THE MASK AND THE FLAG

POPULISM, CITIZENISM AND GLOBAL PROTEST

PAOLO GERBAUDO

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INTRODUCTION

People shouldn't be afraid of their government. Governments should be afraid of their people.

V for Vendetta[1]

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis the world has been experiencing a veritable political earthquake. Economic distress produced by the Great Recession coupled with profound distrust in political and business elites has spawned new populist movements on the Left and the Right, upsetting the heretofore dominant order—firmly established since the 1980s under the aegis of neoliberalism—and raising both hopes of change and concurrent fears of instability. The once triumphant gospel of globalisation is in crisis, as is the faith in the self-regulating power of the markets, long accepted by the entire political mainstream. The system of representation offered by the political parties and trade unions of the post-war era seems incapable of addressing emerging popular demands. Protest movements against governments and banks have not been this strong since the Great Depression, and at every election voters punish incumbents and vote against the establishment. Revolutions, long presumed to be relics of the past, have made a comeback on the world scene, as have coup d'états, as has been seen in Egypt and Turkey. Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the US, Podemos and Ciudadanos in Spain and the Five Star Movement in Italy, Nigel Farage in "Brexit" Britain and Ada Colau in cosmopolitan Barcelona, are all conflicting yet interrelated signal shifts of this emergent political horizon, where traditional ideologies and social cleavages are given short shrift.

One phenomenon has epitomised more than any other this era of crisis, revolutions, and emancipatory possibilities: the movement of the

squares. The moniker "movement of the squares", along with similar terms such as "occupation movements" or "occupy movements," has been used to describe an array of protest movements that have emerged in different countries the world over, protesting against neoliberalism, extreme economic inequality, austerity policies, and lack of democracy. The initial spark for this global upheaval came from the revolutions of the "Arab Spring", where millions demonstrated for democracy against rusting dictatorships. Taking inspiration from Egypt's 25 January revolution in 2011, with its all-out occupation of Tahrir Square in central Cairo leading to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, protesters the world over occupied central public squares and erected protest camps, lasting for weeks or even months, as a means to capture public attention and challenge power-holders.

In May 2011 Spanish protesters occupied Puerta del Sol in Central Madrid to voice widespread anger against greedy bankers and corrupt politicians. The Indignados found an immediate echo in Greece—a country on the brink of bankruptcy, forced to accept a humiliating bail-out program sponsored by the IMF and the European Central Bank—with the occupation of Syntagma Square in front of the Hellenic Parliament. The Arab and European mobilisations were followed by Occupy Wall Street in the US where next to the New York Stock Exchange, the centre of global finance, protesters occupied Zuccotti Park. Though all these occupations were eventually dismantled or evicted, they provided a new protest blueprint for activists the world over. In 2013 Turkey and Brazil witnessed the rise of similar popular movements, taking public spaces to protest against the authoritarianism and corruption of their governments. The latest in this series of popular mobilisations was the 2016 "Nuit Debout" movement in France, which saw the occupation of Paris' Place de la République in protest against a new labour law, and the disconnection between political elites and ordinary citizens.

These movements—often misunderstood and sometimes maligned as inchoate "flash in the pan" spasms—deserve close attention if we are to understand the political horizon that has unfolded in the aftermath of the 2008 crash, and in order to devise progressive political strategies suiting this time of crisis in the neoliberal order. Due to its global scale and profound social and political impact, the movement of the squares may well be remembered alongside such other revolutionary years as the

French Revolution of 1789, the 1848 Spring of Nations, the 1968 student movement, and the 1989 anti-communist protests. Mobilising millions of people, and winning the battle for public opinion, the protest wave of 2011–16 managed to fire up a powerful sense of possibility for radical political change as no other movement in decades had done. Some of these movements, such as the revolutions of the Arab Spring, overthrew regimes; others, such as those in Spain and Greece, led to the downfall of elected governments; all of them have thoroughly shaken and transformed their respective political systems. In fact, these upheavals became widely seen as the moment of foundation of a "new politics," which in the aftermath of the mobilisations led the rise of new left-wing formations like Podemos in Spain and radical political leaders like Bernie Sanders in the US. As argued by Christos Giovanopoulos, a 44-year-old Greek activist, the movement of the squares "changed the whole political imagination, the entire political landscape." But what actual change did the protest wave starting in 2011 bring about? Wherein lies its novelty vis-à-vis previous movements? And what can it reveal about contemporary society and its dilemmas at a time of systemic crisis and instability?

Some answers to these questions can be found in two symbols that often appeared next to one another among the protesting crowds gathered in the occupied squares. On the one hand there was the mask popularised by the international computer "hacktivist" group Anonymous: borrowed from the cult movie *V for Vendetta* and its main character V, and in turn inspired by the English anti-hero Guy Fawkes. On the other hand we saw national flags being waved in demonstrations and clashes in countries struck by this protest wave. These two striking images condense the two main political orientations—neo-anarchism and left-wing populism—that have met, mixed and clashed in the movements of 2011–16, giving way to the "new politics" of citizenism: an emerging ideology of the indignant citizen, that pits the self-organised citizenry against economic and political oligarchies, and pursues the reclamation and expansion of citizenship, seen as the necessary foundation of a true democracy.

The mask of Guy Fawkes is the most widely known symbol of the revolutions of 2011; ubiquitous in occupied squares and demonstrations, and reproduced in the millions while being incorporated into thousands of internet memes. At its core this smiling and moustached mask "signifies freedom of a distinctively left-libertarian sort," as Lewis Call has

argued.[2] This symbol evokes that neo-anarchist influence that has been a constant in the arc of protest movements of post-industrial societies, starting with the student protests of 1968 and culminating in the anti-globalisation movement of the 1990s and 2000s. This political and cultural tendency—which has influenced radical feminism, environmentalism, the squatter movement, Marxist autonomism, anti-capitalist direct action, and hacker culture—exuded a palpable distrust for large-scale institutions such as multinational corporations, banks, and governments: neo-anarchist *bêtes noires* accused of controlling people's lives and deprived them of freedom.

In the positive, "the mask" expresses faith in the democratic power of "autonomous" individuals and self-organising collectives, as seen in a number of movement practices, from the self-management ethos of the '68 occupiers to the self-government of the Zapatistas in Mexico; the use of consensus-based decision-making by anti-globalisation activists in their direct-action movements; and the new practices of online collaboration in the open-source software movement and in hacker collectives, such as Anonymous and Lulzsec that have led a number of cyber-attacks against corporations and security agencies, and in support of various protest movements. Informed by notions of spontaneity and autonomy—staples of post-'68 alternative movements—this neo-anarchist orientation proposes an idea of grassroots democracy based on the principle of "horizontality," which opposes the presence of leaders and hierarchical structures.

The flag evokes something altogether different; strictly speaking flags denote control over an at least partly territorially defined political community. Official and revolutionary national flags have been ubiquitous in the Arab Spring that altered the map of Northern Africa and the Middle East beyond recognition, where they symbolised these movements' appeal to popular unity against the regimes. Furthermore, national flags have been flown in Greece in various demonstrations and protest camps as a way to express a demand for national independence against the perceived turn towards economic colonisation by Germany, but also in Brazil, Turkey, and the US, to express a sense of national unity and popular solidarity in the face of common enemies. Also in Spain where the official flag was taboo during the first Indignados protests due to its association with Franco's dictatorship, a flag did eventually appear in the "civic tide" demonstrations of 2012 and 2013, as the people waved the tricolour of the Spanish Republic defeated in the 1936–9 civil war, its connotations being both anti-fascist and anti-monarchical.

Image 0.1: Protester wearing a Guy Fawkes mask and various European national flags at anti-TTIP protest in Brussels, 16 October 2015 (Courtesy Michael Channan)

Alongside other cultural tropes widely seen in these movements, such as the use of local idioms and folk culture, and various unifying popular symbols, "the flag" manifests the surprising revival in contemporary protest of democratic populism: a populism of a very different sort to the right-wing and xenophobic proposals of the likes of new US President Donald Trump and "Brexit" champion Nigel Farage. This political orientation, which combines appeals to the people with a mostly benevolent patriotism, can be traced back to a number of progressive political movements, including the Narodniks,[3] the egalitarian Russian movement demanding the emancipation of peasants, and the progenitors of the term "populism"; the Chartists in Britain, who demanded a people's Charter guaranteeing basic democratic rights;[4] the People's Party in the

US who fought against robber barons, railroad tycoons, and the gold standard at the end of the nineteenth century;[5] and more recently the pink wave of Latin American socialist populism, represented by Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales among others. Furthermore, populist appeals to the people against the institutions have been implicit in many recent environmental, pro-democracy and anti-corruption mobilisations in Europe and the US. At its heart democratic populism contains a yearning for popular sovereignty,[6] understood as the collective control of a political community over its own destiny against the interference of various oligarchies: the Troika, global markets, financial speculators, lobbyists, and corrupt and authoritarian politicians, accused of rendering democracy and citizenship devoid of any substance.

The mask and the flag, the political traditions they allude to, and the social demands they express, seem at first sight irreconcilable. It is true that anarchism and democratic populism, two lesser-known leftist ideologies when compared to social-democracy and communism, share common origins in the political turmoil of the nineteenth century, at the time of the battle between autocratic regimes and emerging popular movements. This was seen most glaringly in the case of the Russian Narodniks: a populist movement at the dawn of the creation of the modern Left which deeply influenced Mikhail Bakunin, later to become the most influential figure of early anarchism.

Since those foundational times, however, anarchism and left-wing populism seem to have become increasingly at loggerheads. Anarchism espoused a politics of anti-statism, seeing the state as the root of all domination. Populism instead adopted a statist orientation, seeing in the state the necessary embodiment of popular sovereignty, and a weapon against particularist interests, and thus calling for a reintegration of the atomised people with the institutions of the state. Moreover, where anarchism has been resolute in its rejection of leadership and hierarchy, inherent in its very etymology, democratic populist movements have been well known for their customary reliance on strong charismatic leadership, as epitomised by figures like Feargus O'Connor, the leader of the Chartists; William Jennings Bryan, the presidential candidate of the US People's Party; Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico; and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Finally, where neo-anarchism has espoused a cosmopolitan vision of the world where national borders are meaningless, something recently strengthened by its association with hacker culture and its experience of global interaction via the internet, populism has often been

accompanied by an appeal to national identity as a source of meaning, and to the nation as a space to exercise the power of the People.

Why have such conflicting orientations come together in the movement of the squares of 2011–16? And what does their surprising marriage tell us about the meaning of these movements and about the new battle-lines of contemporary politics?

The birth of citizenism

Under the enormous pressure of the economic crisis of 2007–8 and amidst a deep distrust of political institutions, the convergence between neo-anarchism and democratic populism in the occupied squares has given way to a hybrid political culture, which in this book I describe as *citizenism*. Citizenism is a term that had in fact already been utilised by the protesters themselves in a number of countries struck by the 2011 protest wave, from the Spanish "*ciudadanismo*,"[7] to the French "*citoyennisme*,"[8] to refer to, and often to criticise, the ideology of the movement of the squares, particularly what some radical Leftists saw as its excessive moderatism and inclusivity. Furthermore, references to the subjects of the "citizens" and the "citizenry", and description of these movements as "citizens' movements" also cropped up in other countries, as seen for example in the description of the Tahrir movement as "*harka el-muwatineen*" [Movement of the Citizens], or in the Greek movement's name, Aganaktismenoi Polites [Indignant Citizens]. If Marx famously quipped that the French revolution adopted "Roman costumes and […] Roman phrases,"[9] in its revival of the ancient history of the Roman Republic, one could say that the movement of the squares in turn adopted the phrases of the French revolution, and its ultimate hero: the insurgent *citoyen*.

Citizenism is the ideology of the "indignant citizen," a citizen outraged at being deprived of citizenship, chiefly understood as the possibility of individuals to be active members of their political community with an equal say on all important decisions, which is increasingly in question in the neoliberal "post-democratic" condition.[10] It is a populist ideology but a very peculiar one: a libertarian,[11] participatory, or leaderless populism; an "anarcho-populism," which articulates the neo-anarchist method of *horizontality* and the populist demand for *sovereignty*, the mass ambition of populist movements, with the high premium placed on indi-

vidual participation and creativity by neo-anarchism. Within this emerging ideology, "the citizen" or "the citizenry," as a sort of libertarian and individualist variation on the subject of populism's "the People", has become the new revolutionary subject, and "citizenship," as a more participatory and bottom-up approach to the populist demand for popular sovereignty, the new revolutionary object.

This discourse of the citizen and citizenship was however not just a change in the political lexicon or rhetoric. The transformation it signals runs much deeper. It affects different dimensions of protest movements: their collective identity; their definition of the central political conflict; and their vision of an alternative society.[12]

First, citizenship, a notion long associated with a conservative political ethos and an attitude of submission to the *status quo*, was counter-intuitively cast as a radical sentiment and a source of collective identity for protest movements. The movement of the squares used the notion of citizenship, and the subjects of the citizen and the citizenry, rather than notions of class or gender-based and cultural identities, as a common denominator to bring together the disparate social fragments that feel at a disadvantage in a world in which 1 per cent of the population controls more wealth than the remaining 99 per cent.[13] These have included the lost generation of precarious youth, the squeezed middle seeing its economic security threatened, and the new poor affected by unemployment and low pay. It has been precisely the perception of a "lack of citizenship"; the awareness of its erosion and privatisation[14] due to the onslaught of financial markets, the weakening of the nation-state in a globalised era, and the crisis of mass membership organisations, which has made citizenship a signifier capable of uniting a multitude of grievances, demands and constituencies in a counter-hegemonic popular alliance. Citizenship is reclaimed as a source of dignity, in a world in which many feel humiliated by the arrogance of global financiers and an aloof political class.

Second, the central conflict of society in citizenism is not that between labour and capital, which dominated the political "imaginary"[15] of twentieth century left-wing movements. For the movement of the squares, the central antagonism has been between the Citizenry and the Oligarchy: the power of ordinary citizens versus the privilege of economic and political elites, financial markets, the super-rich, the Troika, technocrats and career politicians, all accused of ruling in spite of the views of the

majority of the population. The widening gap between the super-rich and the rest; the collapse of the middle class and the rise of a lost generation of "graduates with no future";[16] the authoritarian behaviour evident in dictatorships and democratic governments alike; the endemic political corruption and the lack of trust in traditional parties; the inability of established civil society organisations and trade unions to cast themselves as defenders of collective interests; a closed-off political system,[17] largely indifferent to new demands: these grievances have been viewed as part of a larger political problem; the manifestation of an anti-democratic and oligarchic trend in government, that deprives ordinary citizens of their fundamental democratic rights and consequently also of their economic welfare and personal dignity.

Third, citizenism offers a view of a better society which centres on the notion of "real democracy,"[18] beyond the "sham democracy" controlled by lobbies, career politicians, and financiers. This effort of "democratising democracy", in the words of Wendy Brown, at a time at which it appears to have been hollowed out, has also resorted to the imaginary and language of citizenship. Protesters saw the reclaiming and expansion of citizenship, understood as a condition of political equality and a culture of active participation in the polity, as the best antidote against an oligarchic power that feeds precisely on the passivity and apathy of an atomised and unpoliticised population. This vision of a bottom-up reclamation of democracy, laying claim to the people's voice and participation in public life, was dramatised in the occupation of public squares the world over, which turned into contemporary "agoras": public spaces in which ordinary citizens could re-engage in the most basic of political acts, such as participating in public meetings and discussing political issues, with the ultimate aim of progressively constituting a power from below from which to challenge the power of those above.

The notion of citizenism, and the connected idea of a politics of radical citizenship, provides a condensed framework for understanding the transformation of protest movements and politics more generally in the era of the Great Recession. Firstly, citizenism signals a veritable change of paradigm in protest culture, which moves away from the minoritarian, countercultural and unequivocally anti-statist "politics of autonomy" of the anti-globalisation movement, and towards a majoritarian and counter-hegemonic politics of radical citizenship aiming at achieving systemic social and institutional change. Instead of pitting society against the

state, and pursuing a "counter-power" against official power, as many anti-authoritarian and anarchist movements did in the aftermath of the 1968 student protests, the movement of the squares tried to build an "under-power", a power from below, which starting from the squares could progressively reclaim all levels of society, including state institutions. Citizenism needs to be understood as a progressive version of the populist turn evident in contemporary politics, while neoliberal hegemony fails. It demonstrates that populist sensibilities do not necessarily need to be turned towards xenophobic and authoritarian ends, as exemplified by the politics of Donald Trump, but can be geared towards a democratic and emancipatory direction. This is why analysing citizenism constitutes an urgent task for those interested in developing a progressive political agenda matching the conditions that have emerged in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

A global analysis of the occupation movements

Adopting citizenism as a guiding concept, this book aims at developing a global sociological analysis of the movement of the squares and the way it reflected an exceptional historical conjuncture marked by converging economic and political crises. Completed on the fifth anniversary of the 2011 upheavals it constitutes to date one of the most extensive (in terms of coverage) and intensive (in terms of depth of empirical research) analyses of this protest wave.[19] Furthermore, it looks at these movements' political ramifications and their spawning of new social and political organisations that are reshaping radical politics the world over. The book covers a total of nine case studies: the Arab Spring, with particular reference to Egypt and Tunisia; the Spanish Indignados and Greek Aganaktismenoi anti-austerity movements; Occupy Wall Street in the US and the UK, which effectively globalised the uprising; the Gezi Park protests in Turkey and the Movimento de Junho in Brazil in 2013, which shook their respective governments and showed the enduring vitality of the global uprising; and finally France's Nuit Debout protests in the spring of 2016.

The movements discussed in this book displayed a considerable degree of diversity in their composition, their ostensible aims, their relationship with power holders, and their discourses and practices. Some were more concerned with the economy, others were concerned with politics; some were more progressive, others were more conservative;

some confronted dictatorships, others elected governments; some have been more durable, others more evanescent. Yet, as we shall see, they all shared significant common features including their tactic of occupying public space for protest, resistance, and deliberation;[20] the adoption of a spirit of radical inclusiveness, epitomised by Occupy's slogan "We Are the 99 Percent"; the suspicion towards leaders, organised political groups and celebrities; the rejection of the Left/Right divide and of traditional ideological descriptions; the eschewal of militantism and a resort instead to amateur protest skills, as exemplified by the ubiquity of handmade protest signs; the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as mobilising platforms; the encompassing of demographics not traditionally seen in political demonstrations, including older people and those with more conservative beliefs; the prevalence of non-violent tactics; and the emphasis on participatory practices allowing all individuals to have a say in the process.

To explore these elements of commonality, which stand to signal the rise of a new global protest culture, between 2011 and 2016 I conducted extensive fieldwork, which allowed me to gather a large volume of qualitative data in the form of interviews, ethnographic observations, and archival and social media material, providing the foundations on which this study's theorising rests. Writing this book has involved first and foremost living through the protests in person, by travelling to and residing in the various cities where rebellions exploded as if via chain reaction. I had the opportunity to visit many of the key sites of this protest wave, including Tunis, Cairo, Athens, Madrid, Barcelona, Istanbul, New York, London, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Paris, while protests raged in those countries. During these visits I immersed myself in the space these movements created, spending a lot of time in protest camps and exploring their manifold activities and events, from people's libraries, people's kitchens, assemblies, working groups and committees, to the stand-offs with security forces.

Especially important was to meet and interview these movements' protagonists, their organisers and participants, to get a sense of how they experienced the upheavals and understood their meaning, ends, prospects and impact. For each of the core countries covered in this book I conducted 15–25 in-depth interviews, for a total of 140 people (details are included in the appendix at the end of the book). These in-depth conversations provided me with a vivid picture of how the movement felt from the

inside, and the different hurdles faced by its participants. Finally, I could also avail myself of data gathered during prior research on the anti-globalisation movement, during which I conducted fifty interviews with activists in Germany, Italy, and the UK, as well as my acquaintance with activism and related youth subcultures and countercultures. Unless otherwise cited, all direct quotes in this book originate from these interviews.

Besides the "live data" of observations and interviews which offered what anthropologists call a "thick account" of what these movements were and how they were experienced by their participants, the book has also drawn upon comprehensive archival research, comprising numerous statistics and key movement documents, including public resolutions, declarations of popular assemblies, and the manifestoes of various protest groups. These documents serve to cast light on the worldviews, self-definitions, and demands these movements have put forward.

The anarchist, Marxist, and techno-political views

Since its emergence the movement of the squares has been the object of an intense debate which has often appeared very tentative and discordant, not least because of the enigmatic character of these movements, and the difficulty of pigeon-holing them into familiar social and political categories. The academic discussion can be roughly categorised into three schools, each with their interpretations of these movements and particular political biases: the anarchist, the Marxist, and the techno-political view. The first two read these movements as prolongations of two familiar twentieth-century ideologies known for their mutual rivalry, while the third reads them as the necessary result of present technological and economic conditions. All these streams provide important insights into the nature of these movements: the influence of neo-anarchist culture; their status as history-changing "events"; their reclamation of a universalist and emancipatory narrative; and their reflection of digital technology and its potential for grassroots organisation. However, they fall short of identifying the novelties and elements of rupture vis-à-vis previous social movements, and in particular the anti-globalisation movement of the 1990s and early 2000s.

The analysis of the movement of the squares that has predominated within activist debates, especially in the US and northern Europe, is their interpretation as twenty-first-century anarchism, standing in direct conti-

nuity with the neo-anarchist section of the anti-globalisation movement. To this stream pertains the work of such self-declared anarchists and autonomists as David Graeber, Mark Bray, Raúl Zibechi, Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini.[21] These authors emphasise the anti-representational character of these movements and see their pursuit of direct democratic practices as proof of their adherence to neo-anarchist beliefs. Thus, David Graeber, influential activist and intellectual in both the anti-globalisation movement and Occupy movement was based on anarchist principles due to its use of "direct action, direct democracy, a rejection of existing political institutions and attempt to create alternative ones."[22] Mark Bray has described the Occupy movement as "an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian movement run by organisers with predominantly anarchist and anarchistic politics."[23] US political historian Michael Kazin has likewise portrayed Occupy activists as the "cyber-clever progeny of Henry David Thoreau and Emma Goldman" dreaming of a future of "self-governing communities" and animated by a "non-doctrinaire anarchism."[24] In their book *They Can't Represent Us!* Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini describe these movements as rejecting all forms of representation in the name of a neo-anarchist politics of "horizontality."[25]

While these interpretations have been most frequently made in reference to Occupy Wall Street, as a reflection of the popularity of anarchism in the US compared with other countries, they have also been seen in other contexts. Turkish writer Süreyyya Evren argued that the protesters in Gezi Park used "anarchistic organisational principles" that were reminiscent of the themes of 1968.[26] Raúl Zibechi has described the movement in Brazil as animated by the neo-anarchist principles of "autonomy and horizontalism."[27] These authors are correct in identifying the presence of a neo-anarchist influence in these movements, seen in their participatory ethos and their adherence to the idea of horizontality. What they fail to notice, however, is that this neo-anarchist element is only one part of a mosaic comprised of various ideological orientations, among which democratic populism features most prominently, and neo-anarchism appears more in the guise of a residual ideological element, inherited from movements past.

The Marxist interpretation takes a more critical view of this protest wave. While not daring to say, as their anarchist colleagues do, that the movements belong to their own political camp—something which would be open to challenge due to the scarcity of self-declared communists in

these movements—authors such as Alain Badiou,[28] Slavoj Žižek[29] and Jodi Dean read in them a political potentiality that furnishes fresh proof of the supposedly ever-green "communist hypothesis."[30] The protests of 2011 are seen, to use a typical Badiouan term, as an "event", a moment of rupture in the historical continuum that opens the possibility of a new emancipatory universalism beyond the folly of the present capitalist order. For the *doyen* of French radical thought, the wave of occupations revealed that "we find ourselves in a time of riots wherein a rebirth of History, as opposed to the pure and simple repetition of the worst, is signalled and takes shape."[31]

While complimenting these movements for demonstrating that history is not yet over, as infamously argued by one of liberal democracy's foremost apologists, Francis Fukuyama,[32] these Marxist scholars unsurprisingly harbour a scepticism towards them and their neo-anarchist elements. Thus Badiou criticises these movements both for being insurrectionary rather than revolutionary, and for substituting the "correct" demand for communism with the demand for democracy, which he, like others in the group, considers a fundamentally bourgeois con.[33] Jodi Dean has taken aim at the organisational practices of these movements arguing that they should abandon their belief in spontaneity[34] and organise as a party,[35] while Žižek has often lambasted the narcissism of their direct democracy practices. This literature is perceptive enough to see the self-indulgence of the politics of horizontality and spontaneity. Yet, by scrabbling to associate these movements with the communist cause, these scholars demonstrate scant connection with the feelings of participants on the ground, who, as we shall see in the course of the book, in fact hold short shrift for the lost cause of the Soviet Union and are more concerned with the issue of democracy than with the overthrow of capitalism.

The "techno-political" view does not derive the characteristics of these movements from a specific ideology, but rather from the material and technological conditions in which contemporary activists operate. It focuses on the "affordances" of digital communication technologies in the era of social media like Facebook and Twitter, and the way they have facilitated new forms of inter-personal interaction and social organisation. An abundant literature has explored this issue, including the work of W. Lance Bennett,[37] Manuel Castells, Jeffrey Juris, Javier Toret, Antonio Calleja-Lopez, John Postill, Arnau Monterde[38] and this author's

previous book, *Tweets and the Streets*.[39] Famed sociologist of the network society Manuel Castells has argued that these "networked movements" are "largely made of individuals living at ease with digital technologies in the hybrid world of real virtuality," and are deeply influenced by the "culture of autonomy" of the internet.[40] Jeffrey Juris sees these movements' adoption of social media platforms leading to a transition of the "networking" logic of the anti-globalisation movement, to a logic of "mass aggregation", resulting in the huge crowds that gathered in the occupied squares.[41] These authors are right to highlight the role of digital connectivity in contemporary protest and its potential for grassroots organising. Indeed, as we will see, the values and worldview of these movements bear a strong connection to digital culture and hacker culture, and their techno-utopianism and techno-libertarianism. However, citizenism cannot be reduced to the affordances of digital communication alone; any evaluation needs to encompass the totality of contemporary social experience, and its emerging desires and fears at a time of systemic crisis.

The movement of the squares as a populist insurrection

There is a fourth possible interpretation of this protest movement, which informs the argument of this book and my understanding of citizenism. This view sees the 2011 and post-2011 mobilisations as manifesting a *populist turn* in protest culture, centring on the demand for popular sovereignty, economic equality and a restoration of the true spirit of democracy.[42] Since the beginning of the Great Recession there has been much discussion about a "populist zeitgeist"[43] seen in the rise of an array of populist phenomena on both the left and right wings of the political spectrum, including the rise of new parties such as Podemos and the Five Star Movement in Spain and Italy, the electoral growth of xenophobic formations like the Front National in France, and the emergence of anti-establishment candidates such as Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the US. As we will see in Chapter 2, populism is an eccentric ideology with both right and left-wing manifestations. The strand most relevant to understanding the movement of the squares is left-wing democratic populism, steeped in democratic passion and emancipatory fervour and with its roots in a number of people's movements, from the nineteenth-century reformers like the Russian Narodniks,

the British Chartists, and the US People's Party, to the Latin American "pink wave" of Chávez and Morales.

Like other democratic populist movements, citizenism's central concern has been with the reclaiming of democracy, understood not simply as a set of procedures for the selection of ruling elites,[44] as proposed by Joseph Schumpeter, but rather as a substantive condition of equality and freedom "that constantly wrests the monopoly of public life from oligarchic governments, and the omnipotence over lives from the power of wealth," as argues French philosopher Jacques Rancière.[45] Counter to the republican emphasis on mixed government and representation, populism approaches democracy in its original and radical sense as people-power and popular self-government. For populists, democracy is thus deeply intertwined with the notion of popular sovereignty as enabling the majority of the population to exercise "a day to day influence on the conduct of society," in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*.[46]

As we shall see, in the case of the 2011–16 public square occupations this customary populist demand for democracy and sovereignty was framed in protest discourse as depending on a bottom-up reclamation of citizenship rights, precisely because of the perception that their erosion in times of globalisation and financialisation is the factor that has allowed the establishment of the Oligarchy and the hollowing out of democracy.

My view of the movement of the squares and of citizenism as "neo-populist" has two important analytical and political implications.

First, this view locates the 2011 protest wave at an exceptional conjuncture of "regime crisis" or "organic crisis," in which, as Gramsci claims, "the old is dying and the new cannot be born," a moment at which progressive populist movements are more likely to arise.[47] The worst economic crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression of 1929—still hobbling the world as we continue through the second decade of the twenty-first century—and the deepening disaffection of citizens with the establishment, have contributed to hastening a crisis for the neoliberal order, with its faith in the self-regulating power of the market, which has dominated the world since the 1980s. The crisis of neoliberalism and the inability of established Left parties and civil society organisations—trade unions, co-operatives, associations—to give voice and weight to popular demands have created the space for new counter-hegemonic actors to arise on the back of broad social alliances that were previously inconceivable.

Secondly, the interpretation of the movement of the squares as populist highlights how, counter to what has been claimed by anarchist theorists, these mobilisations have not adopted a narrow anti-statist and anti-representational view. They have not aimed simply at creating forms of counter-power in civil society against political institutions. As will be seen when analysing the content of resolutions and declarations of popular assemblies, participants in the movement of the squares instead mostly saw in the opening-up of the state a necessary step towards reasserting popular sovereignty and confronting oligarchic power. This orientation marked a significant departure from the political logic of the anti-globalisation movement, which like many post-'68 anti-authoritarian movements before it saw the state as the enemy and not as a structure to be reclaimed. The return of a more pragmatic attitude towards political institutions goes a long way towards explaining why this protest wave has acted as the incubator for new political organisations and parties such as Podemos, and for the rise of left-wing political figures such as Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn.

Citizenism is, however, markedly different from traditional forms of populism in a number of respects. It is a populism with a libertarian twist, an "anarcho-populism" that reflects the influence of neo-anarchist culture in previous movements: it is populist in content, but libertarian or neo-anarchist in form. Also neo-anarchistic are its organisational structures, communicative practices, and protest tactics; but neo-populist the meanings, demands, and claims it conveys through such practices. Reflecting the libertarian primacy of the individual over the collective, and a concern for individual freedom, creativity, participation and self-realisation, long present in alternative movements and subcultures with their suspicion towards bureaucracy and large-scale organisations, citizenism appeals not to the People in its collectivity, but to the Citizen as the individual component of the People. It turns upside-down the modernist political imaginary of revolutions and popular movements, in which the citizen was seen simply as the "member" of the collective and totalising subject of the People, reflecting how references to "the People" smack too much of the distant upheavals of the nineteenth century and sound out of sync with the present era of individualism.[48] Citizenism is thus a populism for an individualised and digital era, informed by a suspicion towards organisations and by the libertarian ethos of digital culture, hacking, and open-source, yet also animated by

a resurgent desire for community and collective solidarity in face of extreme inequality.

Such a libertarian twist has important consequences for organisational forms. Citizenism moves away from the traditional populist assumption about the need for a charismatic leader as the necessary unifying element of an otherwise divided population. This assumption is thematised by Ernesto Laclau when he argues that, "the equivalential logic leads to singularity, and singularity to an identification of the unity of the group with the name of the leader,"[49] a view which is informed by Gustave Le Bon's famous description of the emotional relationship between the crowd and the leader.[50] Counter to this leader-centric view, citizenism sees popular unity as emerging organically out of people's "crowding" online and offline, rather than depending on top-down intervention. Reflecting its incorporation of the neo-anarchist principle of horizontality, citizenism is thus a populism of the "leaderless people", in which the function of the charismatic leader is substituted by the self-organising power of the connected citizenry and by a number of unifying symbols and practices, from the occupied squares to social media and popular assemblies. The movements have however not been completely deprived of leadership. Rather leadership has taken more collective, diffused and interactive forms than those seen in the Old Left of trade unions and parties.

The articulation between libertarian and populist orientations has led to new discourses and practices that have captured the public imagination, at times torn between individualism and a new desire for solidarity, between the narcissism displayed in social networking sites and selfies, and a returning longing for community. But this hybrid ideology has also experienced notable frictions, reflecting the profound differences between its constituent inspirations. Populist and neo-anarchist orientations sometimes appeared to be at cross-purposes and more or less easily identifiable populist and anarchist factions within these movements took rather different views of the meaning and purpose of the occupations. For example, where for anarchists protest camps were seen as self-governed communes prefiguring a world without state and government, for populists they were instead meant to constitute a temporary rallying point for the reclamation of the entirety of society and its political institutions.

2001–11: From counter-summits to public square encampments

This book is not an analysis of ideology as an abstract system of ideas, but rather of ideology as a lived texture of meaning, values and beliefs that pervades all the domains of activity of protest movements, and whose presence can be identified in their most concrete manifestations and the way they respond to overarching cultural motives. To conduct the present investigation we shall focus on two main levels: discourses and practices. The first encompasses the ways in which protest movements conceive of themselves, their adversaries, society, and their goals. The second includes the practices of communication, organisation and protest which these movements deploy in accordance with such discourses.

At the discourse level I will focus on two elements: *ideology*, understood as the general system of values and beliefs that structures these movements' worldview; and *identity*, understood as the subjective self-definition of protest movements. At the level of the analysis of practices, my study will focus instead on three issues: *communication practices* deployed by these movements, and the way in which they mobilise participants; the forms of protest often described as *protest tactics*; and finally the *forms of decision-making* and internal organisation. Other aspects that will be discussed include the geographic scale of protest action and its level of national and international coordination, and the connection between social movements and political institutions. Analysing these different levels of collective action will allow us to explore the concrete difference citizenism has made both to the way in which social movements operate internally, and how they interact with society at large.

To ascertain the specificity and novelty of the movement of the squares I will compare and contrast it with previous protest movements and in particular the anti-globalisation movement. This comparative approach stems from the recognition that no movement creates itself out of thin air; all reflect the deeds of their predecessors, inherit part of their language, aesthetics, and tactics, and absorb their victories and defeats. Yet protest movements are always also a reflection of the specific historical conjuncture they traverse, of the specific dilemmas and demands the present throws up. To them applies the Arab proverb, "men resemble their times more than they resemble their fathers", and this is particularly true at times of systemic crisis, the likes of which the world has been experiencing since the explosion of the financial crisis of 2008, which open the possibility for new actors to storm the political arena.

Table 0.1: Levels of analysis of protest culture

	Anti-globalisation movement	*Movement of the squares*
Discourses		
Ideology	Anarcho-autonomism (autonomy and diversity)	Citizenism (sovereignty and horizontality)
Identity	Countercultural/ minoritarian	Popular/majoritarian
Practices		
Communication	Indymedia, alternative mailing lists, hacker meetings	Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, messaging apps, hackpads
Organisation	Collectives, spokes-councils, social forums, logic of networking	Popular assemblies, logic of "organisation of the disorganised"
Protest tactics	Counter-summits, blockades, block-ins, direct action	Protest encampments in central public spaces; impromptu marches
Scale and political outcomes		
Scale	Global space	National space with strong transnational connections
Relationship with institutional space	Civil society versus political society; uneasy collaboration with political parties; anti-statist attitude	Strategy of "assault on the institutions"; genesis and re-generation of leftist political parties; constitutional processes and civic campaigns

The obvious case for comparison with the movement of the squares is the anti-globalisation movement, the most important predecessor and inspiration for the 2011 wave (see Table 0.1). The anti-globalisation movement, also known as the global justice movement or alter-globalisation movement, is the wave of protest against capitalist globalisation that emerged around the turn of the millennium, and whose flash-points were large counter-summit demonstrations such as those against the WTO in Seattle in 1999, the World Bank and IMF in Prague in 2000, and the G8 in Genoa in 2001.[51] The anti-globalisation protest wave

united different factions of the radical Left—Trotskyist groups, environmentalists, trade unions, and NGOs—in an unstable alliance of the radical Left after the defeat of the labour movement in the 1980s, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the newly rampant hegemony of neoliberalism. Within this motley crew the so-called "anarcho-autonomist" section, comprising both anarchist and Marxist autonomist groups—as manifested in a wide range of phenomena, from the anarchist Black Bloc to direct action environmentalist protests, and non-violent civil disobedience as practiced by groups such as the Tute Bianche [White Overalls][52] at counter-summit protests—exercised cultural hegemony over the whole movement, with its ideas of autonomy and the rejection of hierarchy influencing the entire movement. The anti-globalisation movement managed to mount an impressive challenge to the new regime of global governance, but was soon suffocated by police repression, in-fighting, and the "war on terror" that followed the 9/11 attacks, shifting attention away from its cause.

As we shall see, the relationship of the movement of the squares with the anti-globalisation movement is a complicated one. On the one hand, there are clear continuities between these two protest waves. Firstly, many of the older activists of the movement of the squares, those in their 30s and 40s, cut their teeth in the global counter-summits of the 1990s and 2000s. Secondly, the movement of the squares can be seen as a vindication of much of the analysis of the anti-globalisation movement and in particular its criticism of neoliberalism. Last but not least, the movement of the squares derived much of the organisational ethos and practice of the anti-globalisation movement, as seen for example in their consensus-based decision-making, their rejection of leadership and their use of direct action tactics. Despite this legacy, there is some evidence of rupture at the level of ideology, identity, and organisational practices that reflects the populist turn introduced by the 2011 upheavals, and the rise of citizenism. The 2011 generation of protesters spurned key beliefs and values of the anti-globalisation movement in order to respond to changing structural conditions and exploit the new political opportunities opening up for social movements.[53]

This change in spirit and attitude between the anti-globalisation movement and the movement of the squares is visible both at the level of "protest discourses" and "protest practices", the ideas guiding social movements and their concrete forms of action.