

PRO-PALESTINE BARCELONA: A MOVEMENT-CITY

On the street, on the way to any destination, sometimes more or less noticed by those who walk it, suddenly a set of words appears. The city is observed in the manner of "a flâneur, exploring its nooks and crannies, following unexpected paths, paying attention to what is not offered to the naked eye" (Barbosa & Lopes, 2019, p. 11). As a city surrounded by stimuli from various causes, Barcelona has been materializing several demonstrations of support for the State of Palestine. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has lasted for several decades, has intensified both infrastructurally and humanistically, and its media coverage and social media approaches have also increased over this past year (Abu-Ayyash, 2024). Hence, can Barcelona be conceived as a movement-city? This choice follows a research stay by the author of this article in that city this year and motivates an attempt to answer that question.

Since visuality is composed of points of visibility, as well as invisibility (Pereira et al., 2020), what is visible refers to compounds of meanings that identify others through communicative acts (texts) emerging from someone's interaction with something. For example, when someone walks and interacts with a sentence on a wall. One identifies it and identifies oneself with it to some degree. Even if ignorantly, it may lead one to think about that same sentence on the wall and what it represents. This occurs under a mediation that transforms into interaction, i.e., transmediation (Elleström, 2019). In physical or digital media. Social movements are thus transformed, through texts involving various (semiotic) resources, like colour, words, or their salience, expressing identities detectable in people's interaction with such texts (van Leeuwen, 2021).

Barcelona is a multicultural and diverse city, and any city is made of what all people individually and collectively leave in them. La Rocca (2022) points to the invention and reinvention of the city's daily life. This happens "through practices and uses of its multiple places and spaces" (p. 20). Regarding social movements, with a sociocognitive perspective of discourse production, van Dijk (2024) acknowledges the complexity beyond visible activism, pointing to what is behind the movements, that is, actions of mobilization to engage people, which inherently implies their discursive engagement. From these considerations, let's move onto the streets of that Catalan city.



Figure 1: Graffiti on the wall of a building in a square. Photo captured on March 3, 2024. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro.

On a wall, a first example is the graffiti 'FREE PALESTINE'; in Portuguese, 'PALESTINA LIVRE' (figure 1). Using contributions from Multimodality, Social Semiotics, and Critical Discourse Studies and related fields (e.g., Carvalho, 2008; Cunha & Cintra, 1997; Machin & Mayr, 2023; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023; van Dijk, 2017; 2024; van Leeuwen, 2021), it is possible to interpretively and critically look at this text, by noting the semiotic resources it mobilises that function as modes (multimodality), making texts emerge. First, the visual resources: participants, actional and ideational connections (what is suggested to reveal, think and feel, say and express, and what actions are conducted), colour, shape(s), salience, delimitation, setting and objects. Then, the verbal ones: semantic resources & grammar and vocabulary, actors it summons, and discursive strategies. Finally, the contextual ones: intertextual, sociocultural, political, historical and media.

The dark green colour points to the recognition of Palestine as a State and conveys a sense of "hope" and "renewal" (Heller, 2014/2000, p. 183). It highlights and delimits the message of a "FREE PALESTINE", which is both a metonymy and metaphor. Using the imperative mode, adjectivisation, and image as a stylistic device, the graffiti calls for the desire for recognition Palestine's independence of Israel and its territorial integrity, following the developments of recent months in that region and its global media coverage (e.g., Abu-Ayyash, 2024), as well as the protests of recent months, which have been intensifying along with their approaches in several media outlets and social media platforms. The sentence is frequently used in mobilisations in various cities worldwide and in platforms such as Instagram.

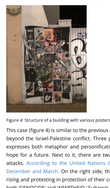


Figure 2: Graffiti on a structure in a construction site. Photo captured on January 21, 2024. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro.

In another case (figure 2), surrounded by a reflective silver metal structure and ongoing construction, the same statement stands out, followed by a heart drawing, visible through its shape. This heart refers to adherence to the cause and its intensity, as well as its more emotional and sentimental side, of attachment and affection. Considering the relationship between the two texts and others, this intertextuality reinforces the breadth of the phenomenon that is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting polarization on both sides of the conflict and support for both sides (e.g., van Dijk, 2017). Indeed, it refers to the representation of the country 'trapped' (Palestine) by another (Israel), suggesting that Palestine should free itself from Israel. Such aspects are suggested by a poster under analysis as follows.

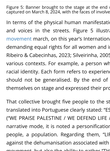


Figure 3: Posters in the window of an unoccupied store. Photo captured on March 3, 2024. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro.

Amid various posters, figure 3 shows some torn posters, where one stands out prominently featuring the flag of the State of Palestine, vertically oriented, with its triangle inverted and its vertex pointing downward. Visually, the actors involved have increased power upon the conflict (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In this case, all participants are people and residents in Palestine. The flag takes up most of the entire poster and reinforces that country's symbolic presence. Translating into Portuguese: "SOLIDARIEDADE COM A PALESTINA! PAREM COM O GENOCÍDIO! ACABEM COM A OCUPAÇÃO!", ("SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE! STOP THE GENOCIDE! END THE OCCUPATION"). The metonymy in the first clause indexes the cause in that State's defence. It is followed by two sentences in the imperative mode, stating "THE GENOCIDE" and "THE OCCUPATION," which must be 'stopped and 'ended'.



Figure 4: Structure of a building with various posters. Photo captured on January 21, 2024. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro.

This case (figure 4) is similar to the previous one, as it mixes various other posters and representations with references beyond the Israel-Palestine conflict. Three posters stand out at the top of the structure. From left to right, the first expresses both metaphor and personification with "GAZA RISES," evoking a part of Palestine that resists and holds hope for a future. Next to it, there are two children hugging, seemingly dehumanised after being victims of Israeli attacks. According to the United Nations (UN), at least 12 300 children died as a result of such attacks between December and March. On the right side, there is another representation: Gaza under destruction along with people living and protesting in protection of their country, featuring a Palestinian flag on top with words calling for an 'end' to both 'GENOCIDE' and 'APARTHEID.' Sultany's article (2024) discusses discursive empowerment using "additional prisms" (p. 26). The author mentions there is a "Jewish supremacy," where Palestinians are given an inferior status, fragmented into ghettos (...) dehumanized" (p. 3).



Figure 5: Banner brought to the stage at the end of the *8M movement* march, near Arc de Triomf, by the Cia la Dona collective. Photo captured on March 8, 2024, with the faces of involved individuals obscured. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro.

In terms of the physical human manifestation of such protests, the focus shifts from graffiti and posters to marches and voices in the streets. Figure 5 illustrates those multimodal realisations, referring to a photo from the 8M movement march, on this year's International Women's Day, on the last 8th March. The streets were filled with people demanding equal rights for all women and individuals within their intersectionalities (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2015; Ribeiro & Cabecinhas, 2023; Silveirinha, 2005). This last concept points to all the identity forms that identify a person in various contexts. For example, a person who is both a woman and black expresses a gender identity aligned with a racial identity. Each form refers to experiences providing either privilege or oppression on an unstable spectrum that should not be generalised. By the end of the march, the various collectives involved came together to represent themselves on stage and expressed their protest. One of them was the Catalan feminist collective Cia la Dona.

That collective brought five people to the stage, where they read a manifesto while holding a banner in Catalan that translated into Portuguese clearly stated: "ESTAMOS A PALESTINA! DEFENDEMOS A VIDA! VAMOS PARAR O MUNDO" ("WE PRAISE PALESTINE / WE DEFEND LIFE / WE WILL STOP THE WORLD") (figure 5). Besides the previously explored narrative mode, it is noted a personification, as if Palestine were a person itself, suggesting it represents a group of people, a population. Regarding them, "LIFE" refers to the humanistic character and a counter-reactionary sense against the dehumanisation associated with the Israeli's attacks. As for the "WORLD," it suggests the global sense of the movement, but also the ability to gather "THE WORLD" for the movement. Furthermore, there are the Palestinian flags, the background pattern of the banner, which refers to the *keffiyeh* scarf as a Palestinian symbol that has become even more globalised in the past year (Abu-Ayyash, 2024), and another poster in the background held by one of the movement's participants that highlights the number "25,000" in reference to the number of women killed in Gaza up to that point.

It is witnessed the materialisation of the movement and the exclamation of the intersection of various identity forms. It is possible to identify people who are women, Palestinian, pro-Palestine, victims of armed conflict, displaced, injured, and/or killed. The mobilisation in the streets and on social media during the 8M movement, according to elDiario.es, gathered "tens of thousands of people" in Barcelona, one of the first cities in Spain to promote such initiatives for International Women's Day. Additionally, the regional government of Barcelona has cut diplomatic relations with Israel since last year until a "total ceasefire" is achieved, and, more recently, the University of Barcelona approved a motion "in support of Palestine and Against the 'genocide'". Following other global movements, several demonstrations of support continue, including student initiatives at universities. Next, here is an appeal for mobilization for a pro-Palestinian demonstration.



Figure 6: *Poster promoting* a demonstration to be held on January 20, 2024. Photo captured on January 14, 2024. Credits: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro

The poster identifies the date, location, time, and involved collectives. Through its reading, one can find the phrases: 'LET'S STOP THE GENOCIDE ON PALESTINE,' 'END ARMS TRADE AND RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL,' reflecting the purposes driving the demonstration. The poster cornerstones and invokes the Palestinian State map before 1947 and UN agreements. Images of missiles falling on the territory from the right side allude to Israel, while birds in Palestinian flag colours on the left allude to peace and independence.

In conclusion, Barcelona exhibits "counter-visualities" in everyday living spaces, which construct "messages" that become "permanent" and themselves "daily present" (Barbosa & Lopes, 2019, pp. 25-26). Returning to La Rocca (2022, p. 20), the city embodies "the lived experience through a collective identity generated by sensitive qualities and the variety of environments encountered." This essay demonstrates that crowds take to the streets driven by both the diversity of graphics and their own voices. Through this article, at the very least, visually mapped, it is suggested that Barcelona explicitly and multimodally expresses support for Palestine. Therefore, in response to the hypothesis listed in the introduction, it can be considered a movement-city.

Texts and images: Pedro Eduardo Ribeiro (CECS – Universidade do Minho)
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