours #Anonymous #nokxl

> #solidaritysaturday #ISupportManning #slutwalk #idlenomore #occupy #Anonymous #nokxl #criticalmass #1billionrising

Here, user-commentators have simply stacked hashtags, and this was a quite common pattern in the material. Because they lacked any descriptions to frame the content of the tweet, little help was provided to any reader trying to grasp why the hashtags were connected. These tweets might even in some cases have been posted by bots or otherwise automated accounts. But regardless of the identity or motivations of the authors of tweets like these, they still represent a source of articulatory practice. In the terms of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Hall (1981), articulation has to do with the ordering of elements or subject positions

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19   We chose, for reasons of anonymity, to remove Twitter aliases.

into chains of meaning, and tweets like these have the potential to contribute to establishing such chains. When we speak of A, we also speak of B. While such an analysis is, of course, highly tentative, the pattern becomes more pronounced when we look at the second category.

Tweets in the second category diverged from the first by the fact that the notion of solidarity was explicitly attached, and this often provided some rationale for having a large number of hashtags heaped onto one another. The tweets, which often contained a variety of hashtags, are exemplified below:

> Solidarity to all those marching.. be safe out there.. If in doubt always LuRk MoAr!! #Anonymous #IdleNoMore #AntiSec #OpIsrael #FTP

> My solidarity to you Malaysia #KL112. The whole world is watching. Stay strong. #IdleNoMore #OWS #Anonymous #GlobalNoise #AllToghetherNow #UP

> Solidarity. Unity. People. Power. #NeverForget #J28 #FTP #J4AB #oo #osf #idlenomore #anonymous #bayarea #oakland #sanfrancisco

Here too, as in the first category, the content of the tweets was of little help for potential readers in getting any deeper understanding of the common political, economic or cultural ground shared by the hashtags. The concept of solidarity obviously indicates that something is uniting them, but what that something is, is not made clear.

We come closer to such a narrative in the third category where tweets tended to contain longer passages of text. Nevertheless, they seldom explained the interrelation between the hashtags. Instead, they purveyed general comments on themes such as political struggles, indigenous politics, or economic injustices, as well as considerations about the media and media portrayals of different movements. In some cases they were purely descriptive of current events or contained general statements expressing the writers' opinions on politics, economics, or culture, and in others they commented on on-going struggles of various sorts. But they did not, at least not overtly, explain why different movements or struggles (which were obviously represented by the hashtags) had common characteristics (that is, the authors did not explain which socio-political or economic traits were shared by the movements that were represented by the hashtags). But in some cases they carried links that directed the reader to material

that did explain the relationship (it must be noted that we have not analysed any links within the tweets because this was not the aim of the study).

> #VANCOUVER TO BECOME NAMERICA;S LARGEST COAL EXPORTER #idleNOmore #J28 #dtes #anonymous #vanpoli #oo #ows #antisec #INM

> Interesting #twitter #Hashtags to check out right now : #OpLastResort, #OpAngel, #IdleNoMore, #OpThunderbird #Anonymous

> What is this global revolution happening now? http://t.co/ spoEt5km #IdleNoMore #revolution #occupy #humanrights

While the three categories described above are variants of frame articulation in the sense that they all include tweets that create symbolic linkages between hashtags and movements by articulating them together in chains of equivalency, the fourth and final category illustrates a more refined type of framing. In these tweets –which had clarifying writing addressing what similarities the tagged movements had and why they should be mentioned together– there was a move from mere frame articulation towards frame alignment. Snow, *et al.*, (1986:472) write about a specific form of alignment, labelled "frame extension", that aptly describes the process at work in these tweets. Frame extension is what happens when a movement extends "the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents". They also write:

> In effect, the movement is attempting to enlarge its adherent
> pool by portraying its objectives or activities as attending to
> or being congruent with the values or interests of potential
> adherents (ibid.).

This is what was done through the tweets in the fourth category. In these tweets, written statements were not only more pronounced when acknowledging similarities between movements, but they also presented the linkages between disparate struggles in more precise terms. Some examples:

> #idlenomore and #stopfazendeirosBrazil are common fights but
> differents consecuences VIDEO http://t.co/2fVkzOlk (sic?)

#wikileaks, #Sidibouzid, #Jan25, #occupy, #anonymous, #idignados, #idlenomore all have thier place in the drama that is resistance to empire (sic?)

We must stand up against all forms of intimidation, violence, hatred, etc. #OWS #Anonymous #IdleNoMore #GlobalSolidarity #KL112 #FreeBradley

The corporations that evict us from our homes are multi-national. Our #solidarity must be, too! #IdleNoMore #Anonymous #KL112 #GlobalNoise

These tweets, in which a narrative created a sense of cohesiveness among the hashtags, were rare in the total material. Even still, the content of these tweets, which extend the frame of Idle No More to create interlinkages with and between several movements, forms of activism, or manifestations of resistance (to capitalism, to anti-indigenous political initiatives, to environmental devastation, and so on) indicate that social movements and activists today are in new ways acknowledging –in real-time– that struggles similar to their own are often taking place at several levels simultaneously. In contrast to the context described by Snow, *et al.*, in the 1980s, social media today enable a translocal and highly networked form of crowdsourcing of the narrative work of frame articulation and frame extension.

Beyond that, these new media also enable completely new forms of networked protest spaces. In these tweets, a politically defined *we* clearly emerges (and, by the same logic, a *them*). Even if this 'we' is heterogeneous by default, connections are still made between different struggles. This can be seen as an illustration of the emergence of what Hemsley and Eckert (2014: 1844) calls "the relational public squares of digital interaction" (the term square in this case not only refers to actual town squares but also to geographically remote areas and digital places). Of course, this has always been the case, and ties have regularly been made between extra-parliamentary organizations and movements from different nations. But here it becomes obvious not only to the actors involved but also to external observers, and this suggests the existence of a dialectical motion involving the local area of contention and a non-local sphere of political meaning-making that influences how struggles or political critiques are framed. In these tweets, the resistance the writers express is framed as a resistance of the people against governmental and corporate enemies. By framing their different political campaigns in terms of a struggle against a global culture that threatens

the well-being of all, as critiques of capitalism and parliamentary politics that lack the ability to defend non-economic values and the interests of the population at large, and resistance to policies and laws that oppress indigenous cultures, specific differences between social movements become negligible. By creating apparent linkages to other movements, symbolic legitimacy can be gained and a particular movement's local positions might be improved.

10. Concluding discussion

The question to ask is whether the results of our analysis suggest that the hashtag #idlenomore surely and unambiguously constitutes an interface that connects movements, struggles, and places. This does not have to be the case, so we need to be cautious; "it is important to remember", as Segerberg and Bennett (2011: 202) point out, "that data from Twitter streams only contain a slice of the collective action space, and that what the slice looks like may change as other elements in the evolving environment interact with the users and managers of the stream". First of all, the study looked at textual material from Twitter and not from concrete and sanctioned collaborations, linkages, and relations between movements. Also, one can question whether the hashtags we focused upon really represent the movements they signify and to which they are related. Hence, our analysis of the material cannot offer indisputable evidence for the achievement of offline inter-movement relations. However, given how the study was framed, this does not mean that our results are insignificant.

The analysis of frames in this article encompasses tweets published during a particular phase of Idle No More which means that we are not able here to cover the temporal development of the movement. Nevertheless, the ties made to other movements, with other time sequences and different ideological structures (e.g., Occupy), suggest that larger chains of meaning, with longer durations, were created. Still, we do not propose that the hashtag use within the Idle No More movement discloses all of the movement's internal mechanisms nor that it fully tells the tale of how the movement organized its protests or how its supporters actually carried out resistance. But we do claim that the Twitter stream gravitating around #idlenomore created an issue public that was based on a discursively framed sense of cohesiveness in how different movements and struggles were framed according to a common political project. By merging with such ambulatory and hybrid organizations (and vice versa) in terms of politics, place, and geography, a movement such as Idle No More (or any of the other movements entangled in the same framework) can gain additional attention. This

also allows such movements to initiate a political public that, given its ideological and organizational mobility, surpasses already established organizational and political relationships and moves toward novel ideological configurations that might confer additional legitimacy upon the movements. According to Gleason (2014), these processes can also be facilitated by the informal learning that Twitter makes possible. It is certainly imaginable that those who follow the #idlenomore stream on Twitter can acquire knowledge not only about that particular movement but also about the more wide-ranging and complex protest ecology that, through means of language frames, is created by the fact that several social-movement hashtags become interlocked through dynamic connective processes of communication.

In this era of connectivity, where the role of actual place becomes less important –because "connections are to people and not to places" (Wellman, 2001, p. 234)– the symbolic creation of a heterogeneous public can be created across the globe. In other words, through the circulation of a certain discursive framework that emulates a shared rhetoric of resistance, an issue public can emerge. *This issue public, or networked protest, grows out from the interconnection between several movements rather than only emanating from Idle No More's political campaigns.* Twitter communities, or publics, can, therefore, offer a sense of solidarity and unity during, for example, upsurges or tumultuous protest situations even if they deviate from the conventional view of what a community is. This means that users, as Varnali and Gorgulu (2014) observed in their study on the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, can "feel a sort of shared sense of consciousness and ideological similarity with their social networks in Twitter". Twitter and the publics that it makes possible can, in other words, not only offer interactive means but also a platform through which a common political project or a shared sense of meaning can be produced. This does not, however, necessarily mean that collective action will follow.

Given the criticisms of the political potential of social media presented by some scholar, (see the Previous research section for some examples), this is not an open-ended and clear-cut development. For instance, the discursive level is also a site for struggle both within and between movements. Because "[h] ashtagged messages –and their retweets– may disperse widely in unpremeditated combinations across a variety of feeds and networks" (Segerberg & Bennet, 2011: 203), nothing can be laid out in advance. This study had some shortcomings, especially the fact that it only analysed the connective structures that the data presented without focusing further on what these structures actually mean. What these interlinkages essentially amount to must, therefore, be left for future research. It would, for instance, be of interest to analyse who the commentators are or where they are located and whether it is organizations or individuals that

predominate the stream. In addition, interviews with actual content providers could provide a stronger and more thorough understanding of the role of Twitter hashtags in the creation of ad hoc publics. It would also be of interest to look closer at the links that the tweets carried, for example, to examine what kind of news sources Twitter users preferred.

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