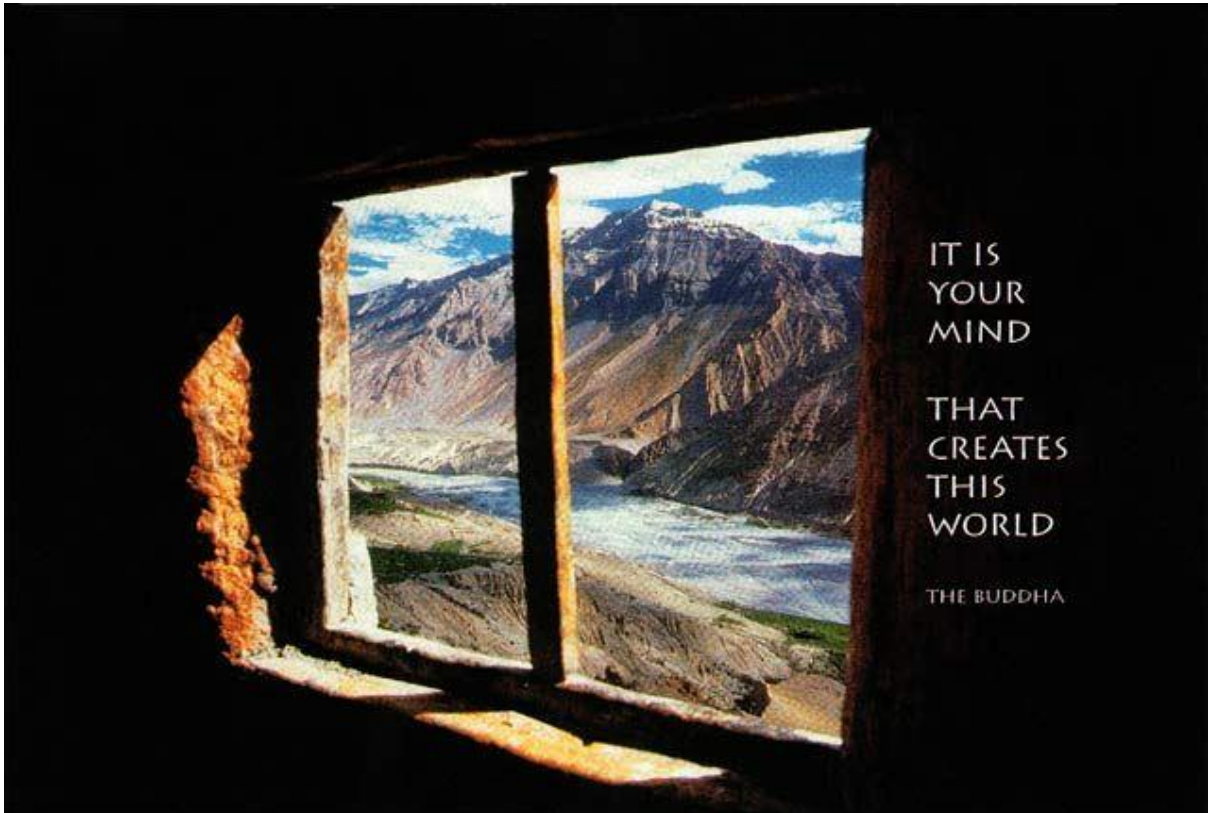


A Window of Opportunity?

*The Olympic Torch Relay as empowerment of the
nonviolent resistance campaigns of Catalans and Tibetans*



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Dinner is served: Enjoy my own-twisted Italian pasta!

Introduction

The Olympic Torch Relay as “symbolic event could barely fail to attract the interest of human rights and pro-Tibet activist, with both groups willing to exploit the event to protest the Chinese Regime.”

“At the agreed moment, the activist coordinating and triggering the action launched himself into the roadway [of the Torch Relay] shouting: ‘Freedom for Tibet!’”

– Pro-Tibet activist Xavier Renou.¹

The Olympic Games are more than only an international sports event, despite the recurring call of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and China to keep it an *apolitical* event. In reality, the Olympics offer a platform for host nations to gain political legitimatisation and for minorities to empower their claim of independence.²

The Olympics are the ultimate sports mega-events³ as they attract massive worldwide attention: they bring together journalists, heads of states, CEOs, celebrities, tourists and opinion-leaders from around the globe. As a result, the Olympic Games open up this rare window of opportunity to highlight political issues, as for a short moment in time, the world’s eyes are pointed towards the hosting country and its contemporary flaws. In this light, the Beijing Olympics of 2008 were unprecedented as the Opening Ceremony was attended by 204 national sport-teams, over a hundred state officials (amongst them was the U.S. president who, for the first time, attended an Olympic

¹ Xavier Renou was a key actor in the pro-Tibet campaign around the Torch Relay preceding the 2008 Beijing Olympics, as will be examined in chapter two. See Xavier Renou, “Resisting the Torch,” in *The Olympic Games, Mega-Events, and Civil Societies: Globalization, Environment, Resistance*, ed. Graeme Hayes and John Karamichas (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2012), 240 (first quote), 243 (second quote).

²The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Chinese authorities propagate the *apolitical* character of the Olympics to silence the human rights debates that surrounded the Beijing Olympics. The IOC did not take an active stance against China’s human rights abuses and therefore this research does not focus on this organisation. For information on the role of the IOC see Susan Brownell, “Human rights and the Beijing Olympics: imagined global community and the transnational public sphere” *The British Journal of Sociology* 63, no. 2 (2012): 312-313, 320-325; Michael Caster, “Nonviolent activism around the Olympic Games: History and lessons learned,” *Open Democracy*, November 4, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/civil-resistance/michael-caster/human-rights-new-millennium-for-olympics>.

³ Maurice Roche defines *Sport Mega-Events* as “Large-scale events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance” such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cups and UEFA games. M. Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics, Expos and the Growth of Global Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000) Referenced by: Hayes. “Introduction,” in *The Olympic Games, Mega-Events, and Civil Societies*, 2.

Ceremony abroad) and two million tourists. Moreover, the Beijing Olympics were the most-watched Olympic Games in human history. To illustrate, 32,278 journalists provided global media coverage watched by 70 % of the world's population, a total of 4.7 billion viewers via television and 153 million via live broadcast online. These numbers signify that the Beijing Olympics provided an exceptional international media platform that opened up opportunities for pro-Tibet activism.⁴

In symbolic terms, the Olympics fuel a contest between host nation-states and suppressed minorities over who's message is conveyed through the Olympics. Indeed, the host nation aims to present its 'national character' to the world, but not all minorities feel represented by this national identity or *Imagined Community*, to borrow Benedict Anderson's term.⁵ Under normal circumstances states have an advantage in this contest as they control the means of repression and meaning production through media censorship. However, during the Olympics the host nation's *international* image is at stake, making them vulnerable to domestic and international criticism.⁶

Especially the international media around the Olympics plays a key role in taking control over the framing process by transmitting the message of minorities. In addition, transnational activists "networks can help reframe international and domestic debates, changing their terms, their sites, and the configuration of participants" according to the authors of *Activists beyond Borders*.⁷ As such, the Olympics as an international event can fuel *Transnational Activism* in which activists' networks of across the world can empower each other, as was the case during the Beijing Olympics. In short, the international dimension of the Olympics creates opportunities for minorities to hijack the spotlight to present their distinctive identities.⁸

⁴ Brownell, "Human rights", 307-308; John Feffer, "Can the Olympics Democratize China?," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, August 1, 2008, http://fpif.org/can_the_olympics_democratize_china/

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁶ David Rowe and Jim McKay "Torchtlight Temptation: Hosting the Olympics and the global gaze", in *Watching the Olympics: Politics, Power and Representation*, ed. John Peter Sugden, Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 2012), 122-123; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in the Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 1994), 32.

⁷ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ney York: Cornell University Press, 1998), X.

⁸ In his later work Sidney Tarrow explores the mechanism of *Transnational Activism*. He emphasises the importance of transnational networks to frame domestic issues as global issues to boost activism. See Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59-76; Keck, *Activists beyond Borders*, 1-4, 16-25.

What is interesting is that, most literature on sport mega-events look at the Olympics from a state-centered perspective, focusing on the advantages for host nations in terms of financial gain, status and image building. This connects to the gap in mainstream International Relations theory that takes a top-down perspective neglecting the role of non-state actors, as will be further explained below. For example, scholars focused on how the Beijing Olympics were China's chance to showcase its political and economic power to the world to gain legitimacy and attract foreign investments.⁹ In this analysis, the social impact and responses by civil society are overshadowed. Furthermore, scholars that did pay attention to this, focus on protest *against* the Olympics itself by anti-globalisation or environment activists.¹⁰ In contrast, this research analyses how minority groups used the Olympics as an international platform to protest against their national governments.

Research Question

Consequently, the aim is to answer: *To what extent did Catalan and Tibetan activists deploy the window of opportunity created by the Torch Relays preceding the Olympic Games to empower their nonviolent resistance campaigns?*

Nonviolent resistance is a strategic method to express civil disobedience against the authorities without the use of violence, such as symbolic demonstrations, protest marches, boycotts and labor strikes.¹¹ In this thesis two case studies are discussed: the

⁹ Scholars for example focused on the Olympics as catalyst for urban development and global city-marketing: see Leo van den Berg, et al., *Sports and city marketing in European cities*. (Rotterdam: EURICUR, 2000) ; For a top-down study on the Barcelona Olympics, see Christopher Kennett and Miquel de Moragas, "Barcelona, 1992: Evaluating the Olympic Legacy" in *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, ed. Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 177-195; on the Beijing Olympics, see Anne-Marie Broudehoux, "Civilizing Beijing: Social Beautification, Civility and Citizenship at the 2008 Olympics," in *The Olympic Games, Mega-Events, and Civil Societies*, 46-67.

¹⁰ For debate on Olympics and anti-globalisation activism, see Helen Lenskyj, *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008); Egidio Dansero et al., "Olympic Games, Conflicts and Social Movements: The Case of Torino 2006" in *The Olympic Games, Mega-Events, and Civil Societies*, 195-218 and more chapters in this volume.

¹¹ This research follows Stephan and Chenoweth definition of *Nonviolent Resistance* as "a civilian-based method used to wage conflict through social, psychological, economic and political means without the threat or use of violence." This definition is largely synonymous with other terms including 'non-violent action', 'people power' and 'civil resistance'. Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Political Conflict," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008), 9-10; Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Ghandi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2-3, 371-372. Sharon E. Nepstad, "Nonviolent Civil Resistance and Social Movement," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 7 (2013): 590-598.

nonviolent resistance campaign of Catalans during the 1992 Barcelona Olympics on the one hand and the actions of pro-Tibet activists surrounding the Beijing Olympics of 2008 on the other. In both cases, the Torch Relays will be taken as focal point because it turned out that the *game* between activists and authorities was played during the Torch Relay preceding the opening of the real Games.

Theoretical Framework

“Among progressive activists there is a palpable sense that ‘another world is possible’ together with the feeling that each and every individual can make a difference, fighting with creative and innovative means to improve the political balance of forces on behalf of popular movements.”¹²

This quote of pro-Tibet activist Xavier Renou acknowledges the power and agency of civic actors, which inspired the bottom-up approach of this research. This is especially relevant since it challenges the mainstream view to think about power and politics within International Relations from a top-down state-centered perspective. In contrast, scholars on *nonviolent resistance* advocate this bottom-up approach that values specifically this agency of individuals, collectively represented under the concept of *Civil Society*.¹³ As it acknowledges *People’s Power* as a significant form of power, it offers a nuanced understanding of the powerful and powerless. Already in 1978, Václav Havel famously described nonviolent resistance as “The Power of the Powerless” as it deprives the power-holder of their coercive means and exposes “the powerlessness of the powerful.”¹⁴

Still most research focuses on ‘hard power’, such as military and coercive action, to generate political and social change. However, Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth show in their quantitative research of 232 civil resistance campaigns between 1900 and 2006, that the nonviolent strategy is more successful than its violent counterpart. Exactly because of its peaceful methods, nonviolent resistance has the ability to undermine the regime’s security forces, mobilise the population and gain international support.¹⁵ Like

¹² Renou, “Resisting the Torch,” 239.

¹³ Following the standard definition used by Hayes, this research defines Civil Society as a conscious set of “social movements, activist networks, advocacy NGOs, civic associations and church organizations.” With this definition, this research can assess the role of NGOs as representatives of civil society. Hayes, “Introduction,” 21.

¹⁴ Václav, Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

¹⁵ Stephen and Chenoweth’s found that “major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 per cent of the time, compared with 26 per cent for violent resistance campaigns.” Stephan and Chenoweth, “Why Civil

Stephan and Chenoweth, this research aims to contribute to the growing literature that acknowledges nonviolent resistance as an effective instrument for socio-political change.¹⁶

Literature debate

The concept of nonviolent resistance is embedded in the broader academic debate on *Social Movements*.¹⁷ In this debate, Sidney Tarrow offers a relevant theoretical framework in his critically acclaimed book *Power in the Movement* of 1986. Tarrow identifies three intersecting elements of social movements: 1) *political opportunities and constraints* that either encourage or discourage collective action, 2) *networks and organisations*, and 3) *cultural artifacts and frames* that advance meaning and solidarity (Figure 1).¹⁸ As such, his book centers on the following crucial question: “How ordinary people take advantage of incentives created by shifting opportunities and constraints?”¹⁹ Can the Olympics function as this rare moment in time during which the balance of power can be temporarily shifted? Consequently, Tarrow’s framework allows this research to take the bottom-up approach that values both activists’ strategies and political opportunity structures.

Resistance Works,” 8. For database on the nonviolent campaigns see Appendix 1 of the book M.J Stephan and E. Chenoweth, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 233-236.

¹⁶ See April Carter, “People Power and Protest: The Literature of Civil Resistance in Historical Context,” in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action From Ghandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25-42; Peter Ackerman and Christopher Krueger, *Strategic nonviolent conflict: The dynamics of people power in the Twentieth Century*. (Westport: Praeger Publisher, 1994).

¹⁷ Tarrow defines *Social Movement* as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities,” Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 9.

¹⁸ For a detailed explanation of these three elements see the corresponding chapter 6-8 of Tarrow’s book. Tarrow defines *political opportunities* as a “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – sets of clues that encourage people to engage in contentious politics.” By *constraints*, he means those factors that discourage collective action such as degree of repression. Moreover, Tarrow explains that people are mobilised through *Collective action-frames* or shared understandings, identities and grievances that justify collective action, see Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 31-32. For later studies that followed Tarrow, see Dough McAdam, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, ed., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-17.

¹⁹ Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 6.

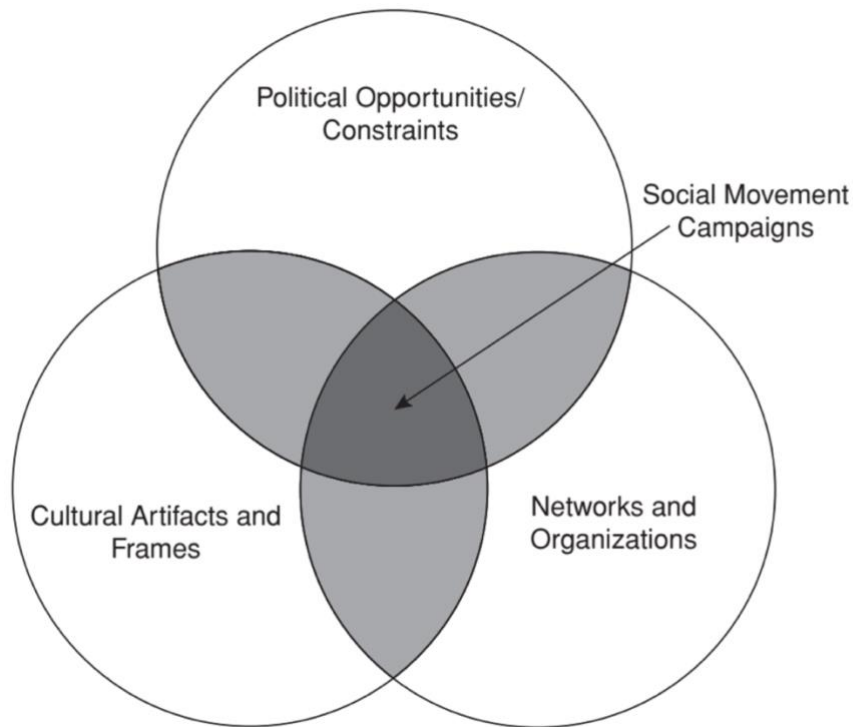


Figure 1: The Intersecting Elements of Social Movements

Tarrow's three intersecting elements are based on insights from previous social movement theories that can be divided into three camps.²⁰ The first camp adheres to the *resource mobilisation theory* that emphasizes the means of mobilisation *internally* available to activists such as campaign strategy, leadership and organisations. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald coincided their theory during the high days of social movement in the 1960s and 1970s and became the dominant paradigm in social movement studies by the 1980s. Positively, it offered a fresh and concrete perspective on the "How" of collective action, considering individual actors as catalyst for change. However, other scholars criticised to narrow focus on professional organisations and leadership, ignoring the informal structure that characterised these movements.²¹

In reaction, a second camp emerged in the 1980s stressing decentralization and grassroots participation. Following the "Cultural and Constructivist Turn" the *framing and collective identity* theorists aimed to transcend structural factors by focusing on emotions, cultural frames, solidarity and collective identity as source of mobilisation.

²⁰ Tarrow provides a clear overview of these three different camps and traces the roots back to the classical theorists of social movement including Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, and Tilly. Following three paragraphs are based on Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 16-34.

²¹ Mayer Zald, and J.D. McCarthy, *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics* (Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop Publishers, 1979).

Certainly, this perspective offered insights on how movements make meaning, bringing the agency of activists to the forefront. However, both *resource mobilisation* and *collective identity* theories do not provide a deeper structural explanation on “Why” movement emerge in certain times and places. A third camp saw the answer in diversity of the political structure.

Already in 1978 Charles Tilly laid the foundation for the *political opportunity approach* that took political structures as its focal point.²² These political conditions – such as a degree of repression and political freedom - are treated as *external* to activists. For this reason, critics argue that by only looking at political environment, this approach fails to explain successful cases in highly repressive regimes. Taking this criticism into account, Tarrow further developed the political opportunity approach by combining it with the other approaches that together explain social movements campaigns. Consequently, his approach answers both WHY people mobilise specifically in this period and place, which has something to do with their perception of political opportunities, and HOW they mobilise through organizations, networks and cultural frames. In short, in Tarrow’s theory lies the theoretical foundation for this research.²³

The Main Argument

The main argument of this thesis constitutes of two parts as visualized in the image below.²⁴ First, it aims to display that the Olympics Torch Relay can function as this temporarily window of political opportunity. Second, how activists can deploy this international event to empower their nonviolent resistance campaigns. Therefore, it answers to the call of social movement scholars to direct future research into how the international dimension influences the outcome of movements. For instance, Sharon Nepstad points to future research into the different types of international involvement such as economic sanctions, financial and military support by other nation-states and

²² The foundation is laid by Charles Tilly: *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978). The concept was further developed by Eisinger (1973), Kitschelt (1986), McAdam (1999 [1982]) and Tarrow (1989) amongst others, see Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 27.

²³ Likewise, Sharon Nepstad takes a theoretical middle path combining both political conditions with campaign strategy. Comparable to Tarrow and Nepstad, this research maintains a two-sided focus as it takes the counter-strategy of the opposing regime into account and the ways the state can neutralize movements strategies. Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 28-34; Sharon E. Nepstad, *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xii-xiii.

²⁴ The main argument concerns a constitutive relationship, in which the Olympics *help shape* movements, rather than a causal relationship.

solidarity efforts by international organisations.²⁵ However, this is still too much guided by a top-down perspective, while this research advocates the bottom-up approach. Consequently, by combining the literatures on Olympic sports-mega events with social movement theory this thesis aims to deliver a theoretical contribution to the debate.



Methodology

This research takes a historical approach to analyse the different actors in historical and political context. This to recreate the historical report of events based on eyewitness reports, media accounts, primary and secondary sources. In addition, the analysis focuses on symbolic expressions such as flags, slogans and anthems. Especially during the Olympic Torch Relay, symbols proved to be important sources to deploy in the power struggle between nation-state and opponents.²⁶

²⁵ In her comparative study Nepstad finds that international involvement can backfire as some authoritarian regimes were able to neutralize the effect of international sanctions and strengthen their claim to power. Nepstad proposes more research into this. Nepstad, "Nonviolent Civil Resistance", 594-596.

²⁶ The most important source for the Catalan case is John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia: Catalan nationalism, Spanish identity, and the Barcelona Olympic Games* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 58. Hargreaves' main argument is that the Barcelona Olympics provided a site for ongoing renegotiation of national and regional identities. Building upon his work this thesis argue that the Barcelona Olympics provided political opportunities for the Catalan minority to empower their struggle for more autonomy within the Spanish state. The Tibetan Case combines the activist's perspective of Xavier Renou with western newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *the Guardian*. These sources are in English, which is as first language in the world the most accessible. In addition, this research analyses

Justification Torch Relay

This thesis takes the Torch Relay as a focal point, because it is for two reasons the opportunity par excellence to fuel nonviolent resistance. First, from a *symbolic* perspective, the Olympic flame is arguably the most cherished Olympic symbol as it embodies international unification and peace.²⁷ After the lighting ceremony in Olympia, Greece, the Torch Relay to the host country is the first Olympic event in terms of world media and athletic show. The cultural significance of the Torch Relay therefore offers a great opportunity for activists to hijack this symbolic meaning and communicate their own message via the international media platform.

Second, from a *technical* perspective, the image of the host nation is exposed during the international Torch Relay. However, the host nation lacks the control over the media and security forces outside its own state sovereignty. As its suppressive control is decreased it offers chances for minorities to resist. Moreover, the Torch Relay has a big reach as millions of people, including activists, who otherwise would not have been able to get close, can now attend an Olympic event freely. Consequently, the Torch Relay allows a comparison between the Catalan and Tibet cases as in both cases the game between activists and authorities was fought around the Torch Relay and not during the Olympic Games. Especially, China's longest Torch Relay through all continents provided a path for pro-Tibet activists to bypass China's repression and media censorship.²⁸

Case-study selection

The Olympic Torch Relay acted as a vehicle for both Catalans and Tibetans to advance their nonviolent resistance protest, providing evidence for the main argument. An analysis of these cases hold implications for the future since their resistance struggles are still persistent nowadays. To illustrate, Catalonia's struggle intensified in October 2017 when the Catalan parliament called for an independence referendum, which is still

symbolisms which is visual and more universal understandable. Nonetheless, this research acknowledges its western perspective as it uses western media sources and academic literature. Therefore, it also refers to Brownell, who offers a critical approach to the "western" dominated debate by incorporating the Chinese perspective, see Brownell, "Human rights", 312-314, 324-325.

²⁷ During the Torch Relay the International community agreed on an Olympic Truce to stop all warfare during the time of the Olympic games. For information on the history and symbolism of the Olympic Torch see Hayes, "Introduction", 6; John J. MacAloon, "Introduction: the Olympic Flame Relay. Local knowledges of a global ritual form," *Sport in Society* 15, No.5 (June 2012): 575-594;

²⁸ Subsequent paragraphs based on: Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 240-241; Rowe, "Torchlight Temptation," 123-124; Tomlinson, *National Identity and Global Sports Events*, 7.

evolving. Likewise, Tibetans have launched a new campaign in 2015 to oppose China's hosting of the 2022 Winter Olympics.²⁹

Moreover, to my knowledge, both cases are understudied from a bottom-up approach. The Barcelona case is frequently studied and almost universal triumphed as a "success" case in terms of organisation, economically profitable and benefiting Spanish and Catalan relations.³⁰ However, this top-down view often overshadows the successful Catalan resistance campaign, that the bottom-up perspective aims to highlight. Tibetan resistance around the Olympics is also understudied because it is framed as a *failed* case as it did not result in socio-political changes for Tibetans. This can be attributed to China's repressive regime.³¹ However, when looking more closely to the Torch relay from a bottom-up approach, we will see how protesters worked with the constraints and initiated protest outside China. In this way, these case studies focus on the mechanism of social movements, going beyond the narrow focus on the outcome in terms of *failed* or *successful* resistance. Combining these two specific cases and studying them from the bottom-up approach offers a fresh and novel perspective.³²

Road-map

The first chapter focuses on how the Catalan minority deployed the passing of the Torch through Catalonia in June 1992 to empower their struggle for more autonomy within the Spanish state. Similarly, the second chapter analyses how the pro-Tibet activists, with support of transnational actors, used the Torch Relay through Paris to empower their nonviolent resistance campaign against the Chinese regime?

Each chapter focuses on the empowerment factors by analysing the activist's strategy, the state's counter-strategy and the role of the media. Leading is how these actors in the context of the Olympic Torch Relay empowered the nonviolent resistance campaigns.

²⁹ David Child and Charlotte Mitchell, "Catalonia independence referendum: All you need to know," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/catalonia-independence-referendum-170927083751915.html> ; "Beijing wins Winter Olympics 2022," Free Tibet, version July 31, 2015, <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/beijing-wins-winter-olympics-2022>

³⁰ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 130; Kennett, "Barcelona, 1992," 178, 189-191.

³¹ Barry Sautman, "China's Strategic Vulnerability to Minority Separatism in Tibet," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 32, no. 2 (2005), 87-91.

³² Rowe's chapter "Torchtight Temptations" focuses on how China's Torch Relay through London provoked protest, therefore this research will focus on the lap through Paris.

Chapter 1: the Catalan Case



Introduction

“They [Catalonian activists] were determined to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the progress of the Torch Relay to agitate in favour of the nationalist cause, and they continued with their attempts to appropriate it symbolically by surrounding it as much as possible with all the paraphernalia of Catalan Nationalism - flags, banners, slogans and so on.”³³

This core observation by John Hargreaves underscores the opportunities for Catalan nonviolent resistance that opened up during the Torch Relay through Catalonia from 13th till the 21st of June 1992. This chapter turns to the sub-question: how did Catalan *nationalists* use the Torch Relay through Catalonia to empower their nonviolent resistance campaign for more autonomy within the Spanish State?³⁴ After a short historical context, a report of the activism around the welcoming ceremony of the torch in Catalonia is given. Secondly, this chapter examines the political context that made the Olympics an empowering stage for a contest over identity juxtaposing *Catalanisation* versus *Españolisation*. Third, it analyses the role of the different actors at play, consisting of 1) the Catalan nationalist camp, 2) Spanish authorities and 3) the media. Finally, it closes with an intermediate conclusion on how each of these actors contributed to empower the nonviolent resistance of Catalans.

³³ Hargreaves. *Freedom for Catalonia*, 82.

³⁴ Echoing Hargreaves, this chapter refers to Catalan activists as ‘nationalists’ as this reflects exactly the contest over who’s imagined community is represented through Olympics.

Historical context

Catalan claims for more autonomy within the Spanish state has a long history that dates back to 19th century. Especially during the Franco regime, Catalan culture and language were suppressed which only strengthened Catalan nationalist movements underground. Eventually, Spain became a democracy in 1970s consisting of seventeen autonomous states of which Catalonia was one of the most developed regions. Catalonia gained official autonomy in 1979 with its own parliament, the *Generalitat*. However, tension remained between the Spanish state and Catalonia, which had a strong political and economic position. Stemming from this historic tension both Catalonia and Spain saw the 1992 Olympics as an opportunity to boost their image and get their message across. As such, Catalans aim to pursue their ongoing quest for more autonomy while the young democratic Spain aimed to showcase and legitimize their modernized image.³⁵

1. Report of events

*“Our aim is to take advantage of the Barcelona games to show the existence of Catalonia and to let people know that Catalonia is a nation without its own state. Our campaign is not against the games,” said Marc Puig, a spokesman for Accio Olimpica, one of the Catalan nationalists organisation.*³⁶

The months before the Torch Relay were characterized by increased tension and mutual suspicious between Catalan nationalists and Spanish authorities that threatened the success of the Games. Already from the send-off ceremony of the Torch Relay in Athens on the 8th of June, the ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ campaign took in a prominent place as activist demonstrated with banners and *La Senyera* - Catalonia’s red and yellow flag. Especially, the arrival of the Torch on the Catalan soil at Empuries on the 13th of June became the focal point for Catalan activists to demonstrate their distinctiveness from Spain.

Indeed, the welcoming ceremony was a completely Catalan event with strong references to Catalan symbols, history and culture such as their own anthem, the

³⁵ See for historical context of Catalan nationalism Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 16-37.

³⁶ Elizabeth Nash, “Catalans to raise nationalist banner at the Olympics: The Games bring a golden opportunity to pursue an old struggle,” *Independent*, July 10, 1992, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/catalans-to-raise-nationalist-banner-at-the-olympics-the-games-bring-a-golden-opportunity-to-pursue-1532325.html>

language and the Catalan flag. To illustrate, the flame reached the Catalan shore in a traditional Catalan fishing boat accompanied by classical Catalan music and dancing. Afterwards, Catalan poets and composers together with many more Catalan singers and musicians were all performing to make sure Catalan identity was prominently present. Moreover, the invited audience of around 3000 people was mainly Catalan, including members of Catalan political elite such as Pasqual Maragall, the mayor of Barcelona, and Jordi Pujol, the president of the Catalan parliament. Outside the enclosed area thousand more Catalans were present following the ceremony on a large screen. Above all, the nationalist groups - which will be addressed later - were strongly represented inside and outside the enclosure displaying Catalan symbolism as *senyeres* and 'Freedom for Catalonia' on T-shirts and banners (Image 2). For example, activists ensured their campaign's visibility with an air balloon and a large 30-meter *senyera* on the beach.

This symbolic contest reached its peak during the key moment of the welcoming ceremony when the flame was received at the Greek remnants at Empuries. This dramatic moment proved *the* opportunity to stage action as a militant activist ran towards the sacred flame and wrapped a 'Freedom for Catalonia' banner around its pedestal. It was left in that place throughout the whole ceremony providing extensive exposure. Even though this expression of Catalan resistance was removed by the Spanish television, it was captured on the front pages of national and international newspapers the next day. This displays the influence of the media in broadcasting Catalan resistance, which challenges Spanish image abroad, as will be discussed later.

In addition, the contest over symbolism was not only aimed at advancing Catalan symbols, but also showing Catalan resistance to Spanish symbolism. Firstly, a group showing a Spanish flag was confronted with a hostile crowd that threw sand and burned the flag. Secondly, when Javier Solana, the Spanish minister of education, delivered his speech in Spanish, he was silenced by loud whistling and shouting. The audience both inside and outside the enclosure expressed their disapproval on "how stupid the minister had been, when all he had to do was to use Catalan."³⁷ As Hargreaves explains, using Spanish instead of Catalan was interpreted by many Catalans as disregarding the Catalan culture. In this regard, reference to the Spanish flag and language are interpreted as *franquista* provocation, referring to fascism under Franco. Consequently, this

³⁷ Referenced by Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 81

underscores the importance of Catalan flags and language to express their difference from Spain.

Taken Empuries as example, nationalists were determined to continue their activism with a well-organized 'Freedom for Catalonia' campaign. As such, Catalan activists went ahead of the Olympic convoy to distributing Catalan flags and banners to local spectators to ensure the Torch was welcomed by extensive Catalan symbolism (Image 1). Moreover, conflict arose at Banyoles, an extremist nationalist stronghold, and later again at Montserrat, Catalonia's foremost nationalist sanctum, on the 19th of June.³⁸ This illustrates that the Torch Relay through Catalonia created this dispute over symbolism to express Catalan nationalist identity and press for more autonomy within the Spanish state.³⁹



Image 1



Image 2

³⁸ Due to special local circumstances violent confrontation took place at Banyoles between extremist nationalists and security force, stationed at Banyoles. However, the incidents at Banyoles were an exception as the majority of Catalan nationalists valued nonviolent measures, see Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 82-83, 132-133.

³⁹ Report of events is based on Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 77-89; See for facts and a map of the Torch Relay, The Olympic Studies Centre, "Barcelona 1992 Torch Relay" in *Torches and Torch Relays of the Olympic Summer Games from Berlin 1936 to Rio 2016*. Version May 22, 2017, <https://www.olympic.org/studies>, 61-65; Romá Cuyàs, ed., "The Preparation of the Games" in *Official report of the Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992*, (Barcelona: COOB'92, 1992), vol. 3: 9-421.

2. Empowering context

Symbolic perspective

As explained in the introduction, the Torch Relay fueled a contest over symbolism and identity. In the case of Barcelona, this contest was rooted in an old political power struggle. Already from the start of the bid the different political actors at local (Barcelona), regional (Catalonia), and national (Spain) level supported the Games out of different interests. Most prominent were the conflicting objectives between Spain and Catalonia over whether the Games should convey the message of *Españolisation* or *Catalanisation*. This raises the question of who is represented as part of imagined community of the Spanish state. Clearly, Catalonia does not feel part of the Spanish state-narrative and therefore using the Olympics to show their distinctiveness and press for more autonomy. This is problematic for Spain, since it is highly concerned with maintaining a good relationship with Catalonia to discourage separatist sentiments. In addition, Spain's international image would be damaged if the games were to be disrupted by Catalan nationalism, making it sensitive to Catalan demands for *Catalanisation* of the Games.⁴⁰

Technical perspective

From a *technical perspective*, the coming of the flame to Catalonia itself offered an undeniable opportunity to the activists. Especially important, the nonviolent character challenged the Spanish monopoly to use violence. The recent history of fascism and abuse of state violence under Franco, made state repression still a sensitive topic at the time of the Olympics. More recently, the authorities had gained some bad experiences with using police violence against activists. To illustrate, during the opening of the Olympic stadium on 8 September 1989, nationalists who whistled and booed to disgrace King Juan Carlos, were knocked down by heavy-handed security measures. Just before the start of the Torch Relay, nationalist demonstrations against the king at the opening of the Expo in Seville in April 1992, were also countered by police force. "If this kind of demonstration were to have happened again during the Olympics, when the eyes of the world were on

⁴⁰ For details on the conflicting objectives of the political actors, see Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 59-62; Table 11.1 by Kennett, "Barcelona, 1992," 180-183.

Barcelona and Spain, the effect would have been catastrophic,” said Hargreaves.⁴¹ Consequently, these critical experiences taught the authorities that violent repression only backfired and would empower Catalan resistance in the international context of the Olympics.

Political Elite Game and the *Paz Olímpica*

Moreover, the political power relations were made complicated by the individual gains of political elites, which increased the tension surrounding the Games.⁴² To illustrate, personal rivalry arose between Pasqual Maragall, the major of Barcelona responsible for the organisation of the Games, and Jordi Pujol, the president of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. One of the main issues became Pujol’s capitalisation on the Olympics and his close involvement with the Catalan Nationalists. In the end, the image of the all political elite benefited from a smooth operation of the Games which increased their willingness to compromise.⁴³

The months preceding the Torch Relay were characterised by heightened tension and threats by nationalists to disrupt the Games, which in the end resulted in the *Paz Olímpica*. This was an agreement over the level of *Catalanisation* of the Games reached by political elites Maragall and Pujol, and eventually accepted by Catalan nationalist groups. This was a highly risky game, as only last minute the details of the agreement were presented on the 13th of June, the day the Torch would arrive in Catalonia. Consequently, the *Paz Olímpica* only narrowly prevented major disruption and humiliation for Spain. Also, tension with Catalonia was predominantly expressed through symbolic nonviolent resistance as will be examined below.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 65 (quote), 72-73, 133; Nash, “Catalans raise banner”.

⁴² Echoing Tarrow, this research acknowledges the contribution and dynamics of elite politics in encouraging and discouraging collective action by civil society. However, as it takes a bottom-up approach, the focus will be on the Catalan civil society groups.

⁴³ Hargreaves points to the crucial role played by Samaranch, the president of IOC, see Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 138-140.

⁴⁴ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 66-82, 95.

3. Actors

I. Catalan Nationalist Camp

Throughout history Catalonia is characterised by a strong civil society aimed at maintaining Catalan identity, in particular their language and traditions. Especially in times when Catalan identity faced repression, as during the Franco regime, civil society institutions provided political affirmation. Historical evidence shows that Catalan nationalist sentiments reached a climax in the 1980s and this coincided with the Games being awarded to Barcelona in 1986.⁴⁵ The majority of the nationalist advanced *inclusive* nationalism which entails that they do not pursue complete independence but adopt a moderate and pragmatic strategy for a maximum degree of autonomy for Catalonia. The Olympics proved to be a chance to advance the Catalan cause. Below, the main nationalist groups that were responsible for the ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ Campaign around the Barcelona Olympics will be discussed.

The Catalan Olympic Committee (COC) was re-established in 1989 in opposition to the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE) to press for a separate Catalan sports team in the Olympics. The COC gained support from the *Generalitat* in its quest for official recognition from the IOC, which would carry out a message of Catalan resistance to the world and ultimately humiliate Spain. Although the COC was portrayed as “non-political” institution, in reality it functioned as umbrella organisation to coordinate the nationalist campaign.

In addition, *Acció Olímpica* was an activist campaign group specially created in February 1992 by the Catalan pressure group *Omnium Cultura* to ensure the *Catalanisation* of the Games. *Acció* was the driving force behind the well-organized campaign from the start in Olympia and the further relay in Catalonia. Pujol’s son was one of the key strategical figures and a picture of him following the torch with a ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ banner was broadcasted all over the news. Consequently, the Spanish authorities accused Pujol for playing a double role as they suspected his party of supporting and financing *Acció*.

Moreover, a substantial role was played by *La Crida de la Solidaritat*, a militant advocacy group consisting of university students from Barcelona and middle-class youth. For example, the militant activist who draped the ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ banner around

⁴⁵ See Table 1, referenced by Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 32.

the flame's pedestal was from *La Crida*. Finally, ERC the main separatist party in the Catalan parliament, was a powerful driving force as it mobilised its large constituency to rally for the *Catalanisation* of the Games.

Analysis of Activists' Strategy

The aim of the nationalist groups was to advance Catalan autonomy within the Spanish State by adopting a strategy of *Catalanisation*. This contained framing the Games as Catalan by keeping "sustained attention on the Games as a Catalan nationalist issue by articulating certain core demands concerning the place of main Catalan symbols in the Games", according to Hargreaves.⁴⁶ To maximise its reach, the 'Freedom for Catalonia' campaign adopted an English slogan to appeal to an international audience.

On 8 May, the above-mentioned groups publicly announced themselves a unified front and aligning their demands presented in a sixty-page booklet. In short, the 'Freedom for Catalonia' campaign called for nonviolent direct-action at Olympic sites and ceremonies. Therefore, they demanded for the Catalan language to be recognised as a fourth language besides English, Spanish and French. Additionally, they demanded to display *La Senyera*, the Catalan flag, on every occasion next to Olympic, Spanish and Barcelona flags. Another requirement was for the Catalan anthem 'Els Segadors' to be played on suitable moments besides the Spanish anthem. For instance, when a Catalan athlete would enter the podium, the Catalan flags and anthem should be vividly expressed. As explained before, they also demanded – unsuccessfully – for official recognition of the COC so that Catalonia could send its own sports team to the Olympics. The nationalist group sent an ultimatum to the IOC, stating that if they did not accept their demands by the 10th of June, the nationalists would mobilize civil society to protest at the Torch Relay. A threat that became reality, as has been illustrated.

In conclusion, the Catalan nationalists took advantage of the Torch Relay as they successfully capitalised on the Games. "Up to the eve of the opening ceremony, the outcome of the conflict was a substantial *Catalanisation* of the Games. Flags were the key symbols in this conflict and played a crucial part in its outcome," as Hargreaves explains in his analysis of what he calls the 'War of the Flags'. In this street battle over flags, nationalist successfully mobilised Catalan sentiment and increased pressure on the

⁴⁶ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 62.

authorities and organisers of the Games. But how did the Spanish state react on the Catalan activism? ⁴⁷

II. Spanish Counter-Strategy

Political Authorities

The political actors at play during the Barcelona Olympics, reflected the government on local, regional and national level and the IOC on international level. On a local level, the main actor was major Pasqual Maragall, whose Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) dominated the City Council of Barcelona. On a regional level, Jordi Pujol's CiU, the nationalist moderate party, held the majority, which made Pujol the president of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. The constitution of 1978 re-established Spain as a constitutional monarchy making King Juan Carlos I the symbolical embodiment of the Spanish state. However, the executive power on a national level lay with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) under prime minister Felipe González. On an international level, the IOC was a key actor, with president Juan Antonio Samaranch playing a pivotal role. As Samaranch was a member of the Spanish political elite and from Catalan origin, he was able to bridge Spanish and Catalan interest.

All three levels of government were represented and supported the formation of the Barcelona Games Organising Committee or COOB in March 1987. COOB functioned as a cooperative body through which all political actors aim to control and advance their own interests. Major Maragall was appointed as president of COOB, making him ultimately responsible for the successful organisation of the Games.

Analysis Spanish counter-strategy

The central government adopted a strategy of accommodation to the nationalist demands for *Catalanisation*, but aimed to limit them through their power position within COOB. Moreover, as biggest financial supporter, the central state could pull the strings.

As this thesis also takes the states counter-strategy into account, we see that the state is not a static actor and responded accurately by changing its police strategy after

⁴⁷ The information on the Catalan Nationalist camp is based on: Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 21-33, 61-62, 72-82, 89-95; Alan Riding, "Barcelona Journal; Catalonia Is Pressing Ahead as Olympic 'Country'," *New York Times*, July 18, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/18/world/barcelona-journal-catalonia-is-pressing-ahead-as-olympic-country.html> ; Nash, "Catalans raise banner".

the critical experiences at the opening of the Olympic stadium. As such, the security operation around the Torch Relay was more discrete and guidelines were provided to the police how to treat Catalans and their culture with respect. Catalans were allowed to express Catalan symbols, but actions to disgrace the king were still countered with force. Consequently, the state came back from their heavy-handed repression used earlier as this only backfired.

Especially important is that the state is removed from its monopoly to use violence during an international event as the Olympics. This is because a *violent* repression of *nonviolent* activists could easily be broadcasting a bad image of Spain to the world.⁴⁸ Exactly in this mechanism lies the opportunity for nonviolent resistance and Catalan nationalists were all the more aware of how to deploy it. In short, the Catalan disruptions before and during the Torch Relay revealed the state's vulnerability to Catalans nonviolent resistance, which undermined their violent counter-strategy.⁴⁹

III. Media

The first page pointed Barcelona on a blank map of Europe asking readers:

"In which 'country' is Barcelona located?"

The second page provided the answer:

"In Catalonia, of course".

On the 17th of July, the *Generalitat* published this two-page advertisement in several European, American – amongst them the *New York Times* - Asian and Australian newspapers. This displays that Catalan nationalists knew how to deploy not only *regional* and *national* media but also *international* media. This move showed the involvement of the Catalan parliament, provoking widespread criticism throughout Spain. Especially the

⁴⁸ The bombs dropped by Terra Lliure, a small *independista* terrorist group, on the 25th of May, reminded the state of their vulnerability for disruption of the games. As this activism concerned a strike for higher wage and was not related to the Catalan nonviolent activism surrounding the Olympics, it was not considered. Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 76.

⁴⁹ The information on Spanish state is based on Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 58-59, 132-133, 138-140; Kennett, "Barcelona, 1992," 180-183.

authorities on the local and national level were furious that the Olympics were propagated as merely Catalan, thereby overshadowing the Spanish state completely.⁵⁰

Moreover, the Spanish media played an important role in *framing* the struggle between Catalan nationalists and the Spanish state. On the 19th of July the media published national opinion polls questioning “who contributed the most”. In reality the central government was the largest financial investor, but the people of both Catalonia and the remaining of Spain marginalised its contribution overstating the share of Barcelona and Catalonia. Based on these polls *El País*, an influential national newspaper, concluded that the Spanish authorities were “stupefied by the success of the nationalists in using the Olympics.”⁵¹ Consequently, by framing the nationalist ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ campaign as *successful*, the media contributed to empower the Catalan cause at the expense of the Spanish state.

In addition, the international media was of great importance as they offered an international podium for the Catalan resistance struggle. They even broadcasted parts that were censored by Spanish television such as the act of the *La Crida* militant who showcased the ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ banner at Empuries. In short, the Catalan activists used the media successfully to make sure their resistance did not go unnoticed.⁵²

Conclusion Chapter

Preview Opening Ceremony

The Catalan nationalist campaign and accompanied threat of disruption continued until one day before the Opening Ceremony on the 25th of July. Only by then did the nationalist camp express its satisfaction with the level of *Catalanisation* and agreed definitely not to mobilise during the Games themselves. This displays that the nationalist threat to demonstrate was effective and how narrowly disruption and humiliation for Spain was avoided.⁵³

⁵⁰ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 85-85; Riding, “Barcelona Journal”.

⁵¹ Hargreaves reference to *El País*, 19 July 1992, Hargreaves, 86.

⁵² Hargreaves reference to the Spanish newspapers *La Vanguardia* and *El País* of 14, June 1992, see Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 81. The picture was also published in the *New York Times*: Riding, “Barcelona Journal”.

⁵³ For information on how an act to disgrace the king was last minute avoided, see Hargreaves, 87-88. For details on the continuous struggle between Spain and Catalonia during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies see Hargreaves Chapter 5.

Moreover the Openings Ceremony was again characterised by the strong presence of Catalan symbols and language. The Spanish king declared the opening of the Games first in Catalan before turning to Spanish. This was a lesson learned from the demonstration at Empuries and a major victory for the Catalans. “Catalonians have seldom had such an opportunity to show the world their distinctiveness,” said the *New York Times*.⁵⁴

The Barcelona Olympics were applauded for their smooth operation, which, in the end, benefited both the image of Spain and Catalonia. Although disruption *during* the Olympic Games was prevented, a closer look at the Torch Relay shows that the real confrontation took place around this international event. This contest was expressed in symbolic nonviolent resistance juxtaposing *Catalanisation* versus *Españolisation* to display that the Catalan identity was very different from the Spanish. This strategy formed the basis of the well-organised ‘Freedom for Catalonia’ campaign boosted by the media. Indeed, the nationalist used the (international) media effectively to advance their cause and to marginalise the contribution of the Spanish state. In addition, the Spanish authorities had learned from previous experience that violent repression only backfired contributing to the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance as method. Consequently, the Catalan nationalists took advantage of the political opportunities afforded by the Olympic Torch Relay to empower the Catalan struggle for autonomy from Spain.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Michael Janofsky, “BARCELONA; Games Begin With a Shot of Catalanian Spirit,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/26/sports/barcelona-games-begin-with-a-shot-of-catalonian-spirit.html>

⁵⁵ Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 130-133.

Chapter 2: the Tibetan Case



Introduction

The morning of April, 7th 2008, when the Olympics Torch was about to cross Paris:

*"All [pro-Tibet activists] shared a sense of urgency, filled with images of the recent repression in Tibet, and a feeling that this was a crucial historical moment for opening a window on the gross violations of human rights in China."*⁵⁶

This quote by activist Xavier Renou expresses the opportunities for Tibetan nonviolent resistance that opened up during the international Torch Relay. Therefore, this chapter turns to the sub-question: how did pro-Tibet activists, with the support of transnational actors, use the Torch Relay through Paris to empower their nonviolent resistance campaign against the Chinese regime? First, the historical context and a short overview of what happened during the Torch Relay in Paris is provided by combining western media reports with the activist perspective of Renou.⁵⁷ Second, this chapter turns to how the human rights debates around the Olympics resulted in an empowering "stage" on which the different actors played. In short, the actors interesting for this research are 1) the pro-Tibet activists consisting of ethnic Tibetans supported by Transnational and France National NGOs, 2) Chinese authorities and 3) the western media. Leading is how each of these actors ended up empowering the nonviolent resistance of Tibetans.

⁵⁶ Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 242.

⁵⁷ Due to the scope of this paper it uses the reports of two leading western newspapers - *New York Times* and *The Guardian* - in combination with Papa's analysis of the French media coverage of the Torch Relay in Paris: Françoise Papa, "France: A Conflict of Values? The Olympic Torch Relay in Paris - the Mass Media were on Cue," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 9-10 (June-July 2010): 1452-1460. See *the Guardian* for more articles on protest at the Torch Relays in New Delhi, San Francisco, London, Canberra and in China: "Olympic torch: where next?," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/10/olympicgames2008.china>

Historical context

The tension between Tibetan and Chinese claims on the Tibetan plateau have already existed for years. Since the large 1959 uprising in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, the Dalai Lama and his Central Tibetan Administration were exiled to India. To commemorate this uprising, a wave of protest erupted again in Lhasa in March 2008 against China's misrule. China responded with heavy crackdowns, that were inconsistent with the peaceful and harmonious image it aimed to convey during the 2008 Olympics. For China, the Olympics functioned as a coming out party – sealing its opening up since 1978 – and a way to present its modernized image as rising power to the world. As the Olympics had to show off China's economic and political standards, the organisation was over the top with the longest international Torch Relay symbolising the 'Journey of Harmony'. However, this international Torch Relay also opened up unintended opportunities for pro-Tibet protest, that did not stand a chance *inside* China, insured by the recent crackdowns in Lhasa. Already from the start in Olympia, pro-Tibet protest disrupted the Torch Relay followed by humiliating demonstrations in London, Paris, San Francisco and New Delhi, as captured by the photos below. Especially in Paris, activists lighted the fire, remarkably enough by blowing out the flame.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ "Tibet A Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown," International Campaign for Tibet, version August 6, 2008, https://www.savetibet.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/03/Tibet_at_a_Turning_Point.pdf, 50-63, 93-117; Shanna, Kohn, "Tibetan Nonviolence," *Peace Review* 26, no. 1, (March 2014): 62-68; "Global Tibet Movement," Central Tibetan Administration, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://tibet.net/>



Image 3: London, 6 April 2008



Image 4: Paris, 7 April 2008



Image 5: San Francisco, 9 April 2008



Image 6: New Delhi, 17 April 2008

1. Report of events

“The Olympic flame relay in Paris ended in farce today when police cut the event short after protests forced officials to repeatedly extinguish the torch.”⁵⁹

This opening statement of *the Guardian* depicts the effective pro-Tibet campaign that reached their goal, namely to embarrass China by extinguishing their symbolic torch of “Harmony”. To obtain this goal, Renou emphasizes the strategic preparation of action. In the morning of the 7th, activists gathered at different locations across Paris for a strategic briefing. This briefing entailed a strategic scenario in which each group would strike independently from different strategic locations along the torch route – the Eiffel Tower, a television broadcasting center and Paris City Hall. A strategic planning that proved to be successful.

Indeed, the Paris’ leg of the Torch Relay ended in embarrassment for China as transnational pro-Tibet protest disrupted the passing of the flame. Already from the start of the relay at the Eiffel Tower around 500 protesters were mobilised to voice their concerns on China’s human rights abuses, especially of Tibetans, by chanting “Free Tibet” slogans. Moreover, similar to protests at Olympia, *Reporters without Borders* unfolded a large banner depicting the Olympic rings as handcuffs at French iconic buildings as the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame (Image 6). But it was Sylvain Garel, a well-known pro-Tibet activist and a *Green* Paris city councilor, who made the first (failed) attempt to grab the torch as it departed on its relay.

The activists succeeded at their second nodal: the tunnel near the television broadcast center attended by many journalists. As the torch came closer, security of the crowd increased and riot police busses formed a protective wall around the torch (Image 7). As planned, the first activist triggered the action by shouting “Freedom for Tibet!” followed by many more activists that broke through the police wall to invade the road. The police reacted chaotically, ineffective and with heavy-handed measures: activists were pinned to the ground and hard-handed removed from the road with tear gas (Image 9 and 10). This whole incident was captured by cameras and the images broadcasted on news that evening. Already in the first of the scheduled 17-miles relay, the protesters achieved their tactical objective: the Chinese security police were forced to extinguish the

⁵⁹ Peter Walker and David Batty “Olympic Torch Relay cut short amid Paris protests,” *The Guardian*, April 7, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/07/france.olympicgames2008>.

flame and bring it into safety on board a bus (Image 8). This was only the first time that day that the flame was extinguished.

After the torch was reignited to continue its journey, protesters continued to seize it, forcing officials to extinguish it over four times. The planned stop at the Paris' city hall was cancelled as members of the French political party, *The Greens*, covered the building with a huge Tibetan flag. Indeed, the significance of the protest was far-reaching as it succeeded in mobilising people from various circles: besides activists, students, elderly, spectators, and support of French political elites joined the protests. These spectators whistled at the police and the Olympic convoy to show their disapproval of the Beijing Olympics. To stop protesters from further hijacking the relay, Chinese officials cut the event short by rushing the torch to its final destination: the Charlety stadium. Renou triumphed the outcome of the Torch Relay as a "giant fraud: The flame was extinguished (...) the dishonour was complete."⁶⁰



Image 7



Image 8

⁶⁰ Report of events is based on Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 242-245, 244 (quote); Walker, "Olympic Torch Relay", *Guardian* ; Katrin Bennhold and Elisabeth Rosenthal "Olympic Torch Relay through Paris turns into melee," *New York Times*, April 7, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/07/world/europe/07iht-torch.4.11743769.html>

2. Empowering context

Symbolic perspective

As explained in the introduction, the Torch Relay offers a platform for a debate over who's message is conveyed through the Olympics. Both the Chinese government and Tibetans recognized the value of the Torch Relay to highlight Tibet, but for different purposes. For China, the Beijing Olympics were an important step to legitimize itself as political power on the world stage. The Chinese state-narrative also includes Tibet as Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya acknowledges: "In certain symbolic ways, China also politicized the Games, seeing them in part as a way to advertise to the world its ownership of the Tibetan plateau - hence the plan to take the torch up Mount Everest and the adoption of the Tibetan antelope as one of the mascots for the Games."⁶¹ In this way, China propagated their longest Torch Relay in history as the 'Journey of Harmony' and making 'One World, One Dream' the official slogan. Through official slogans, symbolism and ceremonies China communicated this powerful message of unity in a shared imagined community.⁶² To illustrate, a Chinese government official gave Tibetan performers at the Beijing Openings Ceremony strict instructions: "The performance must be symbolic of the great unity of ethnic groups in the TAR [Tibet Autonomous Region] and to represent the remarkable achievement of Tibetan people under the excellent Communist Party's leaders and their policies."⁶³ As such, Tibet is forced to be part of Chinese *harmonious* imagined community.

Consequently, the Tibet resistance and China's crackdown of it, undermined the Chinese message of harmony in the base. As Renou explains: "The failure of this symbolic event would also symbolize the failure of the Chinese regime to impose its favored image of itself."⁶⁴ Moreover, protests against the Torch would send a message against an Olympic Games hosted in a country that represses Tibetans democratic demands. In short, the Torch Relay as a symbolic event opened up a site for contest over meaning, that pro-Tibet activists seized to undermine the Chinese regime.

⁶¹ Quote Tsering Shakya, referenced by ICT, "Tibet Turning Point", 12.

⁶² Astrid Nordin analyses the roots of the Chinese dream of a harmonious world, see Astrid Nordin, *China's International Relations and Harmonious World: Time, space and multiplicity in world politics* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-9. Moreover, see BOCOG ed., "A Journey of Harmony Around the Globe," in *Official report of the Games of the XXIX Olympiad Beijing 2008*, (Beijing: BOCOG, 2010), vol. 2: 1- 266. Accessed June 5, 2018, <https://library.olympic.org/>, 33-41. BOCOG explains here the symbolic meaning of the international Torch Relay, but no references are made to any kind of resistance against this message.

⁶³ ICT, "Tibet Turning Point", 12.

⁶⁴ Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 240.

Technical perspective

Moreover, from a *Technical* perspective the coming of the flame to western countries offered an undeniable opportunity to the activists as Renou explains: “the Chinese games were too distant and too expensive to reach, and the Chinese regime too powerful and too brutal to be confronted on its own field, in its own territory.”⁶⁵ In contrast, the international Torch Relay through democratic countries provided great opportunities, as these countries recognize human rights of protesters and press freedom to express dissident voices. Moreover, a broad support was created, as multiple human rights and pro-Tibet NGOs existed in France and the Torch Relay was freely accessible for many activists. Indeed, the chances of success in undermining the credibility of Chinese regime and of western authorities exceeded the risk of getting sued. All this contributed to the successful mobilisation for the pro-Tibet campaign and the momentum created to continue nonviolent action around the Torch Relay through other western cities.

Transnational Human Rights debates

As explained in the introduction, the Beijing Olympic functioned pre-eminently as an international media platform to facilitate transnational debates on China’s human Rights account. Especially since human rights is a highly censored topic in China and during the lead-up to the Games the censorship policies and control of Tibetans became even more strict. As Tibetans had no platform to express their resistance *inside* China, the *international* Torch Relay offered that political opportunity. As Renou explains: “Given the Chinese regime’s vulnerability of human rights and related [Tibet] issues, the context seemed right to organize protest” against China’s authoritarian regime.⁶⁶

Especially France, a country that historically presents itself as a defender of human rights, offered the right context.⁶⁷ Already at the lighting ceremony at Olympia on the 24th of March, members of the French NGO *Reporters Sans Frontières* staged protests. They disrupted the speech of BOCOG president Liu Qui as they aimed to catch the Torch and unfurled a banner depicting the Olympic rings as handcuffs. “If the Olympic flame is sacred, human rights are even more so,” said *Reporters sans Frontières* to *the Guardian*.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Renou, “Resisting the Torch,” 240.

⁶⁶ Renou, 238.

⁶⁷ For more information on the French context see Renou, 236-239 and Papa, “France: conflict of Values, 1452-1459.

⁶⁸ Quoted in *The Guardian* of March 24, 2008, Referenced by Hayes, “Introduction”, 1.

Although this protest was censored by Greek and Chinese state television, it was covered by French and international media. This increased the mobilization for activism around the Paris lap that sparked heated public debates in France to condemn Chinese human rights account. In short, the international Torch Relay offered an empowerment context as it provoked transnational Human Rights debates facilitated by transnational NGOs and media. Let us now turn to how pro-Tibet activists used this context to boost their activism.⁶⁹

3. Actors

I. Pro-Tibet activists

*"We would, in other words, be blowing out their flame to light up ours."*⁷⁰

Here, Renou captures here the fighting spirit shared among pro-Tibet activists. This resulted in an effective collective action to extinguish the Olympic flame in Paris, as was illustrated. But who are these pro-Tibet activists, what was their strategy and what was the role of (trans)national NGOs in empowering the pro-Tibet campaign?

Multiple international human rights NGOs, amongst them Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, were committed to use the Beijing Olympics to raise political issues. As this research acknowledges the influence of these NGOs in provoking transnational human rights debate, it focuses on specific pro-Tibet NGOs – *International Tibet Network* and *International Tibet Campaign* – and national NGOs – *Reporters sans Frontières* and *Les Désobéissants* – that were of importance in the French context.⁷¹

The pro-Tibet Campaign and its strategy

The 'Free Tibet' campaign brought together ethnic Tibetans supported by both transnational and national NGOs, further explained below. In general, their common aim

⁶⁹ Information of 'Empowering context' based on: Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 238-241; Brownell, "Human Rights", 308-309; Sautman, "China's Strategic Vulnerability", 87-91;

⁷⁰ Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 240.

⁷¹ Amnesty International and HRW highlighted the Tibet issue by direct-action, press-releases, petitions and reports on China's human rights account. For more information on their campaigns see Brownell, "Human Rights", 307-308; "China: events of 2008," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2009/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>. Although the Tibet issue was most highlighted, other groups - as Taiwan nationalists and the Uighur (Chinese Muslim minority) - also protest at the Olympics to advance their cause.

was to raise international public awareness and mobilize transnational support for the Tibetan issue and China's human rights abuses. Specifically, the pro-Tibet Campaign aimed at challenging the Chinese message of 'Harmony' conveyed through the Olympic Torch Relay. This struggle over message was symbolised with 'Free Tibet' banners, Tibetan flags and an own Freedom Torch. Above all the extinguishing of the Olympic Torch became the tactical objective.⁷²

Transnational NGOs

The *International Tibet Network* (ITN) is a global coalition of 180 NGOs, which aims to increase the impact of the worldwide Tibet movement. Of particular importance, is the network's commitment to nonviolent resistance and supported by the Central Tibetan Administration, headed by the Dalai Lama. As umbrella organisation, ITN brings together Tibetan and international NGOs, who also have branches in France, such as *Students for Free Tibet* and *Support Committee of the Tibetan People*. INT's most noteworthy member is the *International Campaign for Tibet* (ICT), the largest pro-Tibet NGO in the world with strong support bases in North America and Europe.

Together ITN and ICT were responsible for the international coordination and (press) communication of protests during the Torch Relay in London, Paris and San Francisco. Moreover, these NGOs mobilized and coordinated transnational activism as will be examined below.⁷³

Role transnational activism (NGOs)

During the Torch Relay the emergence of transnational activism was observable. As such, international pro-Tibet NGOs mobilised transnational civil society to support ethnic Tibetans in a joined pro-Tibet campaign. As explained in the introduction, transnational activism has an empowering function. Transnational NGOs were especially valuable as they maintained the exchange of information between the more experienced Tibetan activists across Europe, in particular between those in Great-Britain and France.

⁷² Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 237.

⁷³ Information based on: "Our Mission," International Campaign for Tibet, accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.savetibet.org/about-ict/our-mission/> ; "About Us," International Tibet Network, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://tibetnetwork.org>; "Beijing 2008 Olympics Campaign Evaluation: A Summary," International Tibet Network, version November 2008, <https://tibetnetwork.org/olympics-campaign-evaluation/> ; Brownell, "Human Rights," 307.

Likewise, both the media reports and Renou highlighted the transnational bonds that were created among protesters to build a common momentum around the Torch Relay through western cities. Indeed, transnational activism succeeded in building upon public support, media- and political attention and experience of nonviolent activists, generated in other countries. To illustrate this, at the evening after the protest in London many activists, including Tibetans refugees, traveled to the next protest place – Paris – to meet up with pro-Tibet activists from Belgium and the Netherlands. Jan Willem den Besten, the Dutch coordinator of ICT who accompanied the activists, expressed to the *New York Times* "What is most dramatic is to see how broad and deep the support has become."⁷⁴ Likewise Renou emphasised the strength of this transnational activism as: "We would engage everyone in the battle of images, to put pressure not only on the Chinese government, but also and primarily on our own governments, to convince them (...) to start speaking out against human rights violations in China."⁷⁵ As explained before, the chances of success were higher in confronting China on French ground, where human rights are respected. Hence, the importance of France National NGOs.

France National NGOs.

As mentioned before, *Reporters sans Frontières*, a Paris based NGO for freedom of press, was important as it provoked protest in Olympia and continued its demonstrations in Paris. For the Paris leg, *Les Désobéissants* was especially significant as it was responsible for the organisation of the protests on the ground.

Les Désobéissants was founded in 2006, by Renou amongst others, as an anti-globalization organisation but it expanded to an umbrella organisation representing also pro-Tibet groups. Moreover, *Les Désobéissants* became an action-tool providing trainings in nonviolent resistance and its members were determined to also use their experience to boost the pro-Tibet Campaign.

Role *Les Désobéissants*

As an umbrella organisation, *Les Désobéissants* provided the resources needed to stage a collective action with maximum impact. First, *Les Désobéissants* appealed to a large network and it was responsible for the mobilisation of 4000 people inside and outside

⁷⁴ Bennhold, "Olympic Torch Relay", *New York Times*.

⁷⁵ Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 241 (quote), 240-242; Keck, *Activists beyond Borders*, 1-4,

Paris. Secondly, as its members were experienced in organizing nonviolent action, they planned a systematic disruption of Torch Relay. Thirdly, its structure as informal network, comprising of independent groups that struck from different angles, made it hard for the authorities to stop them effectively. Lastly, the activists had a favorable sociological profile as they belonged to social networks with strong connection to the media and political parties, such as *the Greens*. This provided the activists with strategic information on their opponent's weaknesses. As will be explained below, pro-Tibet activists responded to China's weakness to control its image and global public opinion during the international torch Relay.⁷⁶

II. China's counter-strategy

As explained earlier, the Beijing Olympics was China's chance to legitimise its political system and convey their message of harmony throughout the world. To control this message, China adopted their strategy of repression by silencing dissidents through media censorship and heavy security measures. For example, the crackdown of Tibetan demonstrations in March 2008 on the eve of the Olympics undermined Chinese image of harmony, hence its efforts to impose an information blackout.⁷⁷ China adopted the same strategy of heavy-handed security to secure a smooth operation of the *international* Torch Relay. The illustration below displays how many resources China was willing to deploy to make sure the *right* message was broadcasted.

Wu Shuangzhan was a commander of the China People's Armed Police (PAP) and in charge of the security operation of international Torch Relay. Wu implemented increased security measures to prevent a repetition of the embarrassing demonstration in London. In fact, about 3,000 security officers, consisting of Chinese PAP officers and French police, were deployed on foot, rollerblades, horses, motorbikes, boats in the Seine and a helicopter in the air. As the spectators - including the activists - were kept behind fences controlled by police, they could barely glimpse the flame because the torchbearers were guarded by a 200-metre shield of armed riot officers (Image 7). When confronted with the protests, the PAP officers reacted with aggressive measures such as violence and

⁷⁶ For more information on *Les Désobéissants* see Renou, "Resisting the Torch: 239-243; "Manifest," *Les Désobéissants*, accessed May 26, 2018, www.desobeir.net

⁷⁷ For information on China's heavy security measures in Tibet see ICT report, "Tibet Turning Point", 50-63, 93-117.

tear gas. “One would almost think oneself in Lhasa,” said Jean-Paul Ribes, leader of the *Support Committee of the Tibetan People* in France, to the *New York Times*.⁷⁸ Ribes voiced the striking similarities between the hard-handed measures to protect the Torch and Chinese crackdown of Tibetans in Lhasa. However, Chinese counter-strategy proved to be less effective in context of the Olympic Games. This is where the role of the international media comes in.⁷⁹



Image 9



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12

⁷⁸ Bennhold, “Olympic Torch Relay,” *New York Times*.

⁷⁹ Illustration based on: Walker, “Olympic Torch Relay,” *Guardian*; Bennhold, “Olympic Torch Relay,” *New York Times*; Papa, “France: conflict of Values”, 1452-1460; ICT, “Tibet Turning Point, 109-110; Rowe, “Torchlight Temptation”, 125.

III. International Media

In general, with the broadcasting of events, the media has the power to highlight or overshadow protests. In this case, the western media had an important role in portraying a different image that undermined China's message of harmony. Through an analysis of the western media coverage of the Torch Relay, this thesis aims to display how the media boosted the Tibetan nonviolent campaign.

First, the reports of Xavier Renou, François Papa and the western newspapers all confirm that the western media provided extensive live broadcasting of the Torch Relay and the many incidents that occurred. This international media coverage was advantageous for the protesters as their actions did not remain unnoticed. For instance, Renou explains that the preparations and executions of the action were closely followed by a prime-time television show and by activists themselves who filmed the entire action to provide the press with images. This testifies that the media offered an important platform and that pro-Tibet activists were highly aware how to use this platform to boost their campaign.⁸⁰

Counter-strategy backfired by global media

Second, China's counter-strategy of heavy-security and censorship backfired as the global gaze was pointed towards China. Already in the run up to the Torch Relay, the international press focused on the Chinese crackdown in March 2008: "The regime's violent repression of monks and students proved to be a major mistake, showing how difficult it can be for even a dictatorial regime to control its image at a time when the world-wide press, because of the coming Games, was desperate for news stories on China."⁸¹ This quote of Renou displays the important role played by the western media in broadcasting a different picture. One that highlighted the pro-Tibet protests and challenged China's censorship efforts to propagate its harmonious message.

Indeed, western media reports criticised Chinese counter-strategy of heavy security and censorship.⁸² They highlighted public anger against police violence towards peaceful protesters and journalists. For instance, on Chinese orders Tibetan flags were

⁸⁰ Renou, "Resisting the Torch," 243; Papa, "France: conflict of Values," 1453-1454.

⁸¹ Renou, 238.

⁸² For instance, Papa analyses that French media report covered the same main theme: "China's Olympics involved a politico-military organization and repressive order, under which democratic countries also suffered", see Papa, "France: conflict of Values," 1452-1454.

removed and journalists impeded from filming protests. Also, Chinese state television censored protests at Olympia and Paris. This gave the impression that public protests were illegal and that freedom of speech was limited. This only increased public criticism of China, and of French cooperation with Chinese repressive means that undermined democratic liberties. “These facts and reports sustained the idea of China as a totalitarian regime which sold its political model abroad through the Torch Relay”, said Papa.⁸³

As China was in control over the organization of the Torch Relay, its measures were interpreted by western media as illegitimate assertion of control, interfering with the sovereignty of France and other countries that hosted the relay. This resulted in international condemnation of Chinese measures by western media, transnational NGOs and civil society. Moreover, in Europe and the United States public debate arose over whether their leaders should attend the Opening Ceremony or not.⁸⁴ Consequently, China’s Torch Relay resulted in a public relations crisis, as the *New York Time* states:

*“An event that was supposed to burnish China's image around the world has turned into a public relations nightmare - not only for China, but also for the nations along the torch's relay route. The Summer Games and the torch's journey have served as rallying points for a wide range of opponents of the Chinese government, most notably those supporting autonomy for Tibet.”*⁸⁵

In short, the western media boosted the Tibetan nonviolent resistance in two ways: first by offering a platform for activists to express their resistance and second by criticising China’s counter-strategy.⁸⁶

⁸³ Papa, “France: conflict of Values,” 1454.

⁸⁴ The Torch Relay fueled a public debate inside France reaching consensus amongst the public and its leaders to condemn China’s human rights account, see Papa, “France: conflict of Values,” 1452, 1456-1459. Also debate arose in the U.S., see “US House of Representatives sends strong Tibet message to China and Bush on eve of Beijing Olympics,” International Campaign For Tibet, version July 31, 2008, <https://www.savetibet.org/us-house-of-representatives-sends-strong-tibet-message-to-china-and-bush-on-eve-of-beijing-olympics/>

⁸⁵ Bennhold, “Olympic Torch Relay,” *New York Times*.

⁸⁶ For information on the international conviction of China see Rowe, “Torchlight Temptations,” 122-125; Renou, “Resisting the Torch,” 238, 245-246.

Conclusion Chapter

The Olympic Torch Relay offered an international media platform to express the contest over message between China's state-narrative and Tibetans resistance-narrative. Consequently, pro-Tibet activism responded to Chinese vulnerability to control its Olympic message abroad with the western media discourse shifting towards the pro-Tibet campaign. China's rule of the games backfired in context of the Torch Relay through western cities that respect human rights. Indeed, China's heavy-handed security and media censorship only increased international condemnation of China's human rights account. The international Torch Relay proved to be a window of opportunity for pro-Tibet campaign as the Tibet issue hooked on broader human rights frame boosted by transnational NGOs. Consequently, China's international Torch Relay symbolizing the 'Journey of Harmony' ended up empowering the very Tibetan resistance China aimed to nip in the bud. Moreover, learned from the lessons of the Beijing Olympics, the IOC abolished the international leg of the Torch Relay for the 2012 London Olympics and its successors. This to prevent the international Torch Relay from operating as a vehicle for activism, underscoring the main argument of this thesis.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ IOC member Richard Pound stated that Beijing's international Torch Relay should never have taken place, see MacAloon, "Introduction: Olympic Flame Relay", p. 575; Rowe, "Torchtlight Temptations," 132.

Conclusion

"It is your mind that creates this world."

- The Buddha.⁸⁸

As visualised on the front page, Buddha invites the spectator to look into the window and see the opportunities to transform the world into its own image. This is exactly what Catalan and pro-Tibet activists did as they deployed the window of opportunity that opened up with the Olympic Torch Relay. What were the recurring patterns that connect these two cases?

1. Torch Relay: a contest over message

Explaining the first part of the main argument: the Olympic Torch Relay offered a media platform that transmitted the contest over message between host nations and minorities. The Catalan case displayed how the *Catalanisation* of the Games challenged the Spanish national identity. In this contest over *Catalanisation* versus *Españolisation* the regional, national and international media broadcasted and boosted the Catalan resistance. Likewise, the western media discourse shift towards pro-Tibet activism undermining China's media censorship to convey their message of Harmony. This testifies that activists were important actors capable of hijacking the spotlights surrounding the Olympics away from the host nation to highlight their message of resistance.

2. Tarrow's Theoretical Framework

Tarrow's theory on the three intersecting elements of social movements: 1) *political opportunities and constrains*, 2) *networks and organisations*, 3) *cultural artifacts and frames*, proved to be a suitable framework to explain the second part of the main argument.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The Buddha, "It Is Your Mind That Creates This World," *Tibet Image bank*, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://www.changingworld.com>.

⁸⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 121.

The Catalan Case

In the Catalan case we see these three intertwined elements coming together producing an effective 'Freedom for Catalonia' campaign. Firstly, it displayed that the Olympics can function as this rare moment in time during which the balance of power can be temporarily shifted. To illustrate, the political power conflict between Spanish authorities (on a national and local level) and the regional interest of Catalonia was expressed in a symbolic conflict over the level of *Catalanisation* of the Games. Especially the Torch Relay through Catalan territory created ample *political opportunities* for Catalan nationalists to press for more autonomy for Catalonia.

Secondly, the Catalan Nationalist camp drew on existing and newly established *networks* and *organizations* such as COC, *Acció Olímpica* and *La Crida*. Moreover, political parties as ERC and Pujol's CiU rallied behind the Catalan cause confirming Tarrow's point that elite politics influences and encourages social movements.⁹⁰ Especially important is the function of these networks in building solidarity and a common purpose through *collective action frames* - the third element.

Third, the contest over symbolism displayed the importance of *cultural artifacts and frames*. With this Tarrow means "how activists combine emotions and identities with existing cultural repertoires and make meaning around them".⁹¹ As we have seen, Catalan activists used existing Catalan nationalist symbols such as flags, anthem and language to express their distinctiveness from Spain. Moreover, the media played a role in this "framing" process. By framing the Catalan resistance as successful they marginalised the Spanish state and consequently contributed to empower the Catalan cause.

The Tibetan case

Likewise, in the Tibetan case these intertwined elements generated an effective 'Free Tibet' campaign. First, the Torch Relay proved to be a temporary *political opportunity* that encouraged pro-Tibet activists to engage in collective action despite the *constraints*. We might expect that the high degree of repression from China, that was still fresh in their minds after the crackdown in Lhasa in March 2008, would constrain and discourage activism. On the contrary, the pro-Tibet campaign found international support of both transnational activism and western media, helping pro-Tibet activist to get around

⁹⁰ Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 163-167.

⁹¹ Tarrow, 120 (quote).

China's repressive means. As China has the monopoly on violence and media control within its own territory, pro-Tibet activists focus on the international Torch Relay as China could not bring all its troops to London, Paris and San Francisco.

Second, this also displays importance of *networks* and *organisations* that pro-Tibet activist could use. Especially, Transnational NGOs as *International Tibet Network* and the French NGO *Les Désobéissants* made their networks and experience available to coordinate and promote collective mobilisation. Furthermore, these networks helped building international solidarity as they sustained transnational bonds. The Tibetan case became a common purpose to strife connecting to the third element.

Third, the Tibetan case showed the importance of both international media and transnational networks to frame domestic issues as global issues. This is what Tarrow theorises as the ability of a movement to appeal to broad supported *cultural frames*.⁹² Indeed, the Free-Tibet cause found such a broad support in the western cities that hosted the Torch Relay because it appealed to their democratic values that appreciate human rights. In this way, the pro-Tibet campaign succeeded in hooking on the international supported human rights frame. Consequently, China's heavy-handed measures against peaceful pro-Tibet protesters backfired as they were highly criticised by western media and civil society. Therefore, underscoring the value of nonviolent resistance.

3. The value of nonviolent resistance and the bottom-up approach

This thesis has shown the potential of nonviolent resistance as a method to undermine both the power of representation and military means of the state. First, through symbolic nonviolent resistance Catalans and pro-Tibet activists challenged the message and identity their states aim to display through Olympics. As such, the controversy around the Torch Relay exposes that the state's monopoly over representation is limited in the presence of the global gaze.⁹³

Second, both China's and Spain's repressive means against peaceful protesters backfired under the watch of the international media and civil society. Consequently, the state is removed from its monopoly on violence, showing the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance. Likewise, as explained in the introduction, Stephan and Chenoweth's research

⁹² See Chapter 7 of Tarrow, *Power in the Movement*, 140-156 and Chapter 4 "Global Framing", Tarrow, *New Transnational Activism*, 59-76.

⁹³ Rowe, "Torchlight Temptation," 133.

shows that nonviolent resistance is successful when it succeeds in undermining the state's military pillars of support. The question of effective nonviolent resistance is how to get around the state's repressive means. It turned out that the answer was the *international Olympic Torch Relay*.⁹⁴

This indicates that under certain conditions activists are important actors that have agency to affect the degree of state repression. This underscores the importance of the bottom-up approach taken to prove the main argument. Indeed, the Olympics are this rare moment in time and place that brings about a short-term change in the political opportunity structures. As such, the Torch Relay proved to be the event par excellence to empower the Catalan and pro-Tibet nonviolent resistance campaign.

Future Research

Future research could add more cases such as different host-countries but also other sport mega-events as the FIFA World Cup. Recently, Pussy Riot members demonstrated at the 2018 World Cup finals in Moscow against Russia.⁹⁵ This shows how topical the issue of nonviolent resistance around sport mega-events still is. Moreover, scholars could add different actors to analyse for instance how the International Community or the Chinese media and civil society responded to the Olympics. The Chinese side is especially interesting, as this would counter the western bias of this thesis by adding a non-western perspective.⁹⁶

Also, a combination between the bottom-up and the top-down perspectives could be relevant to examine how the Olympics can both reaffirm the political power of host nation while also empowering minorities' resistance.⁹⁷ Moreover, this perspective could underscore that the Olympics can not only empower *resistance* but can also contribute to *reconciliation*. For instance, the joined sports team of North and South Korean have shown

⁹⁴ Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," 8

⁹⁵ Associated press, 'Pussy Riot members jailed for World Cup final pitch invasion' *The Guardian*, 17 July 2018, retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jul/17/pussy-riot-members-jailed-for-world-cup-final-pitch-invasion>

⁹⁶ Brownell advocates to incorporate Chinese civil society in the human rights debate. Her critical article shows that the Chinese population expressed anti-western sentiments during the Torch Relay through China, Brownell, "Human Rights", 312-316.

⁹⁷ Rowe highlights that the pro-Tibet Protest faded away in light of extraordinary organisation of Openings Ceremony and further progress of the games. This thesis acknowledges the strong power position of China, however this is not to say that the Tibet resistance around the Torch Relay was not effective. We cannot envision whether social-political change will might happen in the future. Rowe, "Torchlight Temptation," 130-133.

that the Pyongyang Olympics in 2018 contributed to rapprochement between these countries.⁹⁸ Also, the 1992 Barcelona Olympics improved the relations between Spain and Catalonia and their willingness to cooperate.⁹⁹ However, this changed over time, judging from the recent referendum for Catalan independence. Therefore, new time horizons could be interesting since both the Catalan and Tibetan resistance struggles are still unfolding today. In conclusion, this thesis provides a first step towards a historical understanding on the ways nonviolent resistance and Olympics are interconnected.

The power of symbolism

To stay in the theme of symbolism, this research closes with a visualisation of the main argument, attached below. It starts with the same window and accompanied quote of the Buddha, depicting the fresh breeze that blows through the *Window of Political Opportunity*. Connected to this is the bottom-up approach that focuses on the agency of activists who use the opportunity offered by the Olympics. At the top, the Tibetan resistance is symbolised by pro-Tibet banners opposing Chinese slogans. On the bottom, the Catalan resistance is visualised with the official Barcelona Olympic song and the 'Freedom for Catalonia' Torch Relay (similar to Hargreaves' book cover). All the way at the bottom, we find Tarrow's theoretical foundation on social movements. Also, the big square around the window of opportunity, visualises Tarrow's definition of political opportunities as inherent to the political environment. Indeed, activists fighting for political change are always lurking, they just need the right timing and platform to light their fire. The Olympic Flame shed light on the Catalans and Tibetans nonviolent resistance, underscoring Mandela's famous words:

"Sport has the power to change the world."

– Nelson Mandela, May 25, 2000¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ed Malyon, 'North and South Korea unifying for the Winter games is a much-needed good news story for the Olympic movement', *Independent*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/>

⁹⁹ See Chapter 7 "the Outcome" for an assessment of the gains made by both Spain and Catalonia, Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia*, 130-159.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson Mandela speech at Laureus World Sports Awards on May 25, 2000. See "15 years of Laureus: The anniversary of a very special speech", Laureus World Sports Awards, version May 25, 2014, <https://www.laureus.com/news/15-years-laureus-anniversary-very-special-speech>.

The visualisation of the main argument



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