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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF RADICAL DEMOCRACY

The 15M movement as a space of mobilization *

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ABSTRACT: Social movements are builders of what are known as “grammars of democracy”, that is, values, participatory experiences, political cultures, languages and structures for articulating demands. This article analyses the 15M or *indignados* (outraged) movement in Spain; a collective action that went beyond classical protests in response to the economic crisis and proposed changes in democratic practices. Social movements, particularly from the 1990s onwards, have focused on democracy as both a means and an end in order to address what they perceive as authoritarian globalization. The article approaches 15M mainly as a space for mobilization articulating the heterogeneity of the movement as well as its effects in Spain (anti-eviction struggles, PAH, social tides, etc.) with a direct reference to the master frame of 'radical democracy'. Methodologically, this work is based upon interviews, focus groups and participant observation conducted from May 2011 to June 2012 during the occupation of public squares and subsequent mobilizations. The text situates this phenomenon in the core of the New Global Movements, and connects it with a decade of similar collective actions in Spain and other parts of the world. Finally, aspects such as the role of the Internet as a tool for and driving force of new models of democracy and the scale of assemblies in relation to deliberative democracy are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: 15-M , democracy, indignados, New Global Movements, protests

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1. Introduction

The so-called 15M or *indignados* movement in Spain aligns itself with previous social movements both in its critical questioning of liberal democracy and also through ongoing experimentation with political alternatives attempting to widen the margins of representative democracy. We talk therefore about a meta-political movement (Offe, 1985), very much defined by social reflexivity (Díez y Laraña, 2017:73) and by the value assigned to autonomy (Held, 1992: 325), to the point where the movement itself is perceived to contribute to "the redefinition of cultural and political parameters within the representation of various interests" (Della Porta y Diani, 2006). If during the 1960s and 1970s the stress was on direct democracy as opposed to liberal democracy and also to organized democracy, whether catholic or socialist, the anti-globalization movement in the 1990s foregrounded a model of deliberative democracy based on diversity, subjectivity, transparency and open confrontation with a view to foster consensus and "ideological contamination" instead of dogmatism (Della Porta, 2005b, Della Porta, 2005).

In line with this deliberative turn within political theory (Robles and Ganuza, 2011: 245), the *indignados* also reclaim the validity of deliberative democracy, contributing features that are characteristic of this particular movement and its context. While equality and transparency represented the cornerstones of deliberative and direct models of democracy championed by new, post-68 social movements and anti-globalization movements focused on the transformation of preferences facilitated by the deliberative process, 15M contributes new elements when it comes to the question of inclusiveness. The sort of 'radical inclusiveness' (Gerbaudo, 2017: 11; Perugorria and Tejerina, 2018) advocated by 15M does not limit itself to members of the movement but it spreads out to society and to potential participants; deliberation takes place in the streets which explains the extraordinary importance given to square occupation (Lawrence, 2013; Romanos, 2016: 111). Also such inclusiveness is based on a profound

empathy that leaves aside strategic questions in order to become a space to share problems and work out different solutions (open mic sessions). Through this, 15M “aimed to construct a movement that belonged to ‘anyone’, predicated upon a collective ‘us’ that is incredibly inclusive in an attempt to overcome old ideological and party rifts, as well as self-referential dynamics, established organizative forms and traditional discourses and identities within activism” (Perugorria and Tejerina, 2018).

This kind of political culture emphasizes the *indignados*’ experimentation with different models of deliberative democracy. Habermas identifies two specific moments within the process of deliberation: informal deliberation, that is, outside the institutional framework, and more formal ways of debating that materialize in the concept of public opinion and influence institutional deliberation. Instead of the informal and unstructured space drawn by Habermas, and also opposed to the framing of deliberation within social organizations undertaken by Dryzek and Cohen, 15M seems to have generated a formal space of its own, supported equally by the Internet and by popular assemblies in “a sophisticated deliberative set up that attempts to mix informal Habermasian debates with the improved, critical articulation of such debates by the organizations themselves” (Dryzek, 2000; Robles y Ganuza, 2011:253).

The aim of this article is precisely to delve into the contribution of the 15M movement to debates and practices on democracy and deliberation. A correlation for many of these debates and practices can be found in academic discussions on what is understood by democracy, different approaches to democracy and their relation to the role played by political actors, be they public institutions, representative agents or social mobilization networks. The issue of democracy turned out to be core to the 15M movement, and entailed everything from the demand for specific measures (i.e. referendums, electoral reform), the symbolic frames of its public discourse (‘real democracy now’) to performative methods of organization (assemblies, horizontal networks on the Internet, rotation of responsibilities and hypersensitivity towards leadership, etc.), all of which are characteristic of the type of radical democracy championed by the movement.

Our analysis of the *indignados* is based upon interviews, focus groups and participant observation conducted from May 2011 to June 2012 during the occupation of public squares. It reveals that the question of democracy is profoundly related to the articulation of the movement as a “space of mobilization”. We understand this latter concept in a double sense: first, mobilization represents a central element within the construction of the movement’s collective identity, bringing together different sections and sensibilities within the *indignados*. Second, the construction of the movement as a space of mobilization also socializes participants in both original protest repertoires

and prefigurative practices where experimental models of democracy are enacted in an attempt at “democratizing democracy, as well as an environment to produce political goods (i.e. discourses, meeting spots, open assemblies, local and thematic committees, spaces for reflection, tools and motivations for action), which in turn would feed other cycles of protest, as we discuss below (Perugorria and Tejerina, 2014: 284-285). Following this, our understanding of 15M as a space of mobilization that revolves around radically democratic ideas focuses on three specific aspects that became key in the context of the movement: the successful merging of virtual and physical assemblies, the design of a viable scale of participation in line with its assembly-based model of direct democracy and, finally, the combination of the macro scale of the movement (state and international) with a micro scale (local) focused on specific needs and everyday problems.

Our analytical take on the 15M movement also favors the term radical democracy (Mouffe, 2005, Calle, 2011) as we feel it still conveys the notion of greater participation and the importance of the deliberative process present in other terms while at the same time placing emphasis on two aspects that are important to our work. First, it foregrounds political conflict in a movement that, despite the central role played by inclusiveness (we are 99%), clearly antagonizes political and economic elites, for instance when referring to “politicians and bankers” as equals or in allusions to the “regime of 78”, PPSOE ¹ or the so-called 1%. Secondly, the term radical democracy also stresses the fact that 15M represents a mobilization in defense of social and economic rights (the so-called substantive rights) in the frame of the anti-austerity protest cycle. For the *indignados*, democracy is as much about means (democratic strengthening) as it is about ends (higher levels of equality, social and labor rights), which aligns the movement with the conflictive and social nature of Mouffe’s proposal.

It must also be noted from the start that our conception of 15M is that of an extremely diverse social movement. From online activities by digital natives at *Democracia Real Ya* at the early stages of protest to the contribution of seasoned activists in the squares or the presence of more established organizations such as *ATTAC España*, not forgetting the role played by mere groups of citizens, the *indignados* can only be understood as a transversal space of mobilization brought together by the recognition of the many ways global, socio-political trends determine everyday life. It is not therefore our intention in the following pages to describe the movement *in toto*, but rather highlight patterns of action that attained important levels of recognition throughout the *in-*

¹ This is an ironic acronym combining the initials of the *Partido Popular* (PP) and *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), the right and centre-left parties which have alternatively been in government in Spain since 1982.

dignados as a heterogeneous collectivity, examining their significance when it comes to widening our conception of what democracy is and how it should be enacted in today's political landscape.

As we have indicated, article approaches 15M mainly as an space for mobilization articulating the heterogeneity of the movement as well as its effects within the subsequent mobilization cycle in Spain (anti-eviction struggles, PAH, social tides, etc.) with a direct reference to the master frame of 'radical democracy'. We begin by offering a socio-political contextualization of the movement within the international anti-austerity protest cycle. After that, we proceed to describe the qualitative methods used in this research: interviews and focus groups. Section 3 details the theoretical references used in particularly when it comes to the relation between social movements and democracy models. We discuss Mouffe's radical democracy and strive to analyze how it synthesizes elements of deliberative-participatory models while framing consensus within the arena political conflict. Discourses and practices on democracy among 15M activists are also examined in order to approach how the movement prefiguratively applies its democratic vision into specific organizative forms, experimenting with issues such as the relation between physical and virtual spaces, the scale of assemblies or concrete proposals, practices and demands both at a micro and macro levels.

2. The 15M movement: socio-political context

The phenomenon of citizen mobilization known as the 15M or *indignados* movement emerged in Spain in response to a call launched on the Internet to hold a demonstration on 15 May 2011 under the slogans 'Real democracy now' and 'We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers'. The movement's demands were aimed directly at the country's political class and economic elites. Much of the success of the mobilization was due to the conscientious effort by its organizers to create an open identity which appealed to the widespread discontent of citizens beyond partisan identities and political ideologies.

The initial protest emerged in response to the economic crisis, but also to the disenchantment of many Spaniards with the country's political class. The high unemploy-

ment rate², especially among youth, and exorbitant housing prices, which had already provoked a series of protests in 2006, set the precedent for the 15M movement.³

Precarious jobs, low wages and temporary employment, as well as the measures adopted by Spain's centre-left PSOE-led government, which included delayed retirement, labor reforms and tax hikes, only added to the problem. Moreover, cases of political corruption, the WikiLeaks revelations, and the passing of the Sinde law⁴ undermined the credibility of institutions to such an extent that the political class was (and is) perceived by a large number of citizens as one of the main problems affecting the country.⁵ The rejection of political parties extended to include trade unions as well, and the absence of references among the classic political organizations and lack of opportunities for institutional participation contributed to the emergence of the mobilization.⁶

The success of the 15M call⁷ took political parties and the media by surprise. Its success empowered many participants, who attempted to keep the movement alive through subsequent mobilizations, in part as a response to the poor media coverage of the initial protests which the activists considered insufficient (Candón, 2011). After the police intervened in Madrid and other cities, which led to several arrests, a few hundred activists decided to set up a camp at the Puerta del Sol in Madrid; a public square in the heart of the city center. Following an initial period of tolerance, the police evicted the protestors from the square. By 17 May, the 15M movement was already a consolidated network made up of hundreds of assemblies.

² According to the Spanish Working Population Survey (EPA), in the first quarter of 2011, just before the protests, unemployment stood at 21.3%. See (<http://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco4211/epa0111.pdf>). Retrieved April 14, 2013.

³ We refer to the Movement for Decent Housing, which reached its peak in 2006 and 2007.

⁴ The Sinde Law, named after the former Spanish Culture Minister Angeles Gonzalez-Sinde, attempted to protect intellectual property rights on the Internet and was widely criticized in social networks.

⁵ According to the barometer of the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), the citizens of Spain have perceived the political class to be the third most important problem since February 2010. In 2011, the political class was viewed as the main problem (according to a multiple response question) by 17.8% of those surveyed in February, 20.2% in March, 21.5% in April, 22.1% in May and 24.7% in June. In March 2013, 31.4% considered the political class to be a problem, while 44.5% stated that corruption and fraud was also a major problem.

⁶ According to the Quality of Working Life Survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Immigration, only 16.4% of workers in Spain belonged to a trade union in 2010, 17.2% in 2009 and 17.4% in 2008. In 2010, only 7.1% of workers aged 16-24 and 9.2% of workers aged 25-29 were union members. See (<http://www.empleo.gob.es/estadisticas/ecvt/welcome.htm>). Retrieved April 14, 2013.

⁷ According to DRY, some 130,000 people demonstrated across the country on 15 May.

As a result of the camps, and especially the ‘decentralization of the protest to neighborhoods’,⁸ the protest became more intergenerational in nature⁹ as it provided a channel for other protests against policies for structural adjustment that were implemented at the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008. At this point, a series of initiatives were taken under the umbrella of the ‘indignados’ movement.¹⁰

One of the most important actions was to occupy public squares to hold training workshops on democracy or social rights and open mic sessions, where people were asked to voice their complaints and launch debates on the problems affecting the political system and the consequences of neoliberal adjustments.

The anniversary of the movement would put an end to the period of greatest activity and media visibility. Nonetheless, the networks that arose from the 15M movement would remain very active by interacting with other groups, such as the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH, Platform of Citizens Affected by Mortgages), which were used to garner support for new waves of social mobilization, such as the ‘tides’ protests. These ‘tides’ mobilizations were sector-based and included educators (the Green Tide), healthcare workers (the White Tide), social workers (the Orange Tide), the unemployed (the Red Tide), and citizens against the privatization of water (the Blue Tide).

The 15M movement marked a turning point in citizens’ response to the crisis and can be credited with launching the debate on democracy, as well as creating stable networks of participation that included activists from previously established social groups and movements in addition to more recent ones who were mobilized following the protests of May. Rather than a social movement structured around objectives and forms of action to appeal to institutions, we will see that the 15M movement built political goods to mobilize both its own members and to mobilize other sectors, that is, as a space of mobilization.

⁸ Process by which the assemblies in the squares decided to disband the camps and form decentralized assemblies in neighbourhoods.

⁹ The older members of the movement called themselves “yayoflautas” (a portmanteau formed from the colloquial term “yayo” used in Spanish to refer to grandfathers and grandmothers and the word “flauta” or flute). The term “yayoflautas” was coined from the pejorative term “perroflautas” used to refer to young hippies with dogs and flutes. The term “yayoflauta” attempted to reflect the intergenerational nature of the movement, which began as a youth movement but later attracted people of all ages.

¹⁰ Term that makes references to Stéphane Hessel’s book *Time for Outrage!* (2011), which was widely referred to by the media and activists.

3. Methods

In order to conduct this work, a total of 24 interviews were held with a group of researchers who had analyzed this phenomenon prior to the call of May 15th, 2011. Additionally, another four discussion groups were held in Seville, Madrid and Barcelona.

The groups were structured around five general thematic lines:

- The reason for joining the movement
- How to engage people and foster participation
- Identification with proposals, subjects and language
- The role of virtual and real networks
- The outcomes and future of the movement

The groups were comprised of recent activists with no previous political background who were mobilized through the 15M movement (Seville and Barcelona), as well as individuals with a long history of participation in social movements (Madrid). Each of the groups was composed of 8 participants and gender balanced. Each group of eight participants included a subgroup of individuals who had only taken part in the first months of the protest.

Finally, the study and subsequent analysis of this phenomenon is based on a participant observation approach at general meetings, working groups, neighborhood assemblies and the occupied squares.

The analysis of the assemblies and the protests in several places across Spain allowed us to test some hypotheses and also draw conclusions from the initial interviews, moving us to consider the 15M movement mainly as a space of mobilization¹¹ which engages with longer cycles of protest. Our working hypothesis states that 15M becomes a space of mobilization, among other things, through experimentation with patterns of radical democracy. Such attempt at radical democracy is characterized by the close correlation between the movement's and demands, and also by a growing disaffection towards the institutionalized political class, which translates into in a constant search for other tools for citizen participation.

¹¹ Several authors consider the 15M movement to be a "collective dialogue within society" or a school of prefigurative politics to produce "political goods" (organization, legitimacy of self-government), which gave rise to subsequent protests against the neoliberal agenda (Calle 2013).

3. Radical Democracy and the New Global Movements

There is widespread consensus among the different schools that analyse collective action regarding the role of social movements as creators of democracy (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Ibarra, Martí and Goma, 2002; Della Porta, 2013; Tilly, 2007; Giner, 2008). According to Tarrow (1994), social movements are 'power in movement', which contest and construct grammars of democracy by changing agendas, institutions, political culture, imaginaries, and creating new structures of participation arising from the act of protest (Giugni, McAdam and Tilly, 1998; Markoff, 1996). Moreover, for authors such as Tilly (2007), social movements are indicators of the quality of democracy. Their presence, therefore, is witness to and is a driving force of social innovations which alter 'politics' (visible and structured power) from the 'political' (more expressive power from everyday life).

The frame of mobilization that aims to radicalize democracy through structures of democratic participation and deliberation has developed over the last decades in several parts of the world, and includes social forums and anti-globalization protests (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Della Porta, 2007; Castells, 2009) to initiatives like the 15M movement in Spain, the Y' en a Marre (Enough is Enough) movement in Senegal, and the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York, among others (Maeckelbergh, 2012).

Other ways to engage in and understand politics from the perspective of radical democracy are emerging, thus permitting analogies to be drawn with formerly isolated protest phenomena (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Democracy as a 'master frame', the participatory use of the Internet, and the global claim to rights has cultivated a fertile political ground for extending mobilization (Subirats, 2012). In this sense, the 15M movement is the expression of a new cycle of mobilization that has been taking shape since the 1990s: the new global movements (Calle, 2005 and 2009; Jiménez & Calle, 2007) or new new social movements (Feixa, Pereira & Juris, 2009; Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

In a recent article, Cristina Flesher Fominaya highlights that the actions of these global movements should be framed precisely around the current crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy and links them to a conscious attempt to rupture the post-political consensus which presents neoliberal state and representative democracy as both sides of the same coin (Flesher Fominaya, 2017).

In general, social movements strive to create public spheres where citizens can choose to not be represented through the existing channels but to participate directly via their own channels (Melucci & Avritzer, 2000). However, the presence of the democracy frame 'from below' as a discourse and as a guideline for the creation of hori-

zontal participatory structures has been the cornerstone and the most relevant link for all the phenomena related to the 'alter-globalization protests' (Calle, 2005 & 2009) or the 15M and Occupy Wall Street movements (Klein, 2011). Several authors have highlighted the link between the 15M movement as a space for mobilization and its radically democratic demands. Paolo Gerbaudo identifies radical democracy as key pursuit of the so-called movement of the squares and situates the demand for 'real democracy' as the nodal point of the citizenist ideology he perceives as defining of such movements (Gerbaudo, 2017: 62). Cristina Flesher Fominaya terms the *indignados'* actions as 'pro-democratic' in their attempt at developing alternative democratic imaginaries around questions such as who could be an agent of change, civil disobedience, political prefiguration, the politicization of the normally mundane or the definition of transversal demands around a shared problematic of democracy (Flesher Fominaya, 2017: 10).

Donatella Della Porta also explains that the 15M movement involves a search for 'another democracy', one that goes beyond representation, claiming that 'attention given to the respect for different opinions aims at creating high quality discursive democracy' (Della Porta, 2012: 276). In fact, a number of terms have been proposed from direct democracy (Abellán, 2008; Vallespín, 1998), participatory democracy (Abellán, 2008; Macpherson, 1977; Vallespín, 1998), strong democracy (Barber, 1984), unitary democracy (Mansbridge, 1983) agonist democracy (Mouffe: 2005), counter-democracy, post-representative democracy, monitored democracy, associative democracy or empowered deliberative democracy (Della Porta y Diani, 2006). As Della Porta herself recognizes in a different contribution (Della Porta, 2013: 80-81), both the participatory and deliberative traditions are aligned with radical conceptions of democracy following the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Our use of the latter term in these pages is based first on these movements' affirmation of a social democracy, one that recognizes fundamental social rights in pursuit of a true welfare state for all perceived to be under increasing attacks by neoliberal forces.¹² Also, the term radical democracy is predicated upon the legitimacy of the Other and the affirmation of his/her political rights while

¹² Following this, along with a defense of deliberative democracy, social, economic and labor questions featured prominently within the initial manifesto published by Democracia Real Ya in 2011 (<http://www.democraciarealya.es/documento-transversal/>). Such questions were even more present within the encampments with housing and labor rights, for instance, becoming key issues in the articulation of the anti-eviction movement or the so-called 'tides' ('mareas') in defense of public services. On the other hand, proposals attempting to prioritise exclusively democratic reforms, such as the October 15th referendum, the #3basicpoints

(<http://actuable.es/peticiones/dile-las-acampadas-acampadasol-acampadabcn-vuelvan>) or the 'minimal consensus' (<http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2011/05/26/acampada-sol-consensua-cuatro-lineas-de-debate/>) were widely rejected by the movement (Candón-Mena, 2013:47-51).

recognizing the conflictual relations that underlie political actions (...), 'they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place' (Mouffe, 2005: 20). Conflict is conceived here as working through difference and must be inscribed in a process whereby preferences are transformed (Romanos, 2011), moving from a logic of individual interest towards the preservation of common good.

Nonetheless, significant nuances regarding consensus and the definition of common good still separate participatory/deliberative models of democracy from the notion of radical democracy, which (in our view) is better suited when discussing 15M as a movement. Deliberative models focus around consensus. As Cohen states (1989), decisions must be approved by each and every participant as opposed to the majority of them. This is a consensus motivated by a shared reasoning that ends up persuading everyone; individuals "removed from themselves and their own interests, get together in order to safeguard general interest" (Cohen, 1989:23-4, Elster, 1998). In line with this, Mansbridge (1996) differentiates between "adversary democracy" and "unitary democracy", precisely with a view to underlining the importance of this kind of consensus in the latter.

On the other hand, Mouffe talks about an agonistic democracy in order to emphasize that conflict as inherent to politics (1999). In opposition to "free public reason" (Rawls) or to Habermas' "ideal communicative situation" as the basis for consensus, Mouffe talks about "transforming antagonism into agonism" and about "transforming the enemy into an adversary". She distinguishes between "the political", linked to agonism and to the hostility that pervades human relations, and "a politics that aims to consolidate an order, organizing human coexistence in conflictive situations saturated by the political" (Mouffe, 1999: 13-14). Such conception also implies that reaching consensus is not always possible as actual inequalities and conflictual interests do not disappear. Accordingly, the main aim of politics should be that of reaching different kinds of "meta-consensus" (in relation to values, beliefs, preferences or discourses) in order to safeguard the correct functioning of the deliberative arena (Dryzek, 2010: 94-114).

Mouffe and Sousa Santos (2016) reject therefore the notion consensus as defined by Habermas, indicating that, in a context of strong inequality, it tends to depoliticize the very idea of democracy and might actually contribute to the maintaining of the *status quo*. Following this, radical inclusivity within the *indignados* movement (Gerbaudo, 2017: 11; Perugorria and Tejerina, 2018) should not be understood as an appeal to all, but rather as a call to articulate a majority, bringing together a number of struggles (Laclau) that transcend classic left-right, liberal-progress distinctions via alliances among different movements (PAH, the so-called tides or "mareas", hacktivists, etc.)

This does not mean 100% of the people, but rather, as stated by the Occupy Movement, 99%, that is, a significant, ample and inclusive majority that nonetheless recognizes itself as antagonizing the 1% represented symbolically by Wall Street or the IBEX 35 in Spain.

According to our research, the 15M movement seems to share this conflicting take on democracy as advocated by Mouffe, but it also departs from it at least in one significant way. To Mouffe, a political community must not be based on *universitas*, as defended by the communitarists, but on the *societas* or on the idea of a "civic association" designating a formal relation in terms of rules, rather than a substantial relation leading to common action (Mouffe, 1999: 96-97). However, in the 15M conception of democracy, substantial aims are also certainly present, as the movement puts forward a definition of common good that is inseparable from social and economic rights. The radicalization of democracy is therefore understood as a means to an end, including the formulation of material aims and aspirations. In line with Tilly (2007: 7), it is possible to find approaches to democracy that encompass substantial aims such as the life and political conditions generated by a specific regime. This substantial conception of democracy is in fact deeply rooted within the Spanish population. According to the last CIS study on democracy quality made before 15M (2009), 23,7% of the population points towards "an economic system that ensures sufficient income for all" as one of the main features of a democratic system, way above "elections" (14,8%). This is evidence that social justice and democracy are deeply interrelated within Spanish political culture, which can explain the success of 15M and its combination of political and economic reforms. "Our dreams cannot be contained within your ballot boxes" was precisely one of the most successful slogans at the Sol encampments. Tensions between sectors of the movement advocating the need for a wider, minimum consensus in terms of democratic procedures and participation (political corruption, open lists, more inclusive electoral law), and those who defended the relevance of economic demands and social rights have been actually very common, with the latter achieving the backing of the great majority of *indignados*. (Candon, 2013: 47-55).

To sum up, our understanding of democracy within 15M shares the importance of dialogue and public debate advocated by deliberative models of democracy, even though our use of the term radical democracy underlines that deliberation within the movement does not strive towards a rational consensus that persuades each and every participant, as is implied by many scholars working on deliberative democracy. The idea of radical democracy here implies inscribing democracy itself within the political in line with the work of Mouffe (1999) and Sousa Santos (2016). Instead of a Habermasian consensus, 15M advocates for the widening of a basic consensus among those below

as opposed to an above represented by a reduced elite (1%, IBEX 36, the banks, etc.). It aims to articulate a new hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) while defending a view of public good based on social and economic rights as consubstantial to democracy itself in line with other anti-austerity movements that have emerged with the economic crisis (Flesher Fominaya, 2017).

The following table aims to summarize some of the concepts we have analyzed, as well as the differences between participatory and deliberative models and the kind of radical democracy we have associated to the 15M movement.

Liberal/representative	Participatory/Deliberative	Radical
Delegation/Consent	...+Co-management/co-decision	...+Self-management
Antagonism: Majority decides	Consensus: Everyone decides by agreement and consensus	Agonism: Everyone decides through the articulation of new, hegemonic majorities.
Elections	...+ referendums, participatory budgets, popular initiatives (participatory) + debate (deliberative)	...+ social/labor/economic rights
Individual interests	Common good	Substantial aims (hegemónico)

Ultimately, full acceptance of radical democracy as an arena for political action represents also a departure from the autonomous tradition leading to 15M in Spain (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Botella Ordinas, 2011). In Spain, the rejection of institutional politics that has traditionally established a clear distinction between autonomous social movements and left political parties and trade unions has recently been problematized by some of the events following square occupations, most notably the emergence of *Podemos* and its relevant presence in the field of Spanish representative institutions. Flesher Fominaya has referred to this departure as a ‘democratic turn’ whereby prefigurative spaces and attacks to the illegitimacy of democratic actors coexist with an attempt to hold political representatives accountable in relation to basic constitutional rights (Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 154). Following this, the claims for real democracy involves respecting the law that corrupt politicians very often manipulate in their own interests.

The cycle of mobilizations led by the New Global Movements is also a new model for collective action. It joins together existing organizations and critical networks with roots in workers' movements or new social movements, while incorporating other models, particularly those emerging from the countries of the so-called South. Thus, it is a very attractive paradigm for new generations of activists who are more capable of engaging in hybrid repertoires of action and the network of networks.

4. Discourses and practices on democracy

Participants in the 15M movement conceived of democracy in the strong sense (Barber, 1984); they combined ideas in the traditions of self-government (Castoriadis, 1975; Fotopoulos, 1997) and radical democracy (direct, deliberative, assemblies) with proposals in favor of participatory democracy (open institutions, equal access to representation) as described by Pateman (1970). The master frame of radical democracy would be prevalent within the lifespan of the 15M movement. This means attending "proposal and practices looking for social cooperation and horizontality; the main goal would be to construct ways of life that aim to satisfy basic needs collectively, bringing in social, political, cultural and environmental spheres 'from below' in a participatory way" (Calle 2011). The concept has been used by authors such as Rosa Luxembour, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Romand Coles or Slavoj Žižek.

In general, radical democracy implies extending formal and representative democracy while still maintaining some of the latter's principles in a way that "expressions of radical democracy (horizontal, bottom-up cooperation) might emerge through participatory democracy (institutional, top-down dynamics) (Calle, 2011: 20). Radical democracy means an encounter between the political (the instituting power of the social) and politics understood as institutional power; radical democracy takes therefore into account the need to reconnect both spheres in order to generate "true democracy", highlighting the relevance of deliberative processes (Habermas, 1987) and of substantive rights, social and economic, in opposition to the kind negative freedom promoted by liberalism).

The 15M's call for democratic change through radical forms of democracy has shaped how mobilization has been organized and carried out within the movement. Democracy is not perceived as restricted to an expressive or formal equality, but, quite

on the contrary, it involves reclaiming rights on material grounds, such as socialization in equality and dignity. In the words of a veteran activist:

What I think is that there is no single, specific way to achieve real and participatory democracy. Actually, real, direct and participatory democracy is the way to achieve a more equal society, don't you think? (45-year-old male)

As the *Real Democracy Now* manifesto puts it, the very concept of democracy represents a strongly accusatory discourse against the current democratic system (defined as a sort of "party dictatorship"); it denounces the material and expressive violation of citizens' dignity and the lack of basic rights that should be upheld within truly democratic societies (ie. the right to a home, a job, culture, healthcare, education, political participation, free self-development, and, in general, everything that is needed in order to lead a healthy and happy life).

Concrete demands within the movement also pave the way for forms of participatory and direct democracy. The intention is to take citizen voices to the institutions, facilitating through direct routes. As a space of mobilization, the 15M movement was therefore based on the radicalizing democracy rather than on putting forward a closed narrative or a specific political project.

It is very clear to me that no one in this 15M assembly intends to represent, lead or direct others. At best we aim to widen and go further with the movement. (34-year-old female)

Initiatives aiming to improve representative democracy (i.e. changing the electoral law, opening lists, eliminating the privileges of the political class) were equally presented within the context of participatory democracy, that is, through open agendas and horizontal decision-making processes. Furthermore, criticism towards cutbacks in healthcare and education (especially after September 2011), as well as opposition to the labor reforms undertaken in November 2011 and 2012 by the PSOE and PP governments, respectively, were also framed by the movement within a context of participatory democracy.

Therefore, the 15M movement did not perceive of democracy solely as a form of action, but also as process to guarantee the right to a decent standard of life and social welfare. In fact, on 15 May 2012, when the 15M activists returned to the streets a year

later, they demanded 'policies that promote common good' as stated in their international manifesto.¹³

Demands for participatory democracy during the movement emphasized not only increase social representation, but the need to actively co-manage institutions and public policies (through shared roundtables and spaces for social deliberation). Indeed, the word 'process' was used when referring to the 15M movement and the development of its proposals. From general criticism of representative democracy and vague support for a democracy 'from below', other discourses emerged demanding self-management as a key feature of 'radical democracy'. This was illustrated by the words of two 15M participants from Madrid:

It is not just about rejecting or reforming the electoral system... Starting from there, one starts to discuss everything from what type of democracy we have to the extent of the welfare state, and the cutbacks... A collective intelligence is developed, which in many cases is brilliant and it's giving rise to, let's say, those processes. Criticism made in the beginning, are now much more thought out. We could say that people are educating themselves, holding discussions in neighborhood assemblies or in working groups and, from there, they are engaging in infinitely more radical discourses than those one could at the beginning of the movement. (32-year-old male)

I would also say that before I wasn't sure how to tackle the questions we were working on... We focused in local, very local proposals like self-employment, self-education or knowledge transfer. Also we tried, each of us at a small scale, self-managed jobs. So at the personal level for me, it is like another part of life, right? (34-year-old female)

Discourses on radical democracy foregrounded an understanding of participation and framed the movement within spaces of social mobilization. According to a study conducted by *Zoom Politico* on the early stages of protest the camp set up in Salamanca (Calvo Borobia, Gómez-Pastrana, Jiménez Sánchez and Mena, 2011), 95% of those who participated in the camp valued positively the fact that decisions were taken by all members of the movement, while 38% described the 15M movement as a 'break' with the system. On the other hand, proposals for participatory democracy found more

¹³ See the manifesto shared by the different assemblies at (<http://12m15m.acampadadebarcelona.org/es/12m-15m>). Retrieved April 14, 2013.

support among society and the media when presented outside the nucleus of the 15M activists.

From the master frame that called for a real democracy as a means to regain 'rights' and 'freedoms', three more specific frames would emerge: participatory democracy (that is, greater participation and co-management); radical democracy (direct participation and self-management) and, finally, sustainable economies (based on the idea of environmental sustainability).

5. From isolated protest to building a space of mobilization

The organizational structures of the new movements are, to a large extent, self-referential as they constitute an aim in themselves and not only a way to achieve the objectives of the movement (Melucci, 1999). The new movements are characterized by the use of horizontal and participatory organizational structures. These structures are the symbolic expression of an alternative model of social organization situated within the frame of radical democracy. Accordingly, the analysis of the democratic proposals of the 15M movement must take into account how the movement experimented with different forms of organization and democratic participation within its own structures. Our understanding of 15M as a space of mobilization that revolves around radically democratic ideas focuses on three specific aspects that became central in the context of the movement.

Probably, the main challenge the movement faced was to merge the virtual spaces where the protest was launched with the physical space where it took place to include both spaces and ensure they functioned in a complementary way, all of which materialized in a hybrid space of both physical and virtual organization. Secondly, the 15M movement had to design a viable scale of participation in line with its assembly-based model of direct democracy. Finally, the movement also had to combine its macro scale (state and international), characterized by an increasingly abstract discourse and proposals to construct a truly transformational alternative, with its micro scale (local), that focused on specific needs and where intervention in everyday problems or direct participation in assemblies is easier. Thus, the 15M tried to bring together the physical and the virtual, the global and the local, the abstract and the concrete by establishing organizational structures and forms of coordination in line with these aims.

Virtual and physical assemblies

The first organizational structure was the Real Democracy Now (Democracia Real Ya, DRY) platform created through social networks. Although the DRY activists held face-to-face (real) meetings, the Internet was the main starting point for the platform. Through the Internet, DRY was capable of mobilizing thousands of people in a common protest in spite of its initially limited material and organizational resources. The 15M movement was therefore a new demonstration of recent processes of mobilization characterized by self-organization, emergent processes (Johnson, 2003), collective intelligence (Lèvy, 2007) and *smart mobs* (Rheingold, 2004) in which decentralized protests emerged as a result of the interconnection of new technologies without the prominent role played by classic formal organizations (the SMOs described by McCarthy, Zald and McAdam, 1999).

Taking advantage of the tools we had to disseminate [the message], and that perhaps we didn't have before, like Twitter, Facebook and so on, we could call, make a call to the people. (Madrid discussion group)

Some authors have argued that the historical primacy of hierarchical forms of organizations is in part due to the lack of a communications infrastructure that permits horizontal forms of organization which are useful for large social groups (Juris, 2006). Today, the Internet and the new media favor a new paradigm of horizontal social organization structured in a number of networks (Castells, 2006) in which active and direct participation is viable on a large scale.

The network provided the movement with an organizational and communicative structure capable of overcoming the limitations of direct and horizontal participation beyond small groups and spaces. This questions Weber's classic argument (1976) which advocates the impossibility of shaping a community without proximity in cyberspace. The new communications infrastructures and the proposals to radicalize democracy permit both the possible and the desirable since, to paraphrase McLuhan, with the Internet 'the medium is the message'.

Before, the movements had ideals but not the right tools to achieve them, now we have the Internet and other tools to put in practice our ideas of horizontality, assemblies, and participation. (Activist, Barcelona)

Internet therefore provided a channel to experiment with forms of direct democratic assemblies and radical democracy in the movement. After the success of the first mobi-

lization, a network of face-to-face assemblies was developed, which complemented the organizational structure of the virtual DRY network?

The merging of virtual and physical spaces of participation brings us to the discussion of the extent of inclusion of each type of space, as well as the limitations they impose on the real opportunities for participation.

On the other hand, physical spaces limit the participation of large groups of people, which can in turn lead to spatial discrimination. For example, people who wish to participate in assemblies held in cities must commute in from peripheral areas, which also involves extra costs. Not only are there spatial barriers to participation, but also time limitations that must be taken into account. A synchronic, face-to-face assembly means that all participants must be available to attend at a specific time, while the network allows communication and participation to occur diachronically and in a flexible manner. However, communication on the network is fast paced and requires a greater commitment in order to follow the debates that are produced within it.

[Internet] lets a lot of people participate in a way that if [it did] not [exist] they could not participate or if they did they would have to change their schedules. I don't know, I think it offers an opportunity that didn't exist before. From being active only if you go to the square to being active in a lot of different ways, for me is one of the keys of the 15M. (Barcelona discussion group)

The advantages and disadvantages of both spaces were discussed within the movement. Despite this, the general tendency was to conceive of both spaces as being complementary to one another and create hybrid forms of organization at different scales or set limits on the functions of each space of action. As a result of this debate, the movement chose to disband the camps in a third phase and move out to the neighborhoods.

The scale of the assembly

After 12 June 2011, the camps decided to disband in order to set up assemblies in neighborhoods and towns, although the main city squares continued to be used as a space for coordinating the movement. Historically, the representative model of democracy has been considered inevitable to ensure the democratic functioning of large groups where direct participation is not possible. Only at a smaller scale would it be possible to implement direct forms of participation and self-management, as exemplified by the cases of the Greek polis, of the Paris Commune or Council Communism.

Nevertheless, one of the pillars of the 15M movements was its critique of representation, and for this reason it sought formulas to combine the inevitable limitations of assemblies and their direct forms of participation with the building of larger-scale spaces of coordination.

As organizational spaces, the camps were also limited in terms of democratic participation. Because a large share of the population converged in a single forum and the turnover rate of the participants was high, the general assemblies were not very operative and often quite frustrating. Indeed, these assemblies were more expressive than operative in nature and fulfilled the role of keeping tensions high and challenging the authorities, as well as providing a venue for participants to voice their discontent in an emotional more than a rational way as exemplified by the open mic sessions. Moreover, there were strong disparities in terms of the space itself and the length of time the participants were required to camp, thus leading to the overrepresentation of young people similar to what occurred in the Internet.

Following the creation of neighborhood assemblies, which were smaller and more operative, the movement encountered a more viable space for the direct and democratic participation that it postulated.

The Internet was key for me in the first days and until [the movement] was decentralized to the neighborhoods [...] when [the organization] moved out to the neighborhoods, the groups were smaller and it was easier. (Female, Barcelona discussion group)

Macro discourse and micro practices

The last challenge, which was discussed above, was the need to merge increasingly abstract discourses and demands with the practices, proposals and forms of intervention in local and specific issues. This symbolic and highly abstract macro discourse needed to be materialized in the everyday realities of the people. According to Harvey (2007), this step from the particular to the universal is a dialectic relation; a process in which concepts such as social justice are materialized in specific situations and gain their universal scope through the abstraction of particular cases. It is a process that was already experienced by the so-called 'alter-globalization' movement under the slogan 'Think globally, act locally' or the newly coined term 'glocal' that reflects the interdependency between the local community and global planning.

To a large extent, the neighborhood assemblies of the 15M movement were set up with the support of previously established mobilization networks. However, because

they were limited to neighborhoods, they were also limited in terms of their capacity for transformation. The community only has revolutionary potential if it manages to engage in wider-based politics, something which the 15M offered. In general, virtual networks as a space for large-scale coordination, debate and general proposals at the macro level began to take shape, while the neighborhood assemblies were more heterogeneous and included activists from pre-existing organizations or older people as well as providing a channel for general demands in specific struggles linked to basic needs. The fight against evictions exemplifies this complementary relation.

As we have stated, the discourses that emerged from the general frame of democracy mutually fed into each other. In the case of evictions, which were the main line of action of the 15M movement after the initial stage of large mobilizations, a radical democratic approach was taken through the organization of assemblies in neighborhoods and the use of direct forms and actions that went beyond the limits of legal and institutional participation. This occurred through acts of civil disobedience against forced evictions or forms of self-management in social centers or houses occupied by evicted families, and focused on issues of social justice and the demand for material rights such as housing. In this way, the movement transcended the formal conception of democracy to a conception of democracy as a process aimed at achieving fundamental goals, guaranteeing a decent life, and ensuring an acceptable level of social welfare. But far from excluding institutional forms of democracy, this discourse was accompanied by the discourse of participatory democracy as it dealt with forms of co-management with existing institutions, the opening of policy agendas, and using channels of direct participation in decision-making processes, such as the popular legislative initiative presented to the parliament.¹⁴

Finally, the discourse of sustainability was manifested through the movement's criticism of the unsustainable growth model that led to the housing bubble, the environmental costs of mass construction of houses, massive urban developments and the demand for communal-based, self-managed housing resources. The 15M movement experimented with structures and spaces of organization, which became 'cultural laboratories' (Melucci, 1999). These cultural laboratories provided a space for the 15M activists to put in practice forms of radical democracy and discuss specific problems such as housing beyond the abstract or global frame of democracy. The struggle for housing serves as an example of the possibility of achieving concrete objectives beyond global or long-term demands. However, this did not mean that the movement lost its initial universal character or turned into a sector-based movement. On the contrary,

¹⁴ See <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/category/propuestas-pah/iniciativa-legislativa-popular>). Retrieved April 14, 2013.

democracy remained at the core of the movement's proposals as exemplified by the mobilizations of 23 February coinciding with the anniversary of the *coup d'etat* attempt of 1981. On 23 February, the 15M movement and the 'tides' of protest led by various sectors against the cutbacks denounced the 'financial *coup d'etat*' undermining democracy.

6. Conclusions

The 15M movement should be inscribed within a wider anti-austerity protest cycle with which it shares a number of elements including emotional factors (outrage), specific forms of action (occupation of public spaces), political frames of interpretation (such as the ones linking the financial and democratic crises), collective identities, generational experiences (precariousness) and even infrastructures (on-line resources and assembly organizing methods) (Romanos, 2018). Although clearly following the steps of the anti-globalisation movement, 15M and other recent mobilisations also reinforce inclusiveness and seem to have reversed the former's transnational stance in order to reintroduce protest in the context of national states.

Nonetheless, an element still linking 15M with previous social movements from the 1960s onwards is the so-called "democratic thread" (Romanos, 2018). Here, the indignados' actions foreground patterns of deliberative democracy clearly reminiscent of discourses present within the anti-globalisation movement. To these ongoing debates around alternative models of democracy, 15M has contributed, first, a more defined take on inclusiveness, trying to prioritize the use of inclusive language within the movement in an attempt to bring in new political actors through an open invitation to society to discuss in occupied public spaces. Secondly, the indignados have also been innovative in relation to the deliberative process itself. Deliberation is not placed within an informal set-up (Habermas, 1998), or limited to voluntary groups (Cohen, 1989), not even restricted to social movements themselves (Dryzek, 2000)), but rather encompasses citizenry as a whole, in "an articulation between deliberation and formalization that is different and breaks the symbolic barrier separating militants from citizens" (Robles y Ganuza, 2011: 260).

As a movement, 15M has been clearly preoccupied with the question of democracy in the context of anti-austerity protests, equally emphasizing both the ends of democratic action (social, labor and economic rights) as well as the means to further develop democracy itself through direct, participatory and deliberative models in order to widen the margins of representative democracy. The movement's take on democracy as

conflictual and socially charged determine our use of the term radical democracy in line with the work of Mouffe and Sousa, among others. As discussed, such term maintains elements from deliberative and participatory models of democracy while placing consensus in the context of political struggles for hegemony.

The indignados have also experimented at a practical level with the processes, means and scales in an attempt to prefiguratively materialize their conception of radical democracy into the space of mobilization that has become the movement itself. In our work, we could observe, first, higher levels of hybridization between physical and virtual spaces of participation, conceived as complementary. Secondly, when it comes to the scale of physical assemblies, the movement has opted by scaling-down the size of assemblies, decentralizing action from occupied squares to everyday politics within different neighborhoods. Thirdly, after an initial stage of protest characterized exclusively by macro-systemic debates, these ended up materializing in a varied pattern of action in relation to specific problems such as housing (micro), allowing the indignados to focus on concrete action at local level.

The master frame of radical democracy pervades the space of mobilization generated by the 15M movement and seems to have spawned renewed action in relation to housing, for instance; a new cycle of protest by the so-called social tides (*mareas*), as well as new political parties (Podemos) and organized groups of citizen taking part in local elections. The process of institutionalization undertaken by, at least, a number of activists within the indignados movement represents today an interesting development. The speed with which Spanish political parties have implemented democratic measures, such as primary elections; the appearance on the Spanish political landscape of virtual mechanisms for strengthening participation (for instance via internal referendums); or the success of strongly inclusive campaigning across the political spectrum in Spain are all aspects perceived to be profoundly related to the democratic innovations brought about by 15M. They foreground some of the dimensions of the 15M movement still in need of further research.

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