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REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN CATALONIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a dialectic of repression and resistance at work in the most recent wave of contentious politics in Catalonia. It emphasises the brief but certain resurgence of a discursive and performative repertoire recollecting Catalonia's revolutionary past in the wave of contentious politics that has swept the region over the past decade, since the onset of the so-called Eurozone crisis. The paper seeks to provide an interpretation of the region's recent cycle of contentious politics through the lens of state repression. It hones in on an emblematic moment, from the spring of 2011, associated with the *Indignados* movement. It pays particular attention to their violent removal by the police from the Plaça Catalunya in May, and to the attempt to surround the Catalan Parliament to disrupt the budget debate the following month. It contends that the violent repression of the *Indignados* movement in Catalonia by the "regional" authorities is best understood as a reflex response to an incipient challenge to existing constellations of hierarchical and oppressive social relations - a challenge that echoed, indeed threatened to revive, long-suppressed memories of the region's revolutionary past, to "blast" this past "out of the continuum of history," to "appropriate its memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger" (Benjamin). This moment of violent repression by the Catalan authorities proved the precursor, the condition of possibility, for the subsequent re-channelling of contentious politics within the more comfortable confines of hierarchically-structured, nationalist imaginaries.

KEYWORDS

Catalonia; collective memory; collective amnesia; 1936 revolution; *Indignados*.

REPRESIÓN Y RESISTENCIA EN CATALUÑA

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo trata la dialéctica de la represión y la Resistencia en la reciente ola de política contenciosa en Cataluña. Ponemos énfasis en el resurgir breve pero cierto del repertorio discursivo y performativo del recuerdo del pasado revolucionario de Cataluña durante esta ola que ha barrido la región desde hace una década, desde el inicio de la así-llamada crisis de la Eurozona. El trabajo intenta proveer una interpretación del ciclo de política contenciosa de la región a través del enfoque de la represión estatal. Afilamos en un momento emblemático, de la primavera de 2011, asociado con el movimiento de los Indignados. Prestamos especial atención en su desalojo violento por parte de los Mossos d'Esquadra en mayo, y el intento en el mes siguiente del cerco al Parlament Catalán, con el fin de interrumpir en el debate presupuestario. Sostenemos que la represión violenta del movimiento de los Indignados en Cataluña por parte de las autoridades 'regionales' mejor se entiende como la respuesta a un desafío incipiente a las constelaciones jerárquicas de relaciones sociales oprimidas - un desafío que se hizo eco, de hecho amenazó con revivir, recuerdos largamente reprimidos del pasado revolucionario de la 'región', un desafío que pudo haber hecho "explotar" este pasado fuera del "continuo de la historia," para "apropiarse de su memoria cómo se enciende en un momento de peligro" (Benjamín). Este momento de represión violenta por las autoridades catalanas demostró ser el precursor, la condición de posibilidad, para la posterior canalización de la política contenciosa dentro de los confines más cómodos de imaginarios nacionalistas - imaginarios, por supuesto, estructurados jerárquicamente.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Cataluña; memoria colectiva; amnesia colectiva; revolución de 1936; Indignados.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on a dialectic of repression and resistance at work in the most recent wave of contentious politics in Catalonia. It seeks to illuminate the ways in which this dialectic has shaped and constrained the contours of contention, with a focus on the fate of the *Indignados* movement in the region. It emphasises the consequences of the repression of the memory of a particular historical event, or conversely, the cultivation of a particular instance of collective amnesia, provoked by a sequence of traumas and series of ruptures, reinforced, even consolidated, by the contours and confines of particular counter-hegemonic projects. The so-called *Indignados* movement, a form of youth mass mobilisation that built on the ideas of the 'Arab Spring' to challenge de-democratisation and corruption, visibly expressed itself in Barcelona with the occupation of Plaza Catalonia, undoubtedly the heart of this large city. Daily assemblies and a plethora of community activities performed a collective exercise of participatory democracy from below. After almost two weeks of 'occupation', however, the police forces of the regional government violently intervened, forcing the dismantling of encampments amidst scenes of great violence. Early in the morning on the 27th of May, 2011, the regional police force used the pretext of the need to clean the Plaza in preparation for possible celebration of Barça fans after the upcoming Champions' League final. They arrived on the scene wearing anti-riot gear, and proved themselves quick to use their batons. Over one hundred were injured when police forcefully removed protestors from the Plaza (RTVE 2011).

This paper argues that the violent repression of the *Indignados* movement in Catalonia in 2011 by the "regional" authorities is best interpreted as a reflex response to an incipient challenge to existing constellations of hierarchical and oppressive social relations – a challenge that echoed, indeed threatened to revive, long-suppressed memories of the region's revolutionary past, to "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis XV), and thereby to resurrect the horizons of consciousness of a "heroic" time when the struggle for "self-determination" could be forged and fought in decidedly *internationalist* and radically-egalitarian, radically-democratic, rather than banal national and nationalist, terms. In searching for the long-term rationales behind repression, this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the intersection of structural conditions that raise the odds of confrontation between social movements and Governments in general, and between youth activism and regional policy-makers in particular.

The article builds on the social-scientific literature on collective memory, a body of literature which can be traced back to the influential work of Maurice Halbwachs ([1925]1992), who famously stressed that

"there are as many collective memories as there are groups and institutions in a society" (Cosser 1992, p.22). We follow Benedict Anderson ([1991]2006), in particular, in emphasising the intimate interconnection between memory and forgetting. At the same time, we seek to situate collective memory (and collective amnesia) firmly within the terrain of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects.¹ The historical event, whose memory has been repressed, though not entirely forgotten, is that of the anarchist revolution, a revolution that broke out in 1936 in Catalonia, in the immediate aftermath, and in response to, the fascist uprising against Spain's Second Republic. The revolution's all-too-short-lived-but-still-heroic victories and achievements, not to mention its libertarian and decidedly internationalist bent, had been nearly drowned out not only by forty years of fascist propaganda, but also by a "conspiracy of silence" (Ealham 2010) perpetrated by an alliance among counter-hegemonic communist and neo-republican currents, whose predecessors and idols were responsible for rolling back the revolution in the first place. These memories have been repressed but never fully forgotten. The irruption onto the scene of the *Indignados* movement in the Spring of 2011, with its radically-egalitarian, direct-democratic and staunchly *internationalist* inspiration and outlook, if but for a brief moment, threatened to "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis XV), to revive long-lost revolutionary horizons of consciousness, and thereby to transcend and confound the narrow "national" confines in which the struggle for "self-determination" has been constricted. Faced with such an incipient threat, the "regional" authorities proved quick to resort to the state's monopoly over violent coercion.

In an introduction to his classic, *Animal Farm*, George Orwell famously and incisively insisted: "The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept in the dark, without the need for any official ban" ([1945]1972). Charles Lindblom (1990) and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1993) have more recently elaborated a set of mechanisms by which unfashionable ideas can come to be marginalised and silenced, even in the absence of explicit censorship. With respect to the silencing of and systematic distortions about the significance of the anarchist revolution (and counter-revolution) in Spain, Orwell himself left an eloquent testament, in his *Homage to Catalonia*. Along similar lines, in the 1960s, Noam Chomsky would famously denounce the alliance between "liberal" and "communist" interpretations of the "civil" war for their convergence in deliberately diminishing and disparaging the achievements of the anarchist revolution ([1968]2005).² The defeat of the revolution, followed by the victory of fascism, the virtual eradication of anarchist organizations and traditions once so influ-

ential among the working classes in Catalonia, the imposition of a fascist model of capitalist development, and subsequently, the pacted transition to a post-fascist model of bourgeois democracy – this sequence of traumas and series of ruptures – have together served to submerge deep into the “political unconscious” the memory of the radical-democratic and revolutionary-internationalist project of self-determination, once espoused and practiced by the anarchists in Catalonia, during those heroic years.³ And yet, in a moment of crisis, with the irruption of the *Indignados* movement, there appeared on the scene a force which, if but briefly, seemed a harbinger for the vengeance of the vanquished, whose means and message harkened back to those heroic years, and thus prefigured the return of the repressed. Until it was violently, and effectively, repressed, as if in an effort to defuse a ticking time bomb.

John Thompson has defined the “social imaginary” as “the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world, the dimension through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life” (1984, p.6). More recently, Charles Taylor has employed the same concept to refer to “the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations” (2007, p.171). We argue that the monopoly of contending nationalist projects in the dominant social imaginary in Spain has been greatly facilitated by the virtual eradication of the anarchist tradition in Spain, a tradition which was characterised by both (a) a critique of hierarchy in all its forms and (b) a thoroughgoing revolutionary internationalism. With the defeat and submersion of the Spanish anarchists’ distinctively anti-hierarchical, class-based project of self-determination, rather more banal, if rival, *nationalist* projects of self-determination, have come to monopolize the “social imaginary.” The irruption on the scene of the *Indignados* movement, with its discursive and performative repertoire echoing and prefiguring the return of an alternative, radically-egalitarian social imaginary, with its decidedly *internationalist* outlook and inspiration, in sync with the pattern and pace of mass mobilizations in Madrid, and with its direct-democratic, rather than “national” or “nationalist” project of self-determination, constituted a clear threat to the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects of Spanish and Catalan ruling elites. Its violent repression by the Catalan authorities was the precursor, the precondition, the condition of possibility, for the re-channelling of contentious politics within the more comfortable confines of hierarchical, nationalist imaginaries.

The article begins with a discussion of collective memory and amnesia. It then turns to assess the

ways in which the repression of the memory of Catalonia’s revolutionary past has served to condition and constrain the dynamics of resistance in the present, with reference to the fate of the *Indignados* movement in particular. We contend that the repression of the memory of this revolutionary past has helped “make the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice,” thereby effectively “cutting the sinews of its greatest strength” (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis XII). This case of collective amnesia has rendered class conflict more manageable, in no small part by facilitating the monopolization of the social imaginary by rival *nationalist* projects. We further contend that the irruption on the scene of the *Indignados* movement threatened to “blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin [190]1968, Thesis XV), threatening a rupture that, if but for a moment, appeared as if it might allow for a return of the repressed. Until it was violently, and effectively, repressed. We conclude by emphasizing how the ongoing polarization for and against the project of Catalan *national* self-determination has functioned to fend off the spectre of perhaps a more fundamental fissure, along class lines, both in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain.

The “regional” authorities were quick to repress the incipient challenge to social-property relations posed by the *Indignados* movement in Barcelona; and the movement itself, proved ill-prepared to respond to such swift and efficient repression. Nor could the movement fend off a turn in the terms of contentious politics away from the demand for “real democracy,” towards the demand for “national” self-determination. This turn, it must be stressed, would be co-opted, perhaps even protagonised, by the very same “regional” authorities who had been so eager to exercise their partial control over the coercive apparatus against the *Indignados*, only to subsequently have the balance of power within the coercive apparatus turned against them.

The article thus departs from most of the literature on contentious mobilization in two important respects: first, in its stress on the dynamics and motives of state repression; and second, in its focus on repression by and of “regional” state authorities. Indeed, our interpretation is consistent with what experts on repression have referred to as “the law of coercive responsiveness” (Davenport 2007a, p.7; DeMeritt 2016), and with the findings of those who have observed a clear tendency towards increasing recourse to repressing contentious politics in the “age of surveillance” (Grasso and Bessant 2018), but stands in some tension with the thesis of “domestic democratic peace” (Davenport 2007b). We contend that the *Indignados* movement posed a threat to ruling elites at both the “national” and the “regional” levels. The “regional” authorities in Catalonia reacted with a particularly repressive reflex against the emergence of an alternative social imaginary, one emphasising a

division between elites and the people, rather than a division between peoples. Nevertheless, this incipient threat posed by the *Indignados* movement was violently, and effectively, extinguished.

As such, our account links the recourse to state repression on the part of the “regional” authorities to the management of collective memory. The voices from Barcelona’s revolutionary past were again silenced, the memories of their heroic resistance, of their revolutionary resilience, again repressed. While dominant, if rival, national imaginaries were again imposed. The “regional” authorities thereby managed successfully to re-channel the direction of contentious politics, by wielding coercive power against the Catalan people in one moment, and successfully disguising themselves as the Catalan people in the very next. Though they were destined to be repressed, too, by “national” authorities determined to impose a strict, neo-centralist interpretation of the constitution and the rule of law. All as if in accordance with Thrasymachus’s dictum that might makes right.

Memory and Forgetting

In a most suggestive chapter on “Memory and Forgetting,” in his contemporary classic, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson refers to a transformation in collective memory that took place – “at the state’s margins”, he insists – in relation to the bellicose events in Spain in the 1930s, originally conceived, by both sides, as a clash of “global historical forces and causes”, subsequently reconceived and recollected as “fratricide,” or “civil war”. The vanishing of the world-historical from the Iberian stage, its replacement with a more prosaic memory about a war ‘between brothers’, Anderson goes on to note, “played a crucial role” in the country’s “startlingly smooth transition to bourgeois democracy,” even before that memory became “official” (Anderson [1991]2006, pp.201-202). From the world-historic, the heroic, the epic, the tragic; to the national, the prosaic, the commonplace, the surprisingly banal. Such was the transformation in the stakes of collective struggles in Spain that occurred between the thirties and the seventies, as the elder sibling Anderson so perceptively observed.

Fascist dictatorship combined with capitalist development together worked effectively to repress, to suppress, to transform the world-historic into the banal. Or perhaps more precisely, the fascist dictatorship repressed, the capitalist development transformed, and the post-fascist democracy consolidated, normalised, the effects of this repression, this transformation. Thus was Spain’s progress: the spectre of “uni-dimensionality” (Marcuse [1964]2002) was consummated; the “society of the spectacle” (Debord 1967) achieved. Like elsewhere in Europe, the country has witnessed “[t]he passing of historical forces which ... [once] seemed to represent the possibility

of new forms of existence.” With this passing, “[t]he inner dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root ... [has been effectively] whittled down” (Marcuse [1964]2002, p.12). Indeed, what’s worse, “[t]he smug acceptance of what exists ... [has even] merge[d] with purely spectacular rebellion” (Debord 1967, paragraph 59). In Spain, such a process has been significantly reinforced by the violent and systematic extirpation of the organizations, traditions, and even memories of the country’s once-militant working class (Aguilar 2002; Cavallaro and Kornetis 2019). And yet, in moments of crisis, these repressed collective memories still threaten to resurface; their spectre continues to haunt the imaginaries of today’s ruling elites, causing them to reflexively respond to any sign of such resurfacing with vehemence, with violence.

The recent wave of contentious politics in Catalonia almost managed to escape the narrow confines of the “society of the spectacle.” However, the cycle of contention that began in synchronization with the rest of Spain in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis took on a particularistic dynamic and momentum from the early autumn of 2012, as the demand for “real democracy” gave way to the call for Catalan “national” self-determination (Carvalho 2018; Portos 2016). Echoes from the heroic past could be heard in the *Indignados*’ protests, but soon the “smug acceptance of what exists,” the “purely spectacular” dimension of *nationalist* street rebellion, managed to drown out these echoes. The *Indignados* proved incapable of exercising dual power; their radical-democratic repertoire proved all too easy to repress. The incipient prefiguration of alternative, radical democratic forms of collective decision-making, conjured in antagonistic opposition to the state, were effectively controlled, and rechannelled into a current of *nationalist* discontent, the so-called *procés*, in which the logic of neoliberal austerity and even that of the ongoing, Orwellian “war on terror” have, for the most part, gone uncontested. As Marcuse poignantly put the point: “There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms” ([1964]2002, p.13). Nevertheless, the recent wave of contentious politics has certainly managed to provoke an authoritarian turn in the Spanish polity, and thereby to reveal the coercive power of the Spanish state, operative both at the “national” and “sub-national” levels, ever-present, always conditioning and lurking beneath, the now-fractured constitutional consensus (Avila et. al. 2015; Calvo and Portos 2018; Oliver and Urda 2015).

The Ghosts of Revolution

Barcelona looms large in the revolutionary imaginary, *la rosa de foc*, a sacred city of sorts, a place where the political unconscious still reels from the bloody history of a not-so-distant past, a battlefield where an epic struggle for self-determination was

once waged, back in 1936, and whose cemeteries are still haunted by the ghosts of that revolution's (perhaps overdetermined and yet still) tragic defeat. But this history, these phantasmagoria, have remained for the most part suppressed, if never fully forgotten, only creeping in subliminally, in ways that mostly work to condition reflexes of submission, to reinforce fears about the brutal consequences of revolutionary resistance, and thereby to reify existing capitalist social-property relations, by reaffirming the dogma that "There Is No Alternative," by consolidating the ever-more firmly held conviction that anti-capitalist revolution can only lead to a bloodbath, indeed, that it is bound to culminate in definite death, defeat, and destruction.

The self-fulfilling prophecy that "There Is No Alternative" (TINA), most famously articulated by Margaret Thatcher, is one of the core convictions of the neo-liberal paradigm. We follow Göran Therborn in emphasising that beliefs about "what can be" constitute one of the key components, or modes, of ideological interpellation. According to Therborn, subjects are always "subject[ed] and qualif[ied]" – "we" are told, related to, and made to recognize three kinds of ideas. First, ideas about "what exists, and its corollary, what does not exist" – that is, about "who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like," and their corollaries, what these things are not. Second, ideas about "*what is good*, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable" and their opposites. The realm of desire, itself structured, "norm-alized," if not always "normal-ized." Third, ideas about "*what is possible* and impossible, our sense of the mutability of our being-in-the world," i.e. what can be changed, as well as "the consequences of change" – these ideas, too, are patterned, our "hopes, ambitions, and fears," are always interpellated, that is, they are "given shape," conditioned, even constituted, by systemic social forces in which "we" subjects are always embedded and formed (Therborn 1980, p.18). Collective memory affects all three of these dimensions of ideological interpellation. Benjamin begins his twelfth thesis on the philosophy of history by invoking Nietzsche's aphorism that "[w]e need history, but that our need for it differs from that of the jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge" ([1940]1968). The repression of the memory of the revolutionary past robs those struggling in the present of moral, even spiritual, energy; it robs them of a register "of action, of active revolt, of revolutionary praxis;" it conceals from struggling subjects the historical consciousness and confidence of being heirs of fallen heroes, whose battles they inherit and whose legacy they can, at long last, vindicate (Löwy 2016, p.81).

Though the epic-cum-tragic history of Barcelona 1936 may loom large in the revolutionary imaginary, this imaginary itself has been all but extinguished from the contours of contemporary consciousness,

relegated to the minds of a tiny minority, the anti-quarians, the outcasts, the misfits, the insane. Collective amnesia serves to strip today's struggling subjects of the "confidence, courage, cunning and fortitude" that could come from being able to locate the current struggle in a deeper history, one reaching "far back into the past" (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis IV). Very few among the multitude of tourists (or, for that matter, locals) who meander daily down the Ramblas remember the heroic assault on the barracks of Atarazanas, located right next to the towering Monument to Columbus, at the very bottom of the city's most famous boulevard, almost touching the Mediterranean, where, on the 20th of July, 1936, armed anarchists defeated the last remnants of the military insurrection in Barcelona, and thereby ushered in the dawn of a new, albeit short-lived, revolutionary order (Peirats 1955, p.162). The fallen hero of that battle, Francisco Ascaso, once a legend, his name now barely rings a bell.

Buenaventura Durruti, who was there that day, among the very first of the revolutionaries to cross the threshold of those barracks, just a few minutes after the bullet pierced Ascaso's forehead, and who was himself destined to die a few months later while defending Madrid, has not fallen into comparable oblivion. But even *his* name is recognised by surprisingly few contemporary Spaniards. Fewer still remember his criticism of the Catalan nationalist leader Francesc Macià, who Durruti considered a "man of integrity, pure, all goodness," but "whose error was to make Barcelona small, when we would have made it the capital of the world" (Ucelay da Cal 1982, p.146). Indeed, the thoroughgoing internationalism of the revolutionary anarchists from those epic times is thoroughly foreign to us today, now that, as Murray Bookchin once sardonically quipped, "an ecumenical reformism is taken for granted by virtually the entire left" (1977, p.5). The memory of the heroic victories of the Spanish anarchists has been all but drowned out by the defeat of their revolution, by forty years of fascist rule, and by forty more of post-fascist, liberal-democratic restoration. The fact that the revolution was rolled back by republican forces, and with the complicity of the communists, before the final triumph of Franco and his subsequent systematic slaughter, not to mention the virtual eradication of anarchist institutions and traditions, helps further explain the "conspiracy of silence" (Ealham 2010) that still surrounds it, the famous testimonies of Orwell and, later, Chomsky notwithstanding.

And yet, Orwell's compelling description of the revolutionary atmosphere that reigned in Barcelona in late 1936 somehow immortalised the instant, rendering it still seizable as "an image which flashes up" at this particular "moment of danger" (Benjamin [1940]1968, Theses V and VI). Orwell begins his classic *Homage to Catalonia* with an autobiographical observation that underscores the immense dif-

ferences in sensibilities on the left, especially with regards to a contagious willingness to sacrifice, to risk everything for revolutionary goals, that distinguishes his era from ours. As Orwell confesses: “I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do” ([1938]1980, p.4). Joining a revolutionary militia, *the only conceivable thing to do*?

With the noble exception of a few hundred brave souls who have travelled to the north of Syria in recent years to take up arms with the Kurdish YPG and YPJ, such an option seems utterly *inconceivable* to almost anyone, at least in the so-called “West.” For indeed, as Žižek has perceptively surmised: “We from the First World countries find it more and more difficult to imagine a public or universal cause for which one would be ready to sacrifice one’s life” (2009, p.25). The appeal and phenomenon of international *jihadi-ism*, which has managed to take root among more than a few of the post-colonial subjects languishing in the banlieus, in the ghettos, of the former Imperial metropolises, is perhaps the closest parallel to such total commitment to a cause greater than oneself which Orwell himself so courageously embodied and, more importantly, so eloquently expressed. Though, of course, the nature of the two causes, the content of the ideals, are radically different, if not completely incommensurable.

The anarchist revolution was millenarian at its core. It was intended to trigger the onset of the reign of equality, indeed, the fulfilment of the prophecy that “the last shall be first,” despite – or perhaps in part because of – its protagonists’ brand of militant atheism. For the anarchists vehemently denounced the otherworldly charlatanism of the corrupt and reactionary Catholic Church. They sought heaven on earth instead. They suffered not the hypocrisy of the clerics, the treachery of the Pharisees, of those who murdered the prophets, of those who conspired to eliminate Christ himself after he drove the money-lenders and money-makers out of the temple. The reign of equality was adorned with robes of red and black, its temples burned and gutted in the “days of smoking justice” (Ealham 2010). The victory of the working class was apparent on the Ramblas, at least as its image flits past us, reflected and refracted through the gaze of Orwell’s eyes, then crystalized and captured by his pen:

“The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing... In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no ‘well-dressed’ people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls, or some variant of the militia uniform. All this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not under-

stand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. Also I believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a workers’ State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers’ side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being” ([1938]1980, pp.4-5).

Queer and moving, indeed, though fleeting, and as Orwell suggests, perhaps things were not even then quite what they seemed. But worth fighting for? Again, here is where the common sense of our two epochs clearly seem to collide.

Occupy Catalonia?

One of the distinguishing features of the anarchist creed was its critique of representative politics, as a bourgeois trap whose ultimate purpose was to divert the class struggle from its proper focal point, the workplace, and in the process, to cultivate the worship of the state (Bar 1981; Bookchin 1977; Cuadrat 1976; Ealham 2010). Three quarters of a century later, a clear echo of that creed could be heard again in Barcelona, in the Plaça Catalunya, in the Spring of 2011, when citizens occupied the city’s central public square, just at the top of the Ramblas, where they camped out, held a series of open assemblies, and where they expressed eloquent denunciations about the bankruptcy of the country’s representative institutions, articulating variations around a central motif captured in the slogan, “*No nos representan / no ens representan*” (“They Don’t Represent Us”). Both the tactic of occupation as well as its signature slogan emulated and was inspired by events at the very centre of Spain’s capital, in the *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid (Anduiza et. al. 2014; Antentas 2015; Calvo 2017; Cameron 2014; Feenstra et. al. 2017; Flesher Fominaya 2015; La Parra-Pérez 2014; Portos 2016; Romanos 2013; Sampedro and Lobera 2014; Tejerina and Perugorría 2017) – “*kilómetro 0*,” as they call it – which was in turn part of a broader international wave of somehow similar burgeoning forms of direct-democratic protest, including perhaps most prominently the Occupy Wall Street movement, not to mention the Arab Spring (Castañeda 2012; Castells 2012; Peterson et. al. 2015; Roos and Oikonomakis 2014).

Much has been written about this international wave of contentious politics, with scholars delving into the similarities and differences among the “cases;” but less effort has been made to understand these “cases” from within a deeper, historically-informed perspective, capable of deciphering the ways in which “the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (Marx 1852). Zamponi (2018) has recently emphasised the ways in which collective memories can not only enable but also constrain movements’ mobilizational capacities.

In no small part they do so by shaping beliefs about what is possible. The eradication of the institutions, traditions, and memories of the heroic achievements of their anarchist ancestors has served to constrict the symbolic, discursive, and narrative horizons of contention in contemporary Spain; however, in the *Indignados'* movement for "real democracy," the repertoire of these revolutionary ancestors was at least partially resuscitated; the idea of an altogether alternative social order, direct-democratic and radically egalitarian at its core, began to resurface.

The protestors in Barcelona clearly echoed the old anarchist critique of representative democracy, even if they proved incapable of summoning the kind of courage of conviction that had motivated their defeated ancestors – the belief in the possibility, indeed, the imminent arrival, of the end of capitalism, and the dawn of the reign of equality. Such lack of faith in the possibility, much less imminent arrival, of an alternative to capitalism, has been much discussed on the left. Slavoj Žižek (2018) has famously and frequently made the point that it is easier to imagine the end of life on Earth than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. This crisis of "revolutionary imagination" in turn reflects not only the failure of state communism, but a deeper "crisis of modernity." Indeed, as Göran Therborn has argued, one of the central features of our "post-modern world" is the ubiquitous "questioning of, or a loss of belief in, the future narratives of the modern" (2008, p.122).

But still, the critique of representative democracy could be heard loud and clear in the Plaça Catalunya during the occupation, even if there was no one to be found with the kind of steely determination or absolute confidence of a legend like Buenaventura Durruti, who just a few months before falling in battle while defending Madrid, had been challenged by a sceptical Belgian journalist: "But you will be sitting upon a pile of ruins if you are victorious." To which, Durruti had replied: "We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here in our hearts. That world is growing this minute" (Van Paasen 1936).

In recent decades, Durruti's legendary status, his place among the pantheon of revolutionary martyrs, has been duly cultivated, even if at the margins, both by the written word and on screen (Enzensberger 1998; Paz [1978]1996), though Ealham and Ferrandis (2016) have provided a more sober view of the efficacy of Durruti's brand of "virile" revolutionary activism, from a perspective nevertheless sympathetic to anarchist principles. In contrast to Durruti's attitude of reckless abandon, not even the most passionate among the 15-M crowd could forget Juan Linz's perhaps sage, though certainly conservative, advice to

"remember that for each successful revolution there have been more victorious counterrevolutions that have represented not only the maintenance of the status quo but often a loss of gains already made and terrible costs for those advocating such radical changes" (1978, p.103).

Nor, for that matter, would the protestors dare to articulate, much less prepare, the tactics and strategy for transcending the system which they so vehemently denounced. The arming of the workers for self-defence, which their anarchist forefathers had managed meticulously to organise and accomplish at the opportune moment, was now totally out of the question, indeed, had been rendered utterly unimaginable. The exercise of "dual power," therefore, was effectively reduced to but an expressive, thoroughly performative, if still prefigurative, act. But one which, it turned out, could be efficiently, and forcefully, repressed by the regional police, at the behest of the regional Minister of Interior, Felip Puig, on the 27th of May (Cordero and Rodríguez 2011).

The term "dual power" was first used by Vladimir Lenin to describe the situation in Russia after the February 1917 Revolution, where workers' councils vied for legitimacy alongside Kerensky's provisional government. More recently, libertarian socialists have appropriated the term to refer to a "strategy of achieving a libertarian socialist economy and polity by means of incrementally establishing and then networking institutions of direct participatory democracy to contest the existing powers of state and capitalism" (Wikipedia, "Dual Power"). The crucial difference between the Leninist formulation and more recent libertarian socialist formulations of "dual power" is sometimes articulated as one of strategy, or objective: namely, "seizing power," versus "dissolving," or "transforming," it. At the libertarian end of the spectrum, John Holloway (2002) has spoken of exercising "anti-power." In between Lenin's formulation and Holloway's, based on an analysis of the Venezuelan context, George Ciccariello-Maher has theorised the "dual power" as "the condensation of popular power from below into a radical pole that stands in antagonistic opposition to the state but functions not as a vehicle to seize that state (unlike Lenin's initial formulation), but instead as a fulcrum to radically transform and deconstruct it" (2013, p.240).

According to Lenin, a necessary condition for the exercise of dual power was an armed populace. More recent formulations, however, have tended to avoid espousing any such open challenge to the state's monopoly of violence. But with the absence of such a challenge, it remains unclear how alternative, direct democratic institutions can avoid the fate of finding themselves caught between the Scylla of repression by the coercive state apparatus and the Charybdis of co-optation, i.e. of being "absorb[ed] back into the social order that they once sought to challenge." The

libertarian socialist thinker Murray Bookchin has provided a forceful articulation of the nature of this dilemma (2015, pp.18-19) – a dilemma from which the *Indignados* were unfortunately unable to escape.

The “indignant ones” did regroup in Barcelona less than three weeks after their forced eviction from the Plaça Catalunya, pulling off what the media dubbed a “siege” on the regional Parliament, when they surrounded the legislative chamber, housed in the park of the *Ciutadella*, and forced the representatives to enter the premises via helicopter, on the very day that representatives were scheduled to vote on a regional budget that included unprecedentedly harsh austerity measures (El País 2017). But such a spectacular show of symbolic force could not alter the outcome of the vote; rather, it served to provoke another successful, if controversial, display of brute force on the part of the regional police (Asens and Pisarello 2012; Ruiz-Rico Ruiz and Ridaó Martín 2017).

So many things have been radically transformed in the decades since the anarchist attempt to transcend the state and abolish capitalism by means of revolutionary violence. Generations of capital accumulation have certainly not erased inequality, injustice, or oppression, but they have fundamentally transformed the country’s social structure, and in so doing, they have provided a certain material basis for consent (Przeworski 1986). A material basis of relative prosperity that has, since the death of Franco and the re-emergence of representative democracy, rendered the tactics and strategy of social democracy much more appealing than any radical, direct-democratic alternative, definitely among the general public, and even among broad swathes of the avowedly anti-capitalist left (Gunther et. al. 2004; Lieberman, 1995; López and Rodríguez 2011; and Maravall 1993; Martín-Aceña 1995). Nor should it be forgotten that, alongside, concomitant with, this relative prosperity, the coercive capacity of the state apparatus has been massively strengthened as well (Limón and Fernández de Mosteyrín 2018). So much so that anything other than a purely symbolic “siege” of any state institution by citizens would seem impossible, unless their numbers be overwhelming and their members be willing to die.

And yet, with the sovereign debt crisis in full effect, and the bankruptcy of social democracy ever more apparent, it seemed, if but for a moment, as if the “continuum of history” might just “explode,” that the “fight for the oppressed past” could perhaps recommence. Indeed, in that fateful Spring of 2011, the image of Catalonia’s revolutionary ancestors “flashed up,” emerged, for an instant, again as recognizable by the present “as one of its own concerns” (Benjamin [1940]1968, Theses V, XV). But then, just as quickly, this historical image was snuffed out, beaten back, violently repressed, to make way again for the “triumphal procession in which the present rulers

step over those who are lying prostrate” (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis VII).

The so-called “siege” on the Catalan Parliament would prove to be the *Indignados*’ last hurrah in the *Ciutat Comtal*. From the following year, the synchronization of contentious politics across Spain, galvanized in response to painful austerity measures and the exposure of systemic corruption, would give way to more particularistic dynamics (Carvalho 2018; Portos 2016). In Catalonia, the regional authorities would no longer be targeted by protestors; nor would they assume the role of agents of coercive repression. To the contrary, the regional authorities would begin to play a rather prominent role in mobilizing a new cycle of street protest, as the axis of contention shifted from the response to austerity and corruption, alongside the demand for direct democracy, toward the call for Catalan “national” self-determination.

The demise of what we call the revolutionary imaginary is intimately associated with the monopoly of contending nationalist imaginaries in the Spanish context. This is not because nationalist consciousness and revolutionary consciousness are necessarily contradictory in all contexts; rather, it has to do with the way in which contending nationalist projects are embedded in the particular constellation of material and social power relations in the Spanish context, not to mention the particular histories of mobilization and alliance-formation of those projects in that context (Martínez and Miley 2010; Miley 2006, 2013). Nor should this claim be interpreted as a denial of the existence of counter-currents that seek to combine commitments to “revolutionary” and “nationalist” aspirations, such as espoused most recently, arguably, by the *Candidatura d’Unitat Popular* (CUP) in Catalonia. Instead, it is merely to insist that counter-currents should not be confused with dominant currents, as happens too often in the literature on social movements.

The Catalan nationalist movement has been hegemonic at the regional level ever since the transition to democracy, which came with a devolution of autonomy to the region. The regional authorities have used their autonomy to advance a nation-building project, centred initially around the protection, promotion and “normalization” of the Catalan language, with an emphasis on the use of the language in the educational system and the public sphere more generally. This project has been spearheaded and championed by the centre-right formation, *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), long led by the once-charismatic Jordi Pujol, whose reputation in recent years has suffered considerably due to the exposure of his implication in systemic corruption during his decades in power as President of the *Generalitat* (Miley 2017). Indeed, the exposure of systemic corruption, both at the regional and “national” levels, was a crucial part of the climate that contributed to the irruption onto the scene of the

Indignados in 2011. This irruption frightened the regional authorities, who feared that it might lead to a radical restructuring of dominant social imaginaries, indeed, to a resurfacing of the long-repressed memory of the region's revolutionary, anarchist past. And so, the regional authorities reacted reflexively to repress. With their reflex to repress the *Indignados* movement, and their subsequent ability to re-channel the terms of contentious politics back within more comfortable, hierarchically-structured, nationalist imaginaries, the regional authorities managed to fend off the spectre of a perhaps more fundamental fissure, along radically egalitarian and direct-democratic, class lines. The incipient division between the elites and the people was redirected, reimagined, as a division between peoples.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to illuminate a dialectic of repression and resistance at work in the most recent wave of contentious politics in Catalonia. A dialectic which has shaped and constrained the parameters of contestation in the struggles for (and against) "real

democracy" and "national" self-determination in Catalonia. Though clear echoes of voices from the revolutionary past can still be heard in today's protests, a sequence of traumas and series of ruptures separate now from then, rendering such echoes barely audible to most. The defeat of the revolution, followed by fascist repression, the imposition of an autocratic model of capitalist development, and the subsequent transition to post-fascist democracy: all these ruptures have served to constrict both dominant and even counter-hegemonic social imaginaries, to limit the horizons of the possible. And yet, the irruption onto the scene of the *Indignados* movement, if but for a brief moment, threatened to "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin [1940]1968, Thesis XV), to allow for a return of the repressed. Until the movement was violently, and effectively, repressed, by the Catalan "regional" authorities, who subsequently managed to re-channel the terms and tempo of contentious politics within the more comfortable confines of rival national and nationalist imaginaries, and, in so doing, to suppress the incipient resurgence of an alternative – perhaps more fundamental – fissure of society, along radical-egalitarian and direct-democratic, class lines.

NOTES

1. The term "hegemonic project" we take from Bob Jessop (2008), which he defines, following Gramsci, as a project "to secure the political, intellectual, and moral leadership of the dominant class(es)," (2008, p.12). Conversely, "counter-hegemonic projects" are projects which would contest such moral leadership.
2. We follow Chris Ealham in using the term "conspiracy of silence" to refer to the achievements of the anarchist revolution. For notable exceptions to this "conspiracy

of silence," see Alexander (1999); Bookchin (2005); Casanovas (2005); Dolgoff ([1974]1990); Guillamón (2014); and Mintz (2012).

3. The term "political unconscious" we take from Frederic Jameson (1981), who emphasised the implicit ideological dimension of creative works. By using this term, we mean to highlight the link between political and psychological "repression."

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