

Continuities and Discontinuities in Recent Social Mobilizations. From New Social Movements to the Alter-Global Mobilizations and the 15M

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Abstract

Our paper seeks to analyze the novel and long-term characteristics of the recent mobilizations in Spain. Our main objective is to identify the defining traits of collective actions currently taking place as a consequence of the multi-dimensional crisis unleashed in 2010. We will focus on three main analytical axes—agents, identity and space—, trying to establish their historicity, that is, their presence or absence in both former social movements and current mobilizations.

The spatial dimension refers to the local versus global and co-presential versus virtual characteristics of collective action. This analysis implies a focus on the mobilizations' demands, the repertoire of actions, and the display of emotions. Emotions are also intertwined with the process of collective identity construction, and the conflictual relationship with agents and institutions identified as responsible for the crisis. Finally, we will give special attention to activists and social movement organizations, decision-making processes and adaptability and resilience of organizational forms.

Our data will come from newspaper articles, the Internet, interviews to participants, and graphic material collected during ethnographic observations in camps (*acampadas*) and assemblies. Data was gathered following the principles of theoretical sampling. Our analysis of these data is in exploratory phase, and is constructed in order to develop a preliminary analytical understanding of the phenomenon.

Keywords

Social movements, 15M, identity, space.

Introduction

The global scenario of social mobilization is rapidly mutating. Periods of relative continuity and stability are being altered in an abrupt fashion by moments of effervescence that seem to be marking a point of fracture with the past. These recent changes in the dynamics of contentious politics are partly captured by the concept of “cycle of protest” (Tarrow 1997).

The year 2011 was particularly fruitful in the visualization of a series of mobilizations that meant to express a double discontent. First, with the collateral effects of the economic crisis, that is, the increasing levels of unemployment and the expansion of social inequalities. And, second, with the management of social life that was being performed by political élites. These élites were perceived as both reluctant to deepening

or expanding democratic procedures, as fossilized by the rising bureaucratization of political life, and as crippled and corrupt by world markets.

Given its multiple sources and diverse manifestations, the task of assessing and diagnosing the current state of affairs is especially arduous. The realities of countries in Northern Africa such as Egypt, Tunisia, Lybia, Morrocco, Argel, or in the Middle East, such as Israel and Syria, show important nuances among themselves and profound differences with that of countries in Southern Europe such as Portugal, France, Italy or Spain. The Spanish case is particularly significant due to both the drastic consequences of the economic crisis on social life and the labor market, and to the progressive erosion of the maneuver capacity of governments and politicians. Moreover, the 15M movement has served as beacon for mobilizations in other European and American countries. These reasons alone would encourage social movement scholars to pay special attention to the characteristics and peculiarities of 15M.

If we however broaden our focus to the evolution of Spanish social movements in the last few decades, we find additional elements that give a patina of exceptional scientific attractiveness to the 15M. Among these traits are Spain's transition from a dictatorial to a democratic regime; the ensuing privatization of social life and political demobilization of the Spanish citizenry; the reconciliation between the Left and the Right in a (failed) attempt to close historical, heartfelt wounds; the process of institutional decentralization derived from the rising tensions between Madrid and the nationalist periphery (Basque Country and Catalonia, mainly); the practice of armed struggle or terrorism for political purposes, and the activation of a "social base" and a "political arm" to support, complement and legitimize that underground activity; and, finally, the emergence of an alter-global movement that, as in other countries, changed the rules of the social movement domestic game. We will analyze this complex and fascinating evolution in the first section of our paper.

Before delving into the analysis of the 15M we will offer a description of the socio-historical context and the cycle of protest amidst which it emerged. As we will show, this context presents notable specificities. Our study of the 15M will concentrate in two dimensions. First, the cognitive and emotional processes feeding the construction of a social movement identity, the establishment of identity boundaries between a "we" and a "them" against which collective action has been directed, and the symbolic and utopian elements condensed in 15M slogans and mottos. Second, we will focus on the spatial dimension of 15M mobilizations and, more specifically, in the tension between a "territorialized" way of doing politics from-the-bottom-up through the (re-)occupation of the public space, and a "disembodied" political praxis mediated by the possibilities and constraints offered by the Internet and online social networks.

Recent Evolution of Social Movements in Spain

The last few decades have seen significant transformations in the shape, content, and course of global mobilizations. In this regard, Spain has not been an exception. The

democratization of political institutions, the fall of the Soviet block, the ensuing socioeconomic crises, the process of globalization, and the dissemination of new technologies have generated profound reconfigurations in the social movement field. In trying to grasp these transformations, international scholars have distinguished three types of social movements: the labor movement, new social movements (eg. feminist, environmentalist and pacifist movements), and the alter-global mobilizations (Calle 2005).

If we focus on these movements' scope, we observe a shift from a local level of action circumscribed by the nation state, to a hybrid local-global field of operation. We also see a passage from uni-dimensional identities to plural and multi-dimensional ones, no longer interpreted as mutually exclusive but as complementary (Tejerina et. al. 2006; 2008). In addition, several social movements have called the "citizenry" as a whole, and no longer a particular categorical group, to become the agent and motor of social change.

Solid, hierarchical organizations with clearly demarcated rules of belonging have also been replaced by networks with lax entry requirements and nodes with multiple and often overlapping affiliations. Additionally, the frontiers established between social movement organizations are no longer understood as insuperable antagonisms, but as lines demarcating highly specialized fields of action. These borders are nonetheless permeable, and they are trespassed whenever the diagnostic and prognostic analysis elaborated by militants deems it necessary.

Public discourse is, in turn, no longer inspired by a stiff and self-contained system of ideas focusing on material welfare, but by an open and flowing amalgam of ideological postulates increasingly centered on the deepening of democracy in daily life and everyday practices (Tejerina 2010a). Revolutionary goals inscribed in trans-historical narratives have been replaced by reformist and, lately, rebellious, reactive, short-term and geographically-bound strategies and actions. "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) social movements are perhaps the clearest example of the latter.

Strategies and tactics have been toned down and limited to an array of focal though highly spectacular interventions characterized by episodic actions of civil disobedience and the short-term occupation of the public space. If we count out the incorporation of new technologies (eg. mobile phones, electronic mail, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter), the repertoire of collective action has not observed major innovations. Massive demonstrations are now complemented by digitally-driven and thus less visible "soft actions", but the format of pedagogical, denunciatory or pressure-exerting actions has been inherited from previous militant generations.

The profile of activists has also suffered important transformations over the last few decades: they currently have higher levels of formal education, come from middle class households, have a tardier entrance to political militancy, and complement this type of engagement with various others. In addition, younger militants in the last few years have tended to give a political sense to their vital projects. Conversely, past activists used to give a vital meaning to their political engagement; politics was at the nucleus of their

lives. This inversion between “life” and politics could be signaling a change in the processes of political socialization, and in the priorities between private life and public action.

Additionally, the generational relief of militants has been marked by a steep decline in their gross numbers. This is probably explained by the shrinking of organizational structures and spaces of interaction that used to facilitate the recruitment of sympathisers. Key periods of social conflict and effervescence such as the Iraq war, the Prestige ecological crisis, and the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 in Madrid appear as punctual oases cropping up in long-term mobilizational deserts. This discontinuity could be partially accounted for by the gradual institutionalization of social protest and the progressive normalization of political life.

Context of Emergence of 15M

By 2007 Spain was blossoming: it had a public account surplus of more than 2 percent of the GDP, and the economy was growing by 3.5 percent. Just one year later, the surplus had become deficit, growth had fallen to less than 1 percent, and the Spanish economy was officially entering recession. Although the economic decline was related to a worldwide financial crisis, it also responded to clearly identifiable domestic facts: the bursting of a decade-long real estate bubble, and the implosion of the associated lending market. Following the lead of other developed countries, the government rapidly created a 99 billion-euro bail-out fund and began to rescue vulnerable banks. In addition, it urged the merger of savings banks that had lent heavily during the property boom; in less than one year the number of these banks was cut down to 17 from 45. In an attempt to weather the socio-economic effects of the financial storm, the government also adopted an economic stimulus plan. The pack included an 8 billion-euro investment in infrastructure, the extension of jobless subsidies to the long-term unemployed, and a 2,500-euro 'Baby Check' for each newborn child.

The recession ravaged most Spaniards, but had a particularly severe impact on the young. Unemployment rates soared to more than 40 percent for 20- to 24-year-olds —about twice the already alarming national average, and the highest for younger populations in the European Union—. Those with jobs were, however, not much better off; despite having one or more university degrees, many of them were caught in a system of temporary contracts, and poorly paid, low-status jobs completely unrelated to what they were trained for. As such, the Spanish young was forced to resign to a key trait of adulthood; in late 2011, almost 70 percent of the 18- to 29-year-olds still lived with their parents. This delayed independence was, in addition, putting further pressure on tight family budgets and overburdened support networks.

After initially denying the Spanish economy was in trouble, in May 2010 president Zapatero announced a slew of adjustment policies. The pack included wage cuts for civil servants, the end of the “Baby Check”, and the freezing of pension increases. As talks about Greece’s potential economic bailout began to intensify, attention turned on Spain

amid worries over its public deficit (60 percent of its GDP). As a result, the government continued to pass austerity measures, combining them with a considerable rise in the Value Added Tax. In addition, a labor market reform was approved in September; presented as a necessary means towards reducing joblessness, the reform actually made it easier and cheaper for employers to hire and fire workers. In late September trade unions called for the first general strike in a decade to protest against the measure; despite the bleak state of affairs the mobilization's impact was almost negligible. In January 2011, the government passed a pension reform raising the retirement age from 65 to 67 thus hindering the "replenishing" of labor posts. This time, surprisingly, the unions were on board.

In March 2011 university students called for a general strike. Thousands of students marched throughout the country in protest against the unemployment rate, labor precariousness, the rise in tuition fees, the Bologna Plan, and budget cuts in education. A few days later, the platform Youth Without Future (*Juventud Sin Futuro*) organized a demonstration against the economic crisis and the bipartisan "PPSOE partitocracy". The slogan was: "Homeless, jobless, pensionless, fearless" ("*Sin casa, sin curro, sin pensión, sin miedo*"). The long-standing repudiation of the government's socio-economic and educational policies was soon to be combined with a novel factor: the rage triggered by a measure that intended to suffocate the "free culture" of the Internet. In early February 2011, the Internet-based initiative #donotvoteforthem (*#nolesvotes*) called to withdraw votes from the political parties that had approved the so-called Sinde Law (PP, PSOE and CiU) in the following municipal and regional elections. This "antipiracy" bill aimed at shutting down previously legal websites that enabled the free download of music and film.

[Figure 1 about here]

But Spain's internal restlessness did not "act" alone; it was boosted by a chain of international factors. Among them were the Arab Spring mobilizations for political reforms and civil liberties, Iceland's "silent revolution" against neoliberal adjustment policies, and the mobilizations of the Portuguese "Generation in Trouble" or "Desperate Generation" (*Geração à Rasca*), again, the young. The disclosure of WikiLeaks documents showing Spanish government officials to be less than forthright, and Stéphane Hessel's book *Time for Outrage! (Indignez-vous!)* also collaborated in inflaming Spanish passions. There wasn't a single or final straw breaking the camel's back. This conjuncture of uncoordinated domestic and international events worked in a synergic fashion, prompting a collective outburst of indignation. In this combustible context, the call issued by the digital platform Real Democracy Now (DRY, *Democracia Real Ya*) to take the streets was "just" the spark that ignited the so-called "*indignados*" mobilizations.

Using Twitter and Facebook, DRY called "the unemployed, the poorly paid, the subcontractors, the precarious, the young people..." to take the Spanish streets on May 15, the week prior to regional and municipal elections. The protest was called under the motto "*we are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers*". Despite being silenced by the corporate media channels, hundreds of thousands of people took to the

streets in fifty Spanish cities; small supporting demonstrations were also organised in Dublin, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Bologna, Paris, London and Lisbon. Coherently with the “they don’t represent us” (“*no nos representan*”) slogan, the demonstrations were characterized by the absence of flags and political or trade union acronyms.

[Figure 2 about here]

Triggered by the political and police mismanagement of the 15M mobilization, in the following evenings the calling for “Real Democracy Now” quickly gave way to an “Occupy the Square” (“*Toma la plaza*”) movement. Despite the explicit restrictions made by the electoral bodies and the constant threat of evictions, the *acampadas* held the squares in several Spanish cities until mid-July; these occupations constituted the movement’s most evident act of civil disobedience. Campers rapidly equipped themselves with organizing commissions, thematic working groups and assemblies. The commissions dealt with the day-to-day functioning of the *acampadas*; they concentrated on issues such as cleaning, infrastructure, infirmary, nutrition, respect, action (performances and civil disobedience activities), extension (art and placard-painting) and communication. The working groups, instead, focused on themes such as economy, sustainability, short-term and long-term politics, international liasons, etc.

Finally, the *acampadas* held their own assemblies, and also general assemblies for non-camping participants. When the camps could no longer be held in mid-June, they gave rise and passed the torch to decentralised assemblies in small villages and neighbourhoods of large cities. This movement towards “the local” was characterized by a steep decrease in the number of participants and, paradoxically, it was accompanied by an internationalization of the protest. The “15M Movement”, as it came to be known, or that of the Spanish “*indignados*”, as they were trivially labelled by the mass media, was rapidly copycatted in towns and cities all over the globe. On October 15, 2011, more than 1,000 cities in 82 countries took to the streets and squares in a global non violent protest guided by the motto “united for global change”.

[Figure 3 about here]

Despite these massive popular mobilizations, Mariano Rajoy's right-wing People's Party (PP, Partido Popular) won a landslide victory in both the May (municipal and regional) and November (general) 2011 elections. As voters punished the outgoing Socialist government for the worst economic crisis in generations and the European Union's highest jobless rate, Rajoy declared that the public deficit for 2011 would come in at 8 percent of GDP, and that the government would be forced to pass new austerity measures. On December 30 the president announced a cut in the following year’s public spending by 8.9 billion euros.

Forging a 15M Identity

Previous studies (Freidin and Perugorria 2007) have pointed at the difficulties involved in forging collective identities amidst social movements composed of “publics” (Mische 2005), that is, of interstitial activist forums where participants build relations and pursue joint actions through the equalization and synchronization of multiple identities¹. Figure 4 shows a “*conceptual map of Acampada Sol*” elaborated by the hacker and 15M member Marga Padilla. Although the map is intended to “depict” Sol’s *acampada*, we will use it to delve into the process of collective identity construction that is being performed within the 15M. As Padilla puts it, “*This conceptual map (...) is only a help to depict what cannot be represented. It is a humble, unfinished map, precarious at its core. And needed all the same...*”

[Figure 4 about here]

We understand collective identity as an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (...) concerning the orientations of their action, and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place (Melucci 1995; 1996). That understanding usually involves a definition of the problematic situation and an attribution of blame (diagnostic framing), the articulation of a solution to the problem and devising strategies to achieve that end (prognostic framing), and a “call to arms” or a fundamental rationale to engage in collective actions tending to remediate the situation (motivational framing) (Benford and Snow 2000).

As mentioned earlier, the 15M demonstration was the spark that ignited the *acampadas* and ensuing mobilizations. Although “DRY *decoupled from the acampada*”, according to Padilla’s conceptual map “*there is continuity in the message*”. The placards designed by DRY for the 15M march help us understand what that message was about: political corruption, capitalist greed, vital (not only labor) precariousness, and special “treats” awarded by the Spanish government to banks and big fortunes while “common people” suffer adjustment measures and the curtailment of their social rights. This diagnostic framing exemplifies what Gamson (1995) denominates an “injustice frame”, that is, an interpretive scheme that characterizes the actions of an authority system as unjust and legitimates its disobedience (Snow et al. 1997). As stated in the 15M manifesto *How to Cook a Non-Violent Revolution*: “*We don’t understand why we need to pay the bills of a crisis whose authors continue to enjoy record benefits. We are fed up of injustices*”. In words of a 15M member, “*The 15M has turned into a collective superheroe that goes wherever there is an injustice*” (Interview to Zulo). This framing of injustice provided a common language in which activists from different movements, and persons with no previous political participation, could communicate and find common ground.

[Figure 5 about here]

DRY encouraged people to put an end to cynicism and apathy. It called Spaniards to feel, and to act; its slogans read “take the street” (“*toma la calle*”), and “be outraged”

¹ We use “collective identity” and “social movement identity” as exchangeable terms; the latter is defined as “the collective identity based on shared membership in a movement” (Polletta and Jaspers 2001:289).

(“¡Indígnate!”). Borrowing from Stephane Hessel’s viral manuscript, DRY utilized the emotion of outrage, or indignation, as a stepping stone for the construction of the movement’s collective identity. The formation of a collective actor not only involves cognitive agreements and negotiations –such as those entailed in the framing tasks mentioned above– but also demands affective or emotional investments. Passion and emotions, as much as ideology and interests, push people to mobilize and act together (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001:6). Several 15M members concur with Zygmunt Bauman’s controversial statement: “*The 15M is an emotional movement*” (Interview to Javier de la Cueva).

“A friend of mine said during the first days of the acampada: ‘There is no cynicism here. Everybody believes in what she is doing’. [...] Maybe that’s what Zigmunt Bauman meant when he said the 15M was, above all, emotion. [...] We are alive, and we are together! There is a change of atmosphere [clima], and that has a very strong emotional intensity. And you can sense that in the bodies, in the faces... But I wouldn’t say that it is just an emotional movement and that there is no thinking involved. There is thought in emotions, and we are thinking a lot.” (Interview to Amador Fernández-Savater).

“*The 15M is an emotional movement*” but despite the media’s trivial labelling this quote shows that outrage was not the sole emotion pushing it forward. Once the uprising was in motion, and people were taking the streets and occupying squares, indignation would be replaced, or at least complemented, by collective enthusiasm and joy. As a 15M member put it, “*The feeling during the 15M demonstration was of happiness*” (Interview to Leila Nachawati). Or, “*[the 15M] is a cry coming from a society that is tired, fed up. It’s been a cry, but a smiling one*” (Interview to Julio Albarrán).

Despite this strong emotional component, the 15M did not emerge to accomplish a “cathartic” mission. Social movements spring up to alleviate or alter situations that activists identify as problematic. Their direct action therefore depends on the identification of the sources of the problem, and relies on boundary and adversarial framing (Benford and Snow 2000:616). Marga Padilla’s conceptual map allows us to reconstruct the identity work through which 15M participants have crafted a “we,” and a “them” (Gamson 1995; Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Diani 2003). The “them” has included those antagonists identified as responsible for the situation of injustice: mainly thieving and swindler bankers (“*banqueros estafadores y ladrones*”) and corrupt politicians. 15M members are “united by their discomfort” towards these actors; these are the “enemies” against whom their collective action has been directed.

“We can vote, but we don’t have a voice, and we are frustrated by the politicians’ lack of will to develop mechanisms of direct participation in decision-making processes. Mechanisms that would put an end to corruption and to the lack of transparency in politics and public institutions, and that would place the citizen before the markets and other private interests.” (15M manifesto How to Cook a Non-Violent Revolution).

The “we”, in turn, has been synthesized in the term “persons” –not people–; this is key to understanding the process of collective identity construction within the 15M. Most 15M members do not portray themselves as activists or militants. In their viewpoint, these terms are associated to an “*old way of doing politics*” (“*la vieja política*”) based on ideological or partisan affiliations; 15M members reject these “*acronyms and flags, because they divide*” (Interview to Miguel Arana). In turn, they think of themselves as members of a community of “persons”.

“A movement whose protagonists were not militants, that doesn’t have a codified vocabulary of protest, that was very inclusive, that wasn’t just talking about the Left, that didn’t speak about revolution in a classical sense [...], that tries to have everybody, anybody, do politics... Some militant friends used to tell me ‘they are talking about ‘persons,’ and that is not a political concept. Persons.’ I, on the contrary, saw the power associated to talking about persons: we are all persons, and talking about persons and persons’ problems we can be together, and start talking.” (Interview to Amador Fernández-Savater)

As with injustice frames, talking about “persons” allowed both people with no previous political participation and with different militant trajectories to feel part of a same collective. This term “synchronized” different and probably opposing political ideologies; it also blurred other potentially alienating axes of dissent: gender, class, religious, and national identities, among others. The “we are the 99 percent” slogan issued by Occupy Wall Street activists synthesized this principle of “inclusiveness” in a brilliant fashion. So did the “united by common sense” (“*unidos por el sentido común*”) motto that could be seen in banners all across Spain.

“We are bringing up the fact that we are the 99 percent, that what unites us are problems and ways of thinking that are common to many people, in a very transversal way. [...] All these things can be common to many different people, people who do not have a clear identity. We need to start thinking over the basis of common problems, in lieu of identities. [... 15M’s] Inclusiveness has to do with this: it is a movement that is based on problems, and not on identities. We want to begin with concrete problems, not with ideologies. We will arrive to that, or not, eventually. Concrete problems having to do with real life, with everybody’s life; this way the movement will become real, will have to do with the lives we lead and not with lucubrations about the world that then do not bear any relation to practices, to life.” (Interview to Amador Fernández-Savater)

Having “problems” instead of “ideologies” or “identities” as a point of departure marked a path of “inclusiveness” for the 15M since its inception. But these “transversal” problems weren’t limited to the “crisis train”, and weren’t just collective; they also had individual manifestations, and both levels seem to be intertwined in the perspective of 15M members. Marga Padilla’s conceptual map fans out these collective and individual experiences that “*have to do with*” the emergence of Acampada Sol and the 15M.

At the collective level, we find traditional social movements (eg. labor organizations), new social movements (eg. feminism, indigenous movements, squatter movement) and, using an interviewee's terminology, "social movements that are not movements" (eg. V de Vivienda, Anonymous, #donotvoteforthem, Youth without Future) of diverse kinds. We can also observe "events" (eg. May '68 and Argentina 2001) and even books or manifestos (eg. Indignez-vous!, Reacciona). This "*things that happened before*"-section of Padilla's map can be interpreted as a social movement genealogy composed of both international and domestic progenitors, of remote, more recent and even contemporary ancestry. It is, according to Polletta (1998), a "narrative of becoming".

At the individual level, in turn, the "we" crafted by 15M members is integrated by persons who feel "*discomfort with their personal lives*" for "*doing what they don't want to do, abiding by rules they don't want to follow, and working at jobs they dislike*". As with previous ordeals, collective involvement has provided a mitigation to this individual distress. According to Padilla's conceptual map, Acampada Sol is "*made of people who want to be and live together*". In words of an interviewee, "*With 15M we have recovered that part of 'person who is willing to share', a part we had long forgotten*" (Interview to Carolina García). This "sharing" or "being together" is at the core of the prognostic framing performed by 15M members; it is seen as a first step in the bumpy and sinuous road towards finding a solution to the multi-dimensional crisis (Benford and Snow 2000:617). It is, too, part of the motivation drawing 15M participants to get involved in, and sustain their engagement with, this type of movement; being together has given them a sense of empowerment, efficacy, and joy (Freidin and Perugorria 2007):

"[With the 15M] We have moved from powerlessness to power, from isolation and competition to being together, to discovering the other as an accomplice and no longer as an obstacle, from cynicism to 'we can change things' and we can be protagonists of that change. That generates a very strong emotion". (Interview to Amador Fernández-Savater)

15M members do not "just" want to be together; this is not a "play date". They see themselves as "*self-convened*" persons that "*occupy the square*" "*to do real democracy now*". But what does "real democracy" really mean? In Padilla's perspective, democracy is associated to "*using words, not violence*", and to a "*friendly atmosphere*" promoted by the act of "*listening and respect*". It is also tied to "*engaging with common matters*", with problems that affect society as a whole. Real democracy is achieved with "*collective intelligence*", described as "*heterogeneous and inclusive*", "*inter-generational*", and "*unrepresentable*" —that is, avoiding "*acronyms and flags because they divide*"—. As mentioned before, one of the outcomes of this from-the-bottom-up democratic praxis is collective enthusiasm. So is "*growing support*" in other cities and countries, which in turn, "*gives strength to*" Acampada Sol.

15M's Social Space, Beyond Alter-Global Mobilizations

The participation of groups, collectives and organisations in multiple levels of action and more than one locale first emerged as a cardinal tension within the alter-global movement; a similar tension is present in the 15M. On the one hand, participation in global actions has allowed alter-global militants to experience (sometimes virtually, sometimes “presentially”) moments that were exceptional and spectacular, and to establish inspiring comparisons between them. On the other, participation in local actions has given them a stronger sense of coherence and unanimity. The local ambit is immediate, accessible, visible, and therefore apprehensible; it is the space in which demands are displayed, and where the “we” gets crystallized through face-to-face encounters and relationships.

In trying to resolve this tension between “the global” and “the local”, the alter-global movement has opted for pursuing “glocal” actions. As a consequence, it has been in permanent oscillation between the fixed (here and now) and the mobile (there and before-after). This option has defined the alter-global movement and given it specificity when compared to previous processes of mobilization. Many 15M militants, particularly the youngest ones, have shown a global or “international vocation”; they are aware of the importance of raising support in other countries, have participated in global actions such as the October 15, 2011 demonstration, and are in constant contact with their foreign counterparts through international commissions. They stress the “*importance of thinking and acting globally*” (Interview to Miguel Arana). However, the movement as a whole seems to have strengthened the bet for “the local” in detriment of “the global” after its “move to the neighborhoods”. The construction of this local space as a place of physical proximity has provided an open field for the interaction, exchange, and creation of organizational tools and symbolic challenges.

The space of social mobilization is therefore at one time social and symbolic. It is a practical field, a space for social experimentation, in which proposals are discussed, negotiated and rehearsed. In the case of 15M, it is the locale where real democracy “is done”. As Padilla’s conceptual map shows, real democracy is accomplished in two different ways: “*presentially*”, in *acampadas*, assemblies, thematic working groups and commissions, and in a disembodied and deterritorialized fashion through the use of online media (see also Figure 6). The 15M manifesto *How to Cook a Non-Violent Revolution* (2011) alludes to this double embeddedness of collective action:

“We recovered and utilize the public space: we occupied the squares and the streets of our cities to meet and work in a collective, open and visible way. We inform and invite every citizen to participate. We debate about problems, look for solutions and organize actions and mobilizations. Our digital networks and tools are open: all the information is available on the Internet, in the streets and in the squares.”

The 15M thus combines online activism with more “traditional” forms of militancy. On the one hand, it embraces the digital age sociability, where “everybody is getting together” in social media, and where groups can “operate with a multi-national’s scope and a birthday party’s informality” (Shirky 2008), and can “organize without

organizations” in order to “change the world without taking power” (Holloway 2002). This form of activism is inspired by the idea that grassroots organizing no longer needs an organizer, a mediator; it follows the “do-it-yourself-with-others” spirit. On the other, the 15M is based on traditional repertoires: *acampadas*, assemblies and demonstrations are characterized by the physicality of bodies being present in a spatial meeting place (Gladwell 2010). 15M members create group commonality through face-to-face, “strong-tie” offline activism, but also through online “weak-tie” association. The two flanks strengthen one another; adding speed, a new dimension (Merrifield 2011). This mutual reinforcement is probably facilitated by the affinity of methods: assemblies and online networks are both characterized by direct participation, horizontality, and open deliberation.

[Figure 6 about here]

Merrifield (2011) has advanced the notion of “encounter” to refer to this new dual type of political engagement. The “politics of the encounter” is a “process without a subject spreading like wildfire, in which crowds become speedy ensembles of bodies created via spontaneous online and offline ordering”. In the beginnings of the 15 mobilizations a lot of the activism and organizing was done de-territorially through Twitter and Facebook. However, protests —encounters— unfolded in the heart of Spanish cities; first in the *acampadas*, and later on in town and neighborhood squares and occupied social centers where militants hold their assembly meetings. Despite the incorporation of digital channels, “encounter politics” is, and will continue to be, based on an encounter *somewhere*, for physical space is still a major battleground for political struggle (Merrifield 2011). 15M members seem to be aware of the importance of the spatial dimension of their praxis; this is evidenced by the “cartographic consciousness” (Anderson 2006) they have displayed in the almost compulsory design, re-design and refreshment (in the computer science sense) of two different types of maps: of the internal organization of *acampadas* (see Figure 7), and of the diffusion of camps all around the globe (see Figure 8). These maps have a “compass-to-the-world element”, but also function as “logo-maps”, that is, instantly recognizable, everywhere visible emblems that penetrate deep into the popular imagination and are available for transfer to political banners, webpages, etc. (Anderson 2006).

[Figure 7 about here]

The space of social mobilization is also a symbolic field, where the understanding of the public and private spheres is transformed and recreated. In a normative sense, the “politics of the encounter” can mediate between “the historical” and lived experience. As people find one another they start to piece together common notions, and common problems: they universalize what, on the face of it, seems only private, specific. The sense of affinity that emerges from this “*being together*”, in words of one interviewee, becomes the cement that bonds —perhaps only for a moment, but a moment that lingers—, people across barriers and frontiers (Merrifield 2011). The emergent “affinity group” (Bookchin, as quoted in Merrifield 2011) is characterized by “deeply empathetic

human relationships—relationships nourished by common revolutionary practice and ideas”.

The aim of 15M *acampadas* and demonstrations was essentially symbolic; they were rehearsals for revolution, but not in a strategic or tactical sense, they were rather rehearsals of revolutionary (or perhaps rebellious) awareness (Merrified 2011). 15M members were rejecting all that they habitually, and despite themselves, accept, and beginning to form a “cosmovision” that gave sense to the crisis and their generalized malcontent. They were identifying mechanisms of inclusion-exclusion (eg. lack of employment, conditions of exploitation, domination and inequality), mechanisms of imposition-repression (eg. concentration of power, privatisation policies, uncertainty and lack of control over important aspects of one’s own life, and repression of alternative lifestyles), and the practices, agents and institutions that were shaping the conflict at stake (eg. the unemployed, multinationals and financial groups, multi-lateral organisms, states and national institutions) (Tejerina 2010b). In these encounters, 15M participants were also discovering their own creativity and power to change the problematic state of affairs. They were expressing political ambitions before having formalized them, and before having created the necessary tools —like structures or organizations— to make them real.

[Figure 8 about here]

Conclusions

The 15M movement counts on different organizational precursors in the process of social mobilization (Youth Without Future), and in the articulation of forms of online (#donotvoteformthem) or hybrid (online-offline) protests (Malestar.org). As we have pointed out in this presentation, the movement has its immediate origin in the double discontent felt by numerous Spanish sectors with the socio-economic crisis and with the political management of collective life by the major political parties. However, the reason that triggered the process of occupation of Puerta del Sol, and later on of numerous squares in different Spanish cities, has its origin in the political and police mismanagement of the 15M mobilization.

The plural composition of the “*indignados*” reflects the rejection of the most negative consequences of the process of globalization: the increased levels of social inequality, and the precariousness of the life conditions of broad social sectors, especially, but not exclusively, the young. In addition, the 15M movement transfers to the public sphere a long-term discontent with the functioning of the Spanish democracy, and persistent demands for deeper democratization and transparency in the administration of public affairs. In the perception of 15M members, this situation and this authority system are defined as “unjust”, and it is precisely this “injustice frame” what has legitimated its disobedience.

Several members have agreed with the statement that the 15M is an emotional movement. The emotion of outrage, or indignation, constituted a central stepping stone for the construction of a collective identity in the beginnings of the movement. However, once the uprising was in motion, indignation was replaced, or at least complemented, by collective enthusiasm and joy derived from the experience of “*being together*”. As one interviewee put it, “[*the 15M*] is a cry coming from a society that is tired, fed up. It’s been a cry, but a smiling one”.

Although 15M members have tried to build on “common problems” in lieu of available “identities”, they have nonetheless performed prognostic, diagnostic and motivational framing tasks that have begun to craft and shape their own, novel collective identity. Their boundary and adversarial framing has demarcated a “them” against which collective action has been directed: mainly thieving and swindler bankers and corrupt politicians. It has also forged a “we”, composed of “persons” —not people, not militants— united by their “discomfort” towards these actors, but also towards the labels and methods coming from “old-time politics” (“*la vieja política*”). Talking about “persons” allowed both people with no previous political participation and with different militant trajectories to feel part of the 15M; it “synchronized” different and probably opposing political ideologies and blurred other potentially alienating axes of dissent.

15M members have also crafted a narrative of becoming; that “we” has a present and a future, but also has a traceable past. Participants have elaborated a social movement genealogy composed of both international and domestic progenitors, of recent and also far-removed ascent. This “family tree” brings together traditional and new social movements, and even “social movements that are not movements” —to use an interviewee’s expression— that belong to the “progressive field”. 15M members have also provided their narrative of becoming with an individual dimension. 15M members are persons who used to feel a discomfort with their individual lives, and who now want to “be and live together” in a friendly atmosphere.

“Being together”, “sharing” has allowed them to universalize their personal experiences, understandings and emotions, and has given them a sense of joy, empowerment, and efficacy. It is thus at the core of the prognostic framing performed by 15M members, and of the motivation drawing them to get involved and sustain their participation. This “politics of the encounter” has been facilitated and boosted by a mutually-reinforcing offline, “strong-tie” activism and online, “weak-tie” association, both based on an open, horizontal and participatory philosophy. In words of Merrifield (2011), squares and digital media have provided a scenario for an illicit rendezvous of human bonding and solidarity, a material, virtual, and emotional topography in which something disrupts and intervenes in the previous paralysis. But 15M members do not “just” want to be together; they gather to “do real democracy”. Real democracy is interpreted as an engagement in “common matters”, an involvement thought of as inclusive, non-violent, and necessarily direct or “unrepresentable”. This last element is probably driving the “move towards the local” in detriment of “the global”.

15M participants may have expressed political ambitions before creating the necessary means to make them real. In the last few months, they have discovered their own creativity and power, and also their own limitations to generate the global and local change they demand. They have also begun to craft a cosmovision that gave sense to the crisis, their generalized malcontent, and their own purposes, actions and organization. 15M members appear to be conscious that: a) through their action they want to build the widest possible movement; b) that they personally mobilize to oppose economic domination, to affirm moral principles of equality and justice, and to transform the political structures and democracy; c) that their interest in uniting with others rests on the possibility of altering an unwanted social reality, generating solidarity, constructing common interests and sharing demands; d) that the mobilization is effective because it is contributing to raise awareness of the risks of globalization and to change the perceptions held of it; and e) that the most problematic aspects of organizing this type of movement are precisely what make it most attractive: diversity and plurality of its components, its horizontal and democratic character, and the fact that it deals with “common problems”, that is, with questions that transcend social frontiers.

Abbreviations

PSOE: Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero de España), center-left wing political party in Spain.

PP: People’s Party (Partido Popular), right wing political party in Spain.

CiU: Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió), center-right wing electoral coalition in Catalonia, Spain. It is technically a federation of two constituent parties, the larger Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) and its smaller counterpart, the Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC). It is currently led by Artur Mas, who is the current President of the Catalan Government.

DRY: Real Democracy Now (Democracia Real Ya).

Data Sources

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Figure 1. Youth Without Future Demonstration on April 6, 2011.



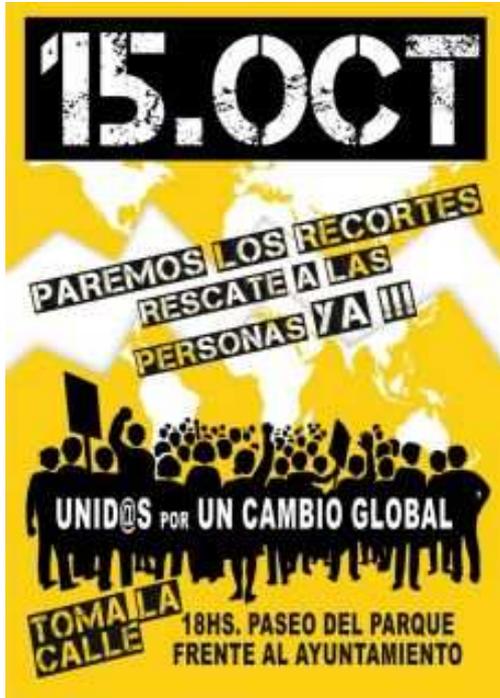
Note: The placard reads: “Homeless – Jobless – Pensionless; Fearless Youth; Recovering Our Future!; This is just the Beginning”. The photograph is available online.

Figure 2. Real Democracy Now! Demonstration on May 15, 2011.



Note: The placard reads: "Read Democracy Now! We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers". The photograph is available online.

Figure 3. Banners Utilized in the “Occupy” Demonstrations that Took Place all over the World on October 15, 2011.



Note: The placard on the left reads: “Let’s stop the cuts. Let’s rescue persons NOW!!! United for global change. Take the street”. The placard on the right reads: “#WorldRevolution. We need an ethical revolution, a change of course. This system treats human beings as numbers and not as persons. Together we can change it”.

Figure 4. Conceptual Map of Acampada Sol, elaborated by Marga Padilla.

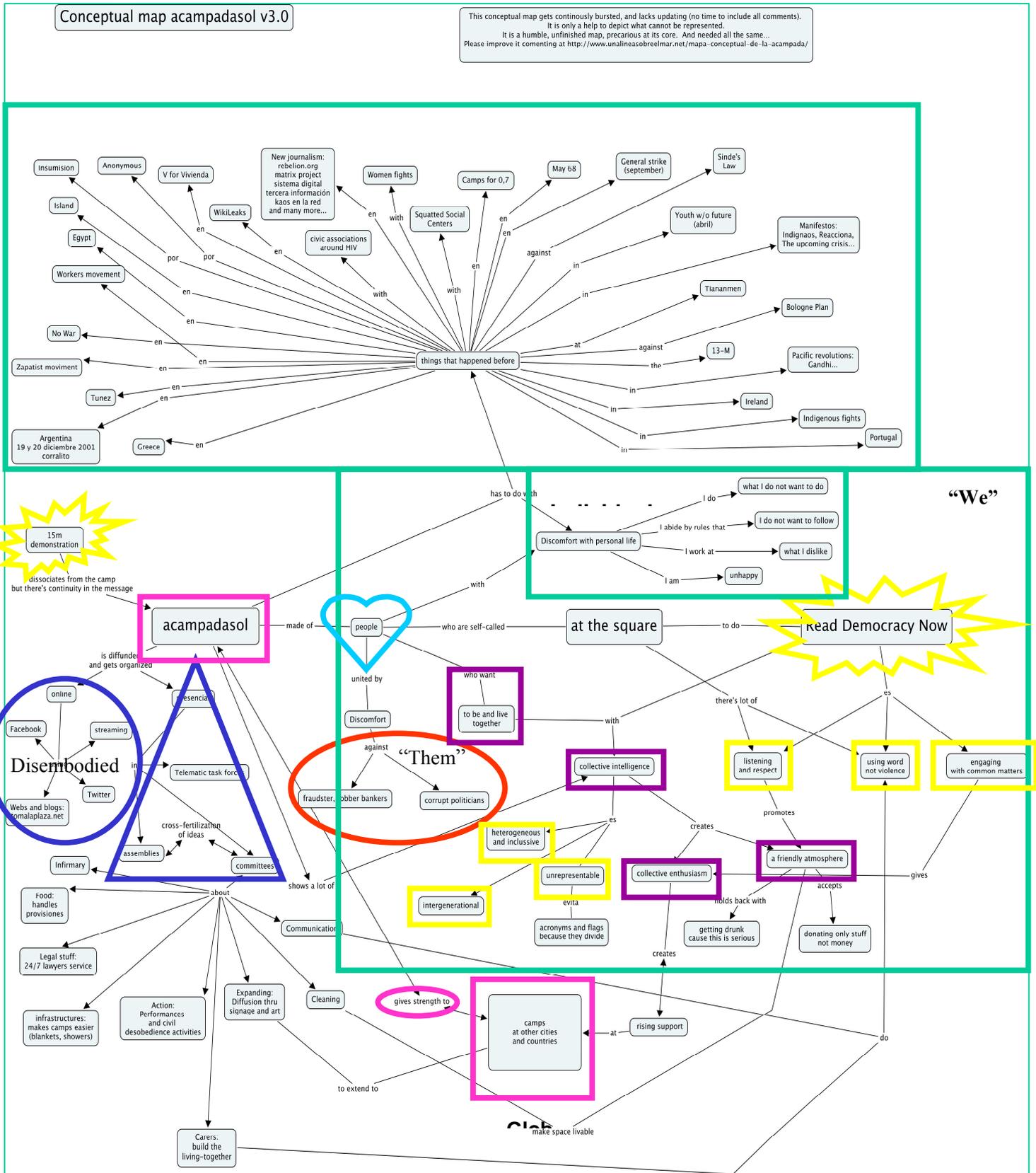
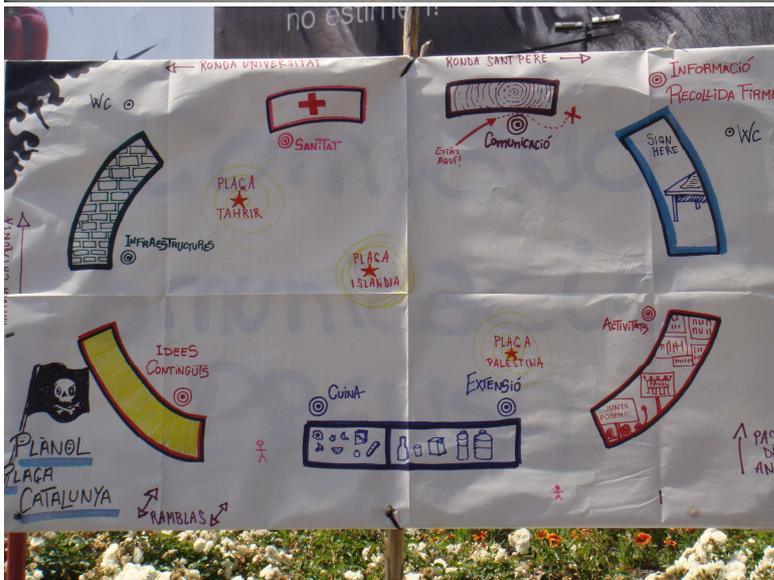


Figure 5. Real Democracy Now! Placards for the May 15, 2011 Demonstration.

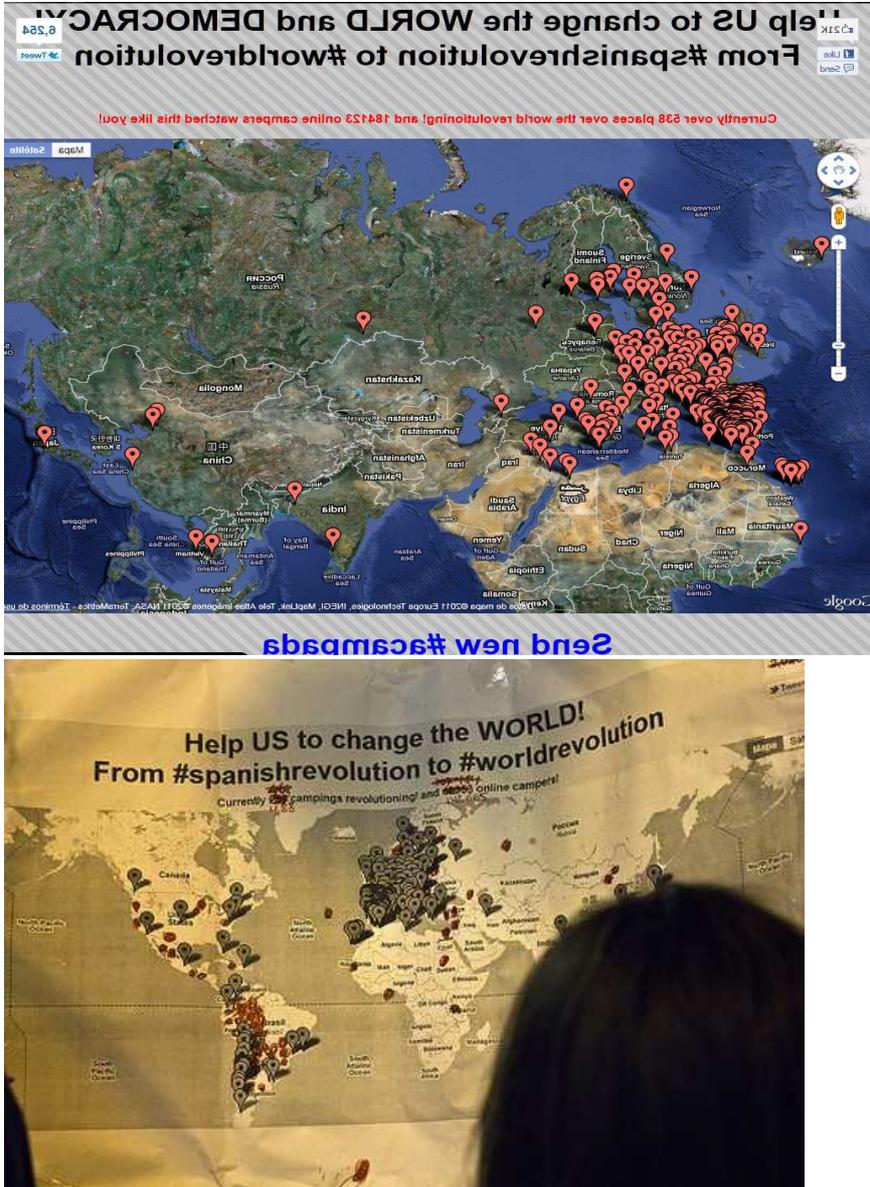


Figure 7. Maps of Acampada Sol and Acampada Plaça Catalunya.



Note: On the left, a map of Acampada Sol, and on the right, a hand-made map of Acampada Plaça Catalunya. The photographs are available online.

Figure 8. World Map of *Acampadas*, and Photograph of the World Map as Seen in Acampada Granada.



Note: The photo on the right is available in <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gorefacio/5741972227/in/set-72157626758531458>