

BEYOND THE INDIGNATION: SPAIN'S *INDIGNADOS* AND THE POLITICAL AGENDA

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Introduction

On the night of 17 May 2011, one of the authors was chatting with a close friend in the United States (US) from his home in Barcelona. The two were lamenting what they considered frivolous trends in mainstream culture, from Lady Gaga and fashion-forward pop music to excess-obsessed reality television and buzzword-saturated 24 hour news channels. In one of those abrupt changes so typical of instant messaging, the conversation shifted towards a discussion of social media's role in the Arab Spring and the attempts to start something similar in Madrid two nights earlier. In a pessimistic tone, the two agreed that simply showing up to a place at a given time would have no impact on the problems facing Spain, the Mediterranean or any other part of the world.

Five days later, the authors and tens of thousands of other Spaniards in over sixty cities defied the Spanish Electoral Junta, breaking the law by gathering in the public squares on the day of reflection preceding regional elections to declare, '*No nos representan*' (They do not represent us) (Elola, 2011). The Spanish and international press, disoriented by their lack of leaders and programme, simply made reference to the participants using the word they repeated most often: *los indignados* or 'the outraged'. The term stuck, as did the one the press decided to use for the movement the indignados participated in: the 15 May (or 15-M) movement.

Ten days later, the Catalan police (the *Mossos d'Esquadra*) attempted to violently remove thousands of protesters from the camp they had built in Barcelona's central plaza, Plaça Catalunya, only to fail against the non-violent resistance of the multitude (Ryzik and Mackey, 2011). One month later, horizontal, autonomous assemblies of anonymous students, staff and faculty began to appear on campuses across Catalonia. Their methods, discourse and praxis were clearly inspired by those of the *indignados*, while the targets of their criticism were simultaneously particular, occupational and global in scope. Several months later, on 15 October 2011, millions of people in over a thousand cities worldwide had taken to the streets to celebrate the viral, global extension of a multitudinal, disobedient, anti-authoritarian movement for democratisation (*La Vanguardia*, 2011).

We understand the 15-M movement as a local iteration of a broader wave of mobilisations at the global level that started with the Arab Spring, spread north to the Mediterranean countries, reached the shores of the United States and extended outwards from there. We also understand that the movement is also part of a more local cycle of struggles. In this article, we provide a genealogy of the 15-M movement and describe its impact on the Spanish political agenda

What is 15-M and what is not?

The impact of 15-M was so massive that, within a relatively short length of time, an intense debate began regarding its nature. In this way, 15-M is a signifier of multiple meanings: a social movement, a movement of movements, a social climate, a network system, an event, a repertoire of collective action and a technology of movement are just some of the ways in which it has been described. The definitions of what 15-M is and what it is not are as manifold as the singular voices trying to explain what lies behind this name that is simply a date.

That said, perhaps the most popular genealogy of 15-M in Spain identifies its roots in five key events (Tinoco, 2011). The first is the massive citizen response to the lies of the Partido Popular (PP) government led by José María Aznar regarding the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 against Madrid's Atocha train station, which the administration attributed to the Basque separatists of ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) despite knowing they were the work of Al Qaeda. Two days later, on 13 March 2004, text messages and e-mails began to circulate all over Spain calling for a protest against the government during the day of reflection prior to the elections held on the fourteenth. These massive, nationwide protests changed the outcome of an election that had been assumed to be a certain victory for the PP over José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

The second event is the smaller cycle of struggles over the right to decent housing that started in 2007 with the *V de Vivienda* protests. In many ways, *V de Vivienda* and the associated *okupa* or squatters' movement spearheaded a major component of the 15-M movement, the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform for those Affected by Mortgages). This Platform was the first to call attention to the social problems caused by the housing bubble that would eventually be diagnosed as central to Spain's current economic crisis. Like the citizen response to the Aznar government's lies regarding the 2004 terrorist attacks, these protests were also organised via e-mail and text messaging.

The third event was the *No Les Votes* (Don't Vote for Them) Twitter campaign during the Goya Awards (the Spanish film awards) against the two mainstream parties (PP and PSOE) for their unpopular anti-piracy legislation. The fourth is the *Juventud Sin Futuro* (Youth without a Future) wave of protests, which organised university students and the youth in precarious situations via social media to protest against the rising labour and youth unemployment rampant among people under thirty years. The fifth and final event was the formation, also via social media, of the *Democracia Real Ya* (Real Democracy Now) platform, which resisted the imposition of neoliberal austerity initiated by the Zapatero government in May 2010 as an anti-democratic pact between politicians and bankers, these being subordinate to the interests of the Troika (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission). These last three events essentially converged when those organisations emerged as key players in support of *Democracia Real Ya's* 15 May 2011 mobilisations.

Perhaps the most common description of 15-M presents it as a type of social movement whose novelty resides in its use of social media and the internet. In the habitual language of liberal social science, so-called 'social movements' are considered agents whose primary function is to detect and call attention to the problems in a given society through collective action that is designed to pressure formal institutions to resolve these issues from the top-down. From this perspective, social movements are like smoke detectors identifying the fire of antagonism upon contact with its smoke. The general sense is that these movements are incapable of resolving the social problems they signal and, in order to be 'useful', must interact with professional politicians and technicians.

Yet the reading of 15-M as a social movement extends beyond academic literature via two mutually complementary lines of interpretation. The first reads 15-M as a mutation of the social movement into a network system that reflects the technical composition of work in post-Fordist society. In this sense, following Marshall McLuhan's (1994) notion of technology as any extension of the human being, and bearing in mind the wave of mobilisations emanating from the Arab Spring, 15-M is less a movement-of-masses or a movement-of-movements than it is a technology of movement which facilitates: first, the production of cultural memes; second, the establishment of new social relations; and third, new forms of identification (though not necessarily proper 'identities') through shared affinities.

The second of these readings emphasises the importance of a change in the repertoire of collective action which allowed the movement to unfold. This occurred during the night of 15 May 2011, when protestors in Madrid stayed beyond the protest that had been organised by *Democracia Real Ya* and attempted on the first occasion to set up the protest camp at Puerta del Sol, were violently removed from the plaza by police, and came back stronger and with more support the following day. Each of these readings is useful in its own way, especially regarding questions of form: while the movement-as-network-system reading facilitates questions about the conditions under which deliberative processes take place, the innovation-in-repertoires reading emphasises a link between collective action and the production of a political programme. However, it remains unclear what these readings can tell us about the content of that political programme and how it can be implemented.

There are also more philosophical readings of 15-M which, though somewhat less common, provide an interesting framework for insight into its impact. The first, coined by Amador Fernández-Savater, promotes 15-M as a 'social climate' (2012) and the second, proposed by Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, describes 15-M simply as 'an event' (2012). According to these readings, 15-M is not one social movement so much as an event that produces a change in the social climate, a mutation in subjectivities provoked by the change in repertoires implicit in the transition from the protest to the plaza and thanks to which a new wave of mobilisations was sparked. Yet these readings, like the movement-as-network-system and innovation-in-repertoires readings, tell us relatively little about 15-M's content and political programme. Rather, what is interesting about them is that they deconstruct the notion of the social movement and, with it, its subordination to party politics, thus situating movement politics properly within the terrain of the political.

15-M and the political agenda

Up to this point, we have made passing reference to 15-M's political programme, by which we mean the issues it calls attention to and its response to those issues. We consider this type of programme to have important differences with respect to the traditional type of programme employed by political parties. These differences stem from the differences in agencies between political parties and political movements, that is, the differences in their approaches to the political. While the traditional party programme has as its objective the establishment of an electoral contract with the citizenry, the programme of a political movement is concerned with the measures, policies and agreements that the citizens undertake themselves via the free exercise of their autonomy and free will with the aim of reaching an emancipatory horizon.

While the party programme responds every four years to the necessity of stating what it would offer in the event of forming a government, a movement programme spearheads itself day by day, adapting to the situations imposed by its condition of antagonism. Thus, while the party programme responds to the logic of representative government, the movement programme responds to the deliberative logic of direct democracy.

With this distinction in mind, and given the complexities of the deliberative processes developed in the plazas, social networks and other spaces-of-movement, it is difficult to summarise the richness of 15-M's programme through descriptive analysis. Rather the demands expressed in the successive moments of mobilisation after the *acampadas* (protest camps) best capture the programme that characterises 15-M. In this sense, the movement in general can be seen as an unveiling of different lines of conflict with the establishment, which reach different intensities at different moments of antagonism. A key example of this dynamic is the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH), the extremely popular civil disobedience movement offering support to those most affected by sub-prime lending and Spain's housing crisis in general.

The successes of their 'Stop Foreclosures!' campaign has increased the importance of housing as a central issue in public debate and in 15-M's movement programme through civil disobedience like physically blocking the foreclosures imposed by banks on poor families both indigenous and foreign-born. The campaign has also worked on the deliberation in spaces-of-movement through, for example, their highly productive, constructive work in the plazas, social networks and neighbourhood assemblies. In contrast to other issues raised at other times in the plazas, such as the reform of electoral law which tends to only arise during elections, housing issues have grown considerably more important over time. The movement's response to these issues has included, for example, citizen-initiated legislation reforming bankruptcy law and the occupation of building blocks in order to house evicted families.

In a sense, 15-M's programme begins with the demands stated in DRY's manifesto, which was quickly amended by the work groups in the plazas. The demands launched in DRY's first document included the following: the elimination of all privileges granted to the political class; a solution to unemployment; the right to decent housing; high-quality public services; control over banks; fiscal reform; civil liberties and participatory democracy; and the reduction of military spending. These demands served as points of departure, which the Barcelona Assembly revised to include the following themes:

privileges of the political class; labour rights; housing rights; public services; fiscal policy; and the environment. Meanwhile, the Puerta del Sol Assembly (Madrid) also developed a list of fourteen points which included several of those mentioned above, but also incorporated new ones, such as the recovery of historical memory in reference to the unresolved atrocities committed by the Franco regime and the mass graves from that era which are all over Spain.

All of these points evolved over time, and on the first anniversary of 15-M, the vectors were reduced to five major points: no more bank bailouts; high quality public health and education; a right to guaranteed, decent housing; no more precarious labour/no to the government's labour reform; and a universal living wage (*renta básica*). Three of these five points correspond to the social conflicts that saw the strongest degree of mobilisation since 15 May 2011, namely education (which saw massive mobilisation and well supported strikes in November 2011 and February 2012), health care (several hospitals were occupied and health care workers went on strike on a number of occasions) and labour (which culminated in the general strike of 29 March 2012). Moreover, two points have also grown in relevance. While bank bailouts have become almost universally unpopular – European Union (EU) bailouts and massive amounts of Spanish public funds have gone to rescue Bankia and other major banks trafficking in toxic assets – actions against banks such as Occupy Mordor have received tremendous support. Finally, although the universal right to a living wage has become a major point in neighbourhood assemblies and even sectors of smaller leftist political parties, it is scarcely mentioned in the media and, as a result, relatively unknown to much of the Spanish public.

Conclusion

In May 2011, the politics of movement experienced an event, 15-M, which marked a point of inflection in the wave of mobilisations that had receded in Spain since the movement against the war in Iraq in 2003. This conflagration took inspiration from and expressed solidarity with upheavals and causes of global magnitude. The Arab Spring was particularly important in inspiring much of the 15-M's repertoire of collective action. The most notable examples were the camps in Puerta del Sol and Plaça Catalunya, which were consciously based on the layout of the Tahrir square camps. In Plaça Catalunya, the three main public speaking points were named after places abroad that provided inspiration: the Iceland area, the Tahrir area and the Palestine area. With their roots in the underlying grievances of large sections of the Spanish population, the protests which began on 15 May thus represented a mass expression of anger and frustration with local, national and international policy-makers.

In the period since then, the movement has revealed a programme of demands that has been supported by a series of mobilisations carried out by activist networks. In areas with existing levels of activism (organised by movements like PAH, student movements, labour unions, etc.), this programme has rapidly progressed and developed. Where it has depended more on specific situations and moments in time, or its treatment in the media, the demands made by 15-M have lost a certain degree of support. With respect to the future, it seems clear that 15-M's strength hinges on its ability to combine antagonism (what it confronts) and agonism (what it promotes) in a virtuous way and, more specifically, to avoid allowing itself to be subsumed or co-opted by party politics. For better or worse, considering the evolution and deepening of the systemic crisis affecting Spain, it does not seem that the incentives offered by institutional politics will be powerful enough to break the movement apart.

What is clear, however, is that the movement is significantly more powerful when it acts in symbiosis with other social movements. One example of this was the aftermath of their reception of the Asturian miners' march in Madrid on 11 July 2012, which ended in intense confrontations with the police. Afterwards, the 15-M movement and the miners joined forces to promote and give new meaning to a fairly run-of-the-mill public sector workers' protest the following week. That protest took place in over sixty cities all over Spain, with over one million coming out, many just to express outrage over what happened in Madrid the week before. What remains to be seen, however, is the evolution of the government's repressive policies and whether these strengthen the status quo of Spain's power and social compositions, or whether they will strengthen support for autonomous movements such as 15-M and the alternative institutions they promote. If the recent events in Madrid from 25 to 29 September 2012 are any indication, state repression will only go so far.

On 25 September 2012, tens of thousands of Spaniards (many of them *indignados*) defied the law by gathering outside the Congress while it was in session to demand the resignation of the government. They were met with police charges, batons and rubber bullets in skirmishes that eventually spread to the city's centre. Over the following days, increasing numbers of people descended upon the Plaza Neptuno in front of the Congress to voice their disgust over the government's handling of the situation, its embrace of neoliberal austerity and its submission to the European power elite. These events suggest that activists will not be cowed by state repression and remain committed to the alternative programmes offered by social movements like 15-M.

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