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What has become of the Indignados? The biographical consequences of participation in the 15M movement in Madrid (2011–19)

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the biographical consequences of participation in 15 M by following the trajectories, from May 2011 to November 2019, of individuals who took part in the movement in Madrid. Based on a field study combining observations and repeat interviews, this follow-up of the trajectories of forty Indignados (22 in the period 2013–15 and 18 to 2019) reveals considerable biographical impacts on both representations and individual practices in the political, personal and professional spheres. These impacts were particularly salient among those who had experienced biographical disruptions, whether in relation to political socialization or a drop in social status, and those who had mobilized in an intense and lasting way. However, 15 M had also had a profound influence on the biographies of those with an activist background and those who had been less involved in the movement. This microsociological approach gives us a better understanding of the biographical trajectories of the Indignados and provides an account of the transformations in collective action in Madrid over the past ten years. The main legacy of 15 M is therefore that it created a new generation of activists who are now involved in a multitude of activist microspheres and institutional settings.

It was a ticking time bomb that just suddenly exploded. It was like the Big Bang. First, there was nothing, and then the galaxies formed, and then different systems within the galaxies, their planets, and then all of a sudden it was something so big I don't think it could go on like that any more (Marcos, aged 22, student).[1]

Like this participant, who was part of the Puerta del Sol assembly and his neighbourhood assembly for almost two years, many of the Indignados I met during this field study told me that the 15 M movement had marked a watershed in their lives and in Spanish society more generally. This movement emerged in Spain following a demonstration that took place on 15 May 2011 organized by groups associated with the platform 'Democracia Real Ya!' (DRY, Real Democracy Now!). Tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the government's management of the 2008 economic crisis and its social consequences as well as the failings, more broadly, of the country's

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🔓 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here.

representative political system. As the demonstration drew to a close, a few dozen people stayed on and set up camp for the night in Puerta del Sol, a symbolic square in the heart of the capital. This square was to host a self-managed camp for almost a month, which organized itself into assemblies. More camps sprang up in the plazas of other Spanish cities, and the assemblies were decentralized to the neighbourhoods. Adell (2011), a sociologist and specialist in the Madrid protests, estimated that by the end of 2011, almost 7 million people had participated in some way or another in 15 M.

This mobilization has been analysed in the scientific literature as a pivotal moment, the biggest upheaval in Spanish politics and society since the transition to democracy at the end of the Francoist dictatorship (Cruells & Ibarra, 2013; Tejerina & Perugorría, 2018). A number of researchers have focused on the 'Spanish political laboratory', analysing the consequences of 15 M both for political culture (Flesher Fominaya, 2020; Sampedro & Lobera, 2014) and for institutional and party practices (Feenstra et al., 2016; Romanos & Sádaba, 2016). According to Tejerina et al., the impact on the political socialization of those who took part in 15 M, as with other Occupy movements, has been 'one of the most important outcomes of this cycle of mobilizations and we suggest that this practice will have impact long after these mobilizations wane' (Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 554). This hypothesis, which can only be tested through a study of the participants' trajectories before, during and after the movement, marked the starting point for this study. It examines the biographical consequences of participation in 15 M through an analysis of the trajectories from May 2011 to November 2019 of individuals who took part in the movement in Madrid.

Although 15 M has been the subject of numerous publications, few have focused on the effects of the mobilization from a biographical perspective. In her thesis, Razquin (2014) reconstructed the trajectories to March 2012 of twenty-four individuals who had taken part in one of the 15 M assemblies. She showed the importance of academic and activist capitals in relation to understanding the rationales for entry into and exit from the movement. Smaoui's (2017) comparative study of the Barcelona Indignados and the Nuit Debout protestors in France indicated that the newcomers to collective action had found the mobilizations an intense political experience. They had suddenly become aware of power relationships and, despite their different backgrounds, all ended up behaving rebelliously. However, he pointed out that 'only a longitudinal survey will be able to tell us more about the biographical effects of such participation (in terms of continued involvement with affinity and activist networks, learning redeployed in other spaces of conflict, practices implemented to politicize daily activities, disinhibited relationships with conflict, etc.)' (p. 125). In a recent article, Prado Galán and Fersch (2021) developed this approach, conducting sixteen interviews with former Indignados in Valladolid six years on from 15 M. They showed that the forms of sociability experienced in the camp had impacted longer-term participation. However, their analysis was limited by their *a posteriori* entry into the field, resulting in substantial biases in the participant selection process. Indeed, the authors acknowledged that 'a main obstacle to accessing interviewees was the dormant state of the movement' (p. 6). They had recruited using Facebook announcements, a mailing list that was still active and a public commemoration of the anniversary of 15 M in 2017, so it is likely those they interviewed would have been among the most engaged both during and after the camp, making it more difficult to access those whose engagement was less intense and/or more ephemeral. Betancor and Prieto (2018) also

sought to analyse the biographical impacts of 15 M and focused on young people because of their greater likelihood of involvement in future mobilizations. Based on 30 interviews conducted between 2012 and 2015 mainly in Madrid, they distinguished several types of participants according to whether or not they had previous activist experience and whether or not they had always attended their respective 15 M assemblies. Their conclusion on the emergence of a new generation of activists profoundly marked by the Indignados experience and destined to play a key role in the development of new collectives, however, remained at the hypothesis stage given the short temporal distance of their survey.

The aim of this study was to extend the analysis of the biographical consequences of participation in 15 M outlined by these early studies by mobilizing the sociology of social movements literature on 'activist careers' and by conducting a combination of observations and repeat interviews in the Madrid region. The paper begins by outlining the theoretical (part 1) and methodological (part 2) frameworks of the research. The main results are then presented, first in relation to the changes in representations of the social world that can impact all spheres of life (part 3) and second in relation to the redeployment of learning from the assembly and the mobilization in a variety of professional, activist and institutional arenas (part 4). Finally, the conclusion shows how the findings provide information on the biographical futures of the Indignados and on the transformations in collective action in Madrid over the last ten years.

Analysing the effects of a social movement through activist careers

The literature on the effects of social movements distinguishes three types of consequences, namely political, cultural and biographical (Bosi & Uba, 2009; Giugni, 2008). While, as several state of the arts have shown (McAdam, 1999; Fillieule, 2005; Giugni, 2004; Vestergren et al., 2017), the biographical perspective is a developing research area, there are still fewer studies conducted on the biographical effects of participation than on the political consequences in terms of impact on public policies. The biographical approach is characterized by its focus on individual rationales for activist participation in a context in which an organizational approach has long been the preferred option. It examines participation as a vector of political socialization through an analysis of how this experience can transform individual representations and practices. Studies in this area have focused mainly on the student protesters of the 1960s in the United States (in the tradition of McAdam, 1988) and, to a lesser degree, on the 1968 activists in Europe (Fillieule & Neveu, 2019; Pagis, 2014). They have shown that activist participation has a lasting influence on people's life trajectories in the political, professional and personal spheres. One of the main consequences of social movements is thus thought to be 'the production of activists able to reinvest the energies in a great variety of movements during many years' (Neveu, 2019, p. 106).

The literature on activists' biographical futures has been marked by McAdam's (1988) pioneering study of the Freedom Summer campaign, which was mounted in Mississippi in 1964 as part of the civil rights movement. Two decades on from the event, McAdam analysed the campaign registration files and conducted a survey using a questionnaire and interviews with volunteers who did and did not actively participate in the campaign. He showed that those who had become actively involved in this high-risk militant action – mainly privileged white students – had been fundamentally

transformed by the experience. The vast majority had discovered activism during this campaign. For some, the event had marked the beginning of their involvement, while for others, its was an extension of previous activities. The most immediate consequence of these individuals' participation in Freedom Summer was political in nature. Many had been radicalized from conventional liberals into extreme leftists. Their stay in Mississippi had strongly challenged their adherence to the American political system and changed their relationships to religion, school and family. These Freedom Summer volunteers had gone on to become heavily involved in the New Left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Their participation had also impacted their professional and personal lives because all the choices they had made (e.g., profession, partner) had taken on a political significance.

Building on this baseline study as well as on Becker's work (1963), French sociologists have developed the concept of 'activist careers' to analyse the effects of participation in a variety of social and political organizations (Fillieule & Mayer, 2001). Fillieule (2001) proposed to use the tools of symbolic interactionism, in particular the concepts of career and life trajectory, to account for the multiplicity of forms of participation throughout the life cycle and the withdrawal from or extension of these involvements. Participation in collective action is thus understood as a process that develops over time and is therefore not definitively determined by original position or socialization. The 'career' concept allows us to reflect on the association between individual trajectories and the contexts in which they take place by focusing both on an analysis of the collective conditions of the action and on the meaning that the individuals in question attribute to it. However, this perspective should not obscure the fact that the rationales for participation are very often part of collective trajectories and that they rarely manifest without the canvassing of existing groups or organizations (Sawicki & Siméant, 2009). It is also important to relate the biographical effects of participation to the intensity of participation in protest events (Pagis, 2014) and to the individual's social trajectory, in particular by analysing how logics of upward or downward social mobility mark activist careers (Leclercq & Pagis, 2011).

Studies in this area have proposed a variety of methodologies for understanding the biographical consequences of participation. Microsociological analyses through life stories reveal, like the statistical macrosociological approach that is predominant in American research, what participation produces in the medium and long term, but they also, more especially, provide an understanding of the contexts and social logics involved in cases where participation contributes to influencing individual life trajectories. However, the biographical narrative method is not without its problems, because it gives retrospective meaning to the sequence of events selected by the interviewee. It is therefore important to connect the life stories not just to the contexts to which they refer but also to the respondents' characteristics in order to distinguish the regularities and typical trajectories beyond the singularity of individual trajectories (Fillieule & Mayer, 2001). The problem of retrospective analysis can also be mitigated through direct observation of practices and repeat in situ interviews (Leclercq & Pagis, 2011). This was the methodological approach adopted here.

A longitudinal field study in Madrid

The analysis was based on a field study conducted over nine years in the Madrid region. The study began at the end of May 2011 and took place first in the Puerta del Sol area and then in one of the city neighbourhoods (Carabanchel) and a suburban town (Parla) located in the south of Madrid, whose population was socially mixed but predominantly working-class. The analysis focused mainly on the data from two rounds of interviews, which were conducted in 2013–15 and 2019. Based on contacts established during my observations, I conducted the first round of interviews with forty Indignados in order to investigate the initial biographical effects of their participation. Without claiming to be representative, which is not the aim of ethnographic interviews (Beaud, 1996), respondent selection was based on ensuring the sample contained a variety of sociodemographic and political profiles, a range of participation histories before and after 15 M and an assortment of types and levels of involvement in 15 M. The objective was to take into account the heterogeneous nature of a movement that comprised 'collectives and individuals with different ideological and sociodemographic characteristics and different forms and degrees of involvement' (Lobera, 2015, p. 100). I thus interviewed twenty-three men and seventeen women, aged between 16 and 69, with a range of social backgrounds and professional profiles (see Table 1 in the appendices). Some of them had been involved since the early days in Puerta del Sol (a few had belonged to organizations that had preceded 15 M, such as Juventud sin futuro (JSF) and ¡Democracia real ya!), some had joined the movement when the assemblies were decentralized to the neighbourhoods, and some had only become involved a year or two later, often through the assemblies on housing. Their reasons for participation were extremely diverse, including the need to resolve a personal crisis (such as eviction) and a desire to continue or reactivate their activism. Some reported that they had been active for only a month or two, some for between a few months and a year, and some were still actively involved in 15 M in 2013–15. One of the criteria for selecting respondents in the first round of interviews was the diversity of their trajectories after the peak of the mobilization. The sample therefore included those who had ceased involvement, those who had continued participating in the 15 M assemblies and those who had become involved in other spaces, such as political parties (notably the Podemos Party, which was created in January 2014) or local initiatives (self-managed squatted social centres, barter markets, and so on).

In November 2019, I conducted a second round of interviews with almost half of the people I had met in the first round (18 out of the original 40) in order to understand the biographical effects of their engagement over a longer period. The selection of interviewees for this round was again based on ensuring a diversity of social situations and engagement trajectories before, during and after 15 M (see Table 2 in the appendices). Most of these repeat interviews were conducted in Parla, where I have maintained the majority of my contacts in recent years for scientific, friendship and family reasons. I balanced the proportion of women (9) and men (9) in this second round and prioritized those who had not been activists prior to 15 M in order to examine the impact of the movement on newcomers to collective action. To this end, I also recontacted five Indignados in Carabanchel who had no previous experience of engagement.

This longitudinal approach, which is still relatively rare in research on the biographical consequences of engagement (Vestergren et al., 2017), is one of the main contributions of this article. The study method nevertheless has a number of limitations, such as the relatively short temporal distance and more importantly the absence of a control group comprising non-15 M-participants, which would have enabled me to verify whether the changes observed were indeed linked to participation in the social movement (Giugni & Grasso, 2016; McAdam, 1988). My longitudinal study of 15 M was based on regular observations carried out between 2011 and 2019. My first observations, in 2011 and 2012, comprised around sixty assemblies and fifteen or so demonstrations and other protest actions that took place during the Puerta del Sol camp and decentralization of the movement to the neighbourhoods (Nez, 2012). Owing to professional commitments in France, my field trips were ad hoc (lasting a few days to several weeks) but very regular (twenty trips over the nine years, including ten between 2011 and 2012). At the beginning, I stayed in a shared house in Carabanchel, hence why I chose to observe this particular neighbourhood assembly. During one of the 'Indignados marches' in Aranjuez in July 2011, I met and formed friendships with a few members of the Parla assembly (and indeed married one of them), which explains my attachment to this area. Beyond the effects of 15 M on my own life journey, setting out the context in which the research was conducted provides an understanding of how I managed, despite the intermittent nature of the observations (Badimon, 2017), to develop bonds of trust with the interviewees and gain access to many informal discussions (such as the 'after-meeting drinks' discussions) and everyday conversations. This detailed knowledge of the movement in Madrid allowed me to distinguish different Indignados profiles in line with Siméant's (2001) methodological recommendations: 'Only ethnographic immersion allows us to judge the exemplarity of certain observed trajectories' (p. 57). The fact that I conducted the interviews mainly with people I had met in Puerta del Sol, Carabanchel and Parla (I also asked these people for other contacts to diversify the engagement profiles) allowed me to triangulate the interview discourses with the observations. Cross-checking what the participants had said in the interviews with the observations made at the beginning of the movement a number of years before partially controlled for 'biographical illusion', which is linked to problems associated with memory and discourse reconstructed a posteriori (Bourdieu, 1986). These interviews were also accompanied by observations carried out both in the 2013–2014 period at the Eko collective squat, which had been set up by the Indignados in Carabanchel (Nez, 2017), and from 2015 onwards within the Podemos circle in Parla (Nez, 2015).

The comprehensive approach was adopted for the interviews, which takes into account in both their implementation and their analysis the strong reflexivity of the individuals involved. The interview schedule used in 2013–15 thus aimed to reconstruct the individual's participation history, to talk about their trajectory (personal, professional and political) and their family and friends and to understand, from their point of view, any learning and changes that had taken place as a result of their participation in 15 M. The interview schedule in 2019 began by going back over the evolution of their personal situation and participation and then focused on their perception of the evolution of the social and political panorama in Spain generally and in the Madrid region specifically, explicitly tackling the subject of 15 M's legacy. In line with the ethnographic interview methodological approach, which always forms part of a field study (Beaud, 1996),

I personally fully transcribed all the interviews (which lasted between one and four hours). The two sections that follow present the main results from the comparative analysis of all the interviews and the in-depth study of each one.

'There is another truth': changes in representations of social reality

One of the main elements that emerged from the comparative analysis of the interviews concerned 15 M's impact on the participants' ways of looking at the social world. Many respondents told me how they had been forced to question everything they had previously taken for granted. Their perception of politics had thus changed through, for example, their questioning of the two-party system or of the professionalization of a field dominated by experts. This change was summed up by Evelyn (aged 41, unemployed), who had been intensely involved first in Puerta del Sol and then in her neighbourhood: '[15 M] challenged stuff people took for granted [...], it broke with a lot of discourses that were already flawed ... on the transition, on the monarchy. Before it'd never even occurred to us the transition could've been done differently [...]. It was like a taboo subject'. Their representations of capitalism, social movements, the police and the media had also been transformed by their participation in the movement. This corresponds with the findings of studies that have highlighted a transformation of political culture associated with 15 M, particularly concerning 'the culture of transition' (Flesher Fominaya, 2020; Sampedro & Lobera, 2014). Compared to these macro-sociological analyses, this biographical approach was able to show that these changes varied in degree depending on the individual's profile, notably in relation to their social trajectory and political socialization. The changes were highly visible when the individuals had not previously participated in activism and/or when they had experienced a drop in social status, but they also manifested in Indignados with an activist background who had experienced favourable economic conditions. These transformations in their perceptions of the social world had impacted all or at least some of the spheres in their lives (political, professional and personal).

The changes were particularly noticeable when participation in 15 M had marked a break with previous socializations (Leclercq & Pagis, 2011). This was exemplified by Victor, who had no previous experience of politics and came from a right-wing family. This photographer claimed that no one in his circle of family and friends would ever have told him about the Puerta del Sol camp, which he had stumbled upon 'by chance' at the age of 33. His parents (an engineer and a teacher) had taught him 'not to give his opinion', but he had been attracted by the slogan 'they don't represent us'. He discovered through 15 M 'that [he] had been told many lies': 'I realized that the politicians, the media and the police were all corrupt. [...] I realized that the police repressed rather than acted to resolve social problems and protect the majority of society. [...] I realized there was a lot of media blocking'. Victor believed that the movement was 'making society rethink politics and question whether it makes sense to vote every four years instead of having a much more constant level of engagement and whether it makes sense that politicians can win elections and then not keep any of their election promises. It makes us rethink the perception there's not much we can do about it'. Two to three months after discovering the social movement, Victor decided to devote all his professional time 'to documenting everything to do with 15 M' and to 'campaign by telling the story that

nobody talks about'. This was a radical political and professional change for Victor, who had no history of any activist engagement and who had chosen to specialize in artistic studio photography rather than politically engaged documentary photography. When I met him two years later, he fully identified with 15 M ('it's my movement') and had photographed all the demonstrations, especially the scenes of police repression, which had already cost him three trials and a fine. When I asked him about what he had learned by participating, he answered: 'I've learned to think politically, to make my own judgements, to not just blindly trust what I'm told'. He believed that 15 M had changed everything in his life: 'Your way of working, your way of life, your way of thinking, your ideology, your way of understanding social relations, money, everything'. At the time, he was looking for a way to combine his activism and his profession and still get paid.

Changes in social representations and biographical trajectories were also strongly in evidence when individuals had experienced a drop in their social status. These individuals questioned everything that they had previously taken for granted because their living conditions had suddenly deteriorated with the economic crisis. This phenomenon has been highlighted by Johsua in her research on anti-capitalist activists: 'These disruptions are likely to reveal the arbitrariness of the social world and its rankings and the domination logics that underlie them, contributing to 'subjective breaks with 'the self-evident''' (Johsua, 2015, p. 87). A number of the individuals I interviewed at the Eko squat in 2014, who had been prompted to join 15 M a year or two after it had begun when they were faced with a housing problem, had reviewed their perceptions of the social world in relation to their drop in social status. This was the case with Mónica (aged 47), a concierge from a working-class background (mother a seamstress, father a craftsman). Her life had been turned upside down when her husband Javier, a sound and lighting manager with a company, had been made redundant during the crisis and then set up his own company, which had subsequently gone bankrupt. This couple, who had enjoyed a good standard of living until then, had first become involved in 15 M some time after the movement had started, when they were amusing themselves having their pictures taken in Puerta del Sol with 'those crusties'. In May 2013, they went to a housing assembly at the Eko after meeting some squatter neighbours, because they could no longer continue living in their flat (there was no gas or electricity) and were threatened with eviction. Although Mónica had no previous experience of activism, she began to participate in all the Indignados actions and demonstrations. When I met her in 2014, she told me that 15 M had changed her way of looking at things: 'It's as if it opened your eyes to the real problems'. Her representations of the social movement, especially of squats and squatters, had completely changed. The 'troublemakers' and 'the poor' had become their 'neighbours' and 'benefactors' who had pointed them towards 'the only place where we had a bit of hope'. This change was commensurate with their downward social trajectory: 'Suddenly you realize what it's like to be poor'. A year on from entering the Eko, Mónica and Javier had formed extremely radical views on squatting, which had led them to distance themselves from the housing assembly. They were helping other people find squats and considered squatting in their own apartment if they were to be evicted. When I interviewed the couple for the second time, in 2019, their social situation and discourse had not changed. They were still involved in occupancy issues and were ready to squat in their apartment once evicted. Mónica believed that 15 M had transformed them and shown them 'another truth': 'We've become different people on every level'.

She spoke of an 'inner revolution' linked to a new 'way of living and interacting' and came back again to what 15 M had meant in terms of 'openness [. . .] to other people and other ideas, and to other ways of life, with not much money, not much security, not much work'. While her professional life had not been impacted to any great extent, the effects on her personal and political life were considerable. As a result of her contact with the social movement, she had reviewed her lifestyle, including even her eating habits (she had become a vegetarian), and had developed an 'anarchist consciousness', which had led her to question the capitalist system.

While changes in perceptions were more salient among those who had political socializations that were far removed from the social movement and conflicting social trajectories, they were nevertheless also visible in individuals who were more politicized and enjoyed privileged social situations. Clara and Ruben, a couple who had only recently settled in Parla when 15 M first emerged, were a good example of this. At 38 and 35, they both worked in publicly listed companies, one as a lawyer, the other as an accountant. During my first interview with them in 2014, they told me that they were comfortable financially, as indeed were all those who still met in the local assembly: 'We all work, we've all got homes, none of us are affected by education problems, we've got an iron constitution'. Clara, who came from a working-class family in Asturias (mother a cook, father an employee in a state-owned company) that had always encouraged her to participate in protests, had been involved with the student movement as well as with environmental NGOs. Ruben, who came from a more conservative family (father a lathe turner, mother a cleaner) and region (Ávila), had only taken part in the bigger demonstrations. Both were intensely involved in 15 M, first in Puerta del Sol (notably on the legal committee) and then in their own city, where they were very active in the assembly until its dissolution at the end of 2013. Clara and Ruben believed that '15 M's opened us up enormously, it's changed us'. This extract from our second interview in 2019 sums up the extent of the changes to their way of thinking and acting in the social movement and in their daily lives:

Me What did 15M change for you?

Ruben It's changed a lot.

Clara Everything, everything, everything. The way we think about life, our consumption habits of course, our beliefs, our values. [. . .]

Ruben Ultimately it changes the way you see things, the way you look at everything.

Clara At life, at people, everything. It's as if you put on different glasses and see the world in a different way. [. . .]

Ruben Before I always found it difficult to communicate with people, now it's a bit easier. You can relax . . . you can go to a self-managed centre, before you'd say that's foreign to me, I wasn't used to going there . . . now you can go to those places no problem [. . .].

Clara Learning to create networks, to be happy in a different way as well. With fewer things . . . [. . .] In terms of conversation, of reflection, of thought, of always asking yourself questions . . . everything, everything, everything, it's a complete change.

Ruben Right down to what we eat, we've gone vegetarian.

Clara and Ruben thus revealed transformations both in their perceptions of the world (in particular with regard to questioning their prejudices about the squatter movement) and in their social, political and consumer practices. They stressed this last point because they believed their power as consumers was a determining factor in the capitalist system. With 15 M, they had decided to boycott supermarkets, switch electricity companies, wear vegan shoes and only buy from organic producers. Like many former Indignados, they belonged to a local consumer group and as such subscribed to a prefigurative conception of politics aimed at transforming their lifestyles (Yates, 2015). Although they had 'slowed down a bit' by 2019, they were still involved in numerous collectives that tackled environmental, feminist and animalist issues. However, there was a total disconnect between these changes and their professional lives, as Ruben explained: 'Unfortunately, we work in areas that are far removed from everything 15 M stands for'. They did not feel they would be able to engage in strike action, but the money they earned allowed them to support many social and political projects that were important to them.

While Clara's trajectory shows that changes in representations can happen when people have an activist experience, a number of the activists I interviewed rejected the idea of an 'awakening' with 15 M. This was the case with Julio (aged 25), an autonomist activist who looked on the assemblies as a 'way of life', and Javi (27), a lawyer who was sceptical about the slogan 'now or never'. Their discourses evidenced the affinities between 15 M and the autonomist and squatter movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Martínez & García, 2018). Nevertheless, other activists did claim their lives had been transformed with the Indignados. Despite the fact they had already formed a critical view of the world before 2011, the movement nevertheless had a lasting impact on them. José (aged 69, journalist), for example, who had a long activist trajectory in trade unionism and social movements, was so intensely involved in 15 M that he had reviewed his accommodation type (moving from a shared flat to a squat) and talked of a change in his 'life system'. Alberto (aged 57), who had long been involved in the autonomist and squatter movements, believed that 15 M had 'awakened consciousnesses and even revived those of us who were asleep'. This was also the case with Natalia (aged 37, teacher), who had been very involved in the squats but had been disengaged for a few years. When 15 M emerged, however, she had become involved on a daily basis in the Puerta del Sol camp and subsequently in the assembly in Parla. The 15 M movement had substantially impacted not just her activist life (she had been an active participant from its inception) but also her personal life. She had broken up with her partner because she was disappointed that he would not get involved and had gone on to find a new partner and friends in the movement. Similarly, when I asked Lola (aged 23, student), who was very involved first in the student movement and then in the emergence of the Podemos Party, if there was a 'before 15 M' and an 'after 15 M', she had answered without hesitation: 'For me and for everyone else, for me and for the political history of this country. 15 M is the biggest thing that's happened here in … I don't know, since the transition. […] It changes the way we understand politics'. She believed the main learning experience from 15 M 'for all organized people' had been 'learning to work and build with real people who don't fit into the moulds the activists previously had for them'. The section that follows shows how, through learning accumulated from the assembly and the mobilization, 15 M was a major political experience for both the newcomers to collective action and the seasoned activists alike.

'I learned how to do politics': learning from the assembly and the mobilization

When I asked the respondents about what they had learned from 15 M, all of them talked about the experience they had gained from the assembly. Learning to (no longer be afraid to) speak in public came up repeatedly, especially among the women, particularly those with few qualifications, even when they had an activist background. This had been the main learning from 15 M for Elena (aged 28, healthcare assistant), a 'lifelong activist' who had been involved with the Juventudes Comunistas since the age of 18: 'I used to be really embarrassed when I spoke in public, when I expressed myself in public, and that's been great for me. To be able to speak in public and say what I think, what I feel'. There was a lot of learning linked to the assembly's practice among those who had not been familiar with this kind of organizational structure, such as Marcos (aged 22, student), who had learned 'patience, to listen to people, to collaborate with people, to be much more open, how to work with other people who think differently'. He nevertheless bemoaned, as many did, the slowness of consensus decision-making. Those with an activist background said that the main thing they had learned from the 15 M assemblies was to listen to and work with different people. This learning was highlighted by all the activists, regardless of their generation and the movements they had been involved in. The interview I conducted in 2013 with Rafa (aged 23) and Emilio (aged 63), two journalists involved in the 'Periódico del 15 M', exemplified the idea of a joint venture between people from different backgrounds. Rafa, who had come from the student and right to housing movement, responded to the 'learning' question with a single word 'listening'. Indeed, he repeated it several times and then said: 'The most important thing is to listen to other people who think differently from you'. Emilio, who described himself as a 'somewhat sectarian' anarchist, had learned that he could work respectfully with people he never would have thought he had any affinity with. He thus talked about 'relinquishing the flag' and believed that 15 M had made him 'a better person'.

Beyond the assembly's practice, there was a great deal of learning accumulated from the collective action. Several first-time demonstrators claimed to have 'learned how to do politics', referring to the skills of debating, mobilizing in the streets, putting pressure on elected representatives and creating systemic alternatives. Miguel (aged 32, unemployed), who had no previous activist experience and had been involved in Parla's assembly for over a year, told me he had 'learned that you can fight, don't let them walk all over you'. Many trajectories were thus marked by a process of empowerment 'that links up an individual dynamic of self-esteem and skills development with a collective commitment and transformative social action' (Bacqué & Biewener, 2013). By participating in 15 M, the respondents had become aware of their individual and collective ability to change their social reality. These empowerment trajectories were conspicuous among the newcomers to collective action, who had learned they no longer needed to be afraid because they realized that a problem that they had perceived to be specific to them (such as the threat of eviction) was in fact shared by many others and could therefore be solved collectively. This is similar both to the concept of agency as used by Butler (2004), where a capacity to act and self-emancipate from forms of domination is expressed through a denouncement of injustices, and to the concept of cognitive liberation developed by

McAdam: 'Before collective protest can get under way, people must collectively define their situation as unjust and subject to change through group action' (McAdam, 1982, p. 29).

The case of Gabriela illustrates this well. This 33-year-old cleaner from Ecuador had gone along to a housing assembly at the Eko in spring 2012 on the advice of a social worker because she could no longer meet her mortgage payments as her husband was unemployed. In 2014, she told me that at the start she had been 'petrified' when she had gone to see her bank manager but that 15 M had shown her that it was in fact a 'scam' and that she was not the guilty party. She had learned how to organize sit-ins, demonstrations and assemblies and how to negotiate with the banks by 'demanding a solution' from them. The trajectories of the newcomers to collective action thus revealed processes of political subjectivation, which were particularly marked when they were confronted with forms of dispossession through a loss of income and/or housing (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013). These empowerment trajectories also applied to those Indignados with activist profiles who had become aware through 15 M of the possibility of effecting concrete change. Like a number of other activists, Amalia (aged 36, psychologist), who was actively involved in a political party (Izquierda Unida), a trade union and international solidarity NGOs, had thus changed her activist representation and practices: 'I was campaigning on theoretical stuff, or on ideologies [. . .]. Activism was almost like having a faith, practising a faith, but deep down you think it's impossible because everything always just stays the same and there's no way to change things. Suddenly, a movement that's so big, so broad, and that also achieves real things [. . .]. This is the first time I've thought we can really change the system'.

Despite the variety of their trajectories, the Indignados had all acquired a great deal of knowledge and know-how related to the assembly and the collective action, which they had then redeployed in a diverse range of political and professional spaces. Elena (aged 28) showed, for example, how learning to speak in public had been useful to her both in her militant activities after 15 M (in the 'white tide' protest in Madrid for public health and then in the Podemos circle in Parla) and in her professional life, that is in the many projects she undertook alongside her job as a healthcare assistant, such as 'Tuppersex' parties and presenting her own radio programme. On a political level, the Indignados were redeploying their learning in a range of organizations, which were thus marked by the influence of 15 M. Activists from the Podemos circle in Parla told me, for example, how they had drawn inspiration from the way in which the Indignados assemblies operated but that they had streamlined the meetings to make them more efficient. Experience in the social movement had proved useful in the institutional sphere for those who had joined the municipal council in 2015 and then the government team in 2019. Camila, a 22-year-old student in 2011 who had gone on to become an elected representative (Podemos) in Parla's municipal council in 2019, told me how her participation in 15 M had impacted her 'way of doing politics, in a more participative way, more empathetic' and added that she had 'a lot of respect for people who organize and mobilize themselves to get things done, because I've lived it'. A number of the Indignados also pointed out the similarities between the organizational structure of 15 M and that of other social movements that they had subsequently become involved in, such as the 'white tide' and 'green tide' (state education) protests and the 8 M feminist movement. Its influences were even visible in collectives that were initially far removed from the

principles of 15 M. For example, Ariel (aged 31, software developer), who had been involved in a small anti-capitalist, revolutionary organization for the past decade, had learned from 15 M that more attention should be paid to internal democracy, *micro-machismos* (everyday sexism) and the feminization of language. The activist trajectory of Luis, a 16-year-old high school student at the time of 15 M, had also been marked by this first political experience in the Parla assembly, which had led to his subsequent involvement in libertarian groups at university and then back in his home town, although he had reviewed his relationship to pacifism in the interim.

The learning acquired from the assembly and the collective action could also be reused in the professional sphere. Juan (aged 27), who went to the Puerta del Sol camp every day and whom I met at the general assemblies, stopped participating when he emigrated to the United States in the summer of 2011 to do a doctorate in biotechnology. Although he had no history of activism and his family was opposed to 15 M, Juan had been marked by this participation experience that was as intense as it was brief. While he did not continue with any political activity, he listed (in our interview two years later) the lessons he had learned from his participation that he valued in his professional sphere, such as 'getting stuck in', 'appearing in public' and 'I don't need to be a prominent figure to share what I know'. Other people's professional lives had changed more radically since 2011. Isabel (aged 32), who considered herself to be 'a 15 M purist', believed that all the paid jobs she had had since 15 M had been 'because of my political birth in 15 M'. A former company sales manager, she was in the process of retraining as a community worker when the movement had first emerged, which gave her the opportunity to put her knowledge into practice by moderating large assemblies in Puerta del Sol. Eight years later, she told me how she had converted her know-how into her professional activities (notably the setting up of local participatory bodies in Madrid and the reception of asylum seekers) by specializing in participatory methods. Isabel said that she had 'found herself' with 15 M and that it had taught her 'a lot of things on a human level', such as 'to have patience, to take my time, to have more empathy, to take care of myself'. In 2014, Evelyn (aged 41), who was unemployed and tired of precarious jobs, told me that her participation in the 15 M assemblies had taught her a number of things that were useful for her cooperative project, like organizing meetings, but also that she had learned above all that it was possible to have 'a job that we enjoy and do in the way we like'. The 15 M movement thus represented a space for the acquisition not only of skills that could then be of value in other spaces but also of ways of seeing and reconsidering life on all levels.

Conclusion: a new generation of activists in militant microspheres and institutional spaces

This follow-up of the trajectories of forty Indignados in Madrid (22 in the period 2013–15 and 18 to 2019) highlights substantial biographical impacts on representations and individual practices in the political, personal and often also professional spheres. These impacts were particularly salient among those who had experienced biographical disruptions, whether in relation to political socialization or a drop in social status, and who had mobilized themselves in an intense and lasting way. However, 15 M had also profoundly impacted the trajectories of those with an activist background or who had been less involved in the movement. The methodology used in this study certainly had

a number of limitations, above all the absence of a control group, which would have enabled me to verify whether the changes observed were actually linked to participation in the social movement. Other interviews conducted as part of a survey of the Podemos activists, some of whom had not participated in 15 M, showed that they may also have been influenced by the movement without even having taken part in it (Nez, 2015). The respondents in the present study also reported changes in their families' representations and practices. Natalia, for example, had noted a clear difference from the time when she had been mobilized in the squats: 'In my family, the discourse has changed a lot, before I was a radical, now they tell me you're right, it's just we couldn't see it'. It seems possible therefore that 15 M also had an influence on people who had not participated directly in the movement. There is no doubting the fact, however, that there was a considerable change in the perceptions of the social world and the political, personal and professional practices of those who had participated in the Indignados assemblies and actions. Beyond the mobilization itself, they had politicized all aspects of their daily lives and transformed their lifestyles (Yates, 2015). The findings of this study thus confirm that there is evidence of biographical effects of participation in social movements in contexts outside that of the United States in the 1960s (Giugni & Grasso, 2016).

This micro-sociological approach gives us a better understanding of the biographical futures of the Indignados and, in addition, provides an account of the transformations in collective action in Madrid over the last ten years. While most of the respondents remembered with some nostalgia that 'we were all there' and valued the fact that 15 M had succeeded in bringing together a very diverse range of people fighting very different battles, they also recognized that it was difficult to work together in such a heterogeneous movement. The vast majority of those interviewed in 2019 had thus continued their activism in much smaller affinity groups. These activist microspheres were marked by a division between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' conceptions of politics that was very present in 15 M (Feenstra et al., 2016). Some of the Indignados I followed had become involved in partisan organizations, mainly in the Podemos and Izquierda Unida Parties, and a few had become elected representatives in the municipal councils. Some had mobilized in social organizations as diverse as a feminist committee, an anti-racist libertarian collective, a local group campaigning against bullfighting and a Latin American women's association combatting gender-based violence. Some of the collectives were only very loosely formalized and comprised barely a dozen people who all knew one another through friendship and family networks and who were committed to concrete actions such as fundraising for animal shelters or artistic interventions in the public space. These Indignados were aware, as Ruben pointed out, that they had thus limited their sphere of action and influence: 'We have withdrawn into more closed groups'. Isabel, for example, regretted the fact that 'we've gone back to what we had before 15 M a bit, I mean, everyone in their own area, on their own cause'. However, some Indignados had demonstrated that it was far more pleasant and sustainable to participate in this way, because the more unifying movement had generated many interpersonal and political conflicts. These conflicts were found to be among the disengagement from 15 M factors, along with the emotional toll and variations in biographical availability over time. Most of the trajectories were in fact marked by phases of engagement and disengagement, which were linked in particular to activist fatigue and even exhaustion. The many immediate effects of 15 M on the participants' personal lives, such as separation from a partner and exam failure, had also contributed to

the rationales for exiting the movement. However, among the 18 people interviewed in 2019, only three mentioned an almost total disengagement, which had been mainly for biographical reasons. Two of them, who had been activists as a couple in their 15 M local assembly and then in the Podemos circle in Parla, had got divorced and gone on to meet new partners who were far removed from the social movement. The other, a first-time demonstrator in Carabanchel, had found a job that had left him little time for collective action, although he had managed to resolve the housing problem that had prompted his involvement in the first place. These 'disengaged' Indignados had not withdrawn completely, however, because they continued to participate in some demonstrations and said they were ready to re-mobilize at any moment.

My findings here differ from those presented by Accornero (2018), whose longitudinal study of the trajectories of students who had engaged with far-left organizations during the dictatorship in Portugal showed that their disillusionment with the revolutionary project had led to widespread disengagement. However, my interviews also revealed disappointment that the 15 M ideals had not been achieved. The comprehensive approach adopted in this study has thus provided an understanding of how the Indignados themselves perceived the legacy of 15 M. When the second round of interviews were conducted in November 2019, after the re-run of several legislative elections in Spain and just before the new left-wing coalition government was formed, most people were very critical of 15 M's impact, condemning the lack of legislative changes that could improve social situations. The disappointment around 15 M's lack of institutional opportunities was palpable, especially among the first-time demonstrators and those in difficult social situations. A number of Indignados had nevertheless changed their electoral behaviour, often choosing the new option proposed by the Podemos Party and maintaining it over time despite their disillusionment. Others had remained sceptical about the idea of effecting change through elections, going so far as to say that 'Podemos killed off 15 M'. Although they lamented the limited transformations at the macro level, with the notable exception of the end of the two-party system, many Indignados highlighted the multiple effects of 15 M in Spanish society more broadly, for example, in terms of political conversations in everyday life and 15 M's influence on other social movements. There was not total disenchantment therefore, which may explain the differences between the findings of this study and those of Accornero. In addition, unlike Accornero's far-left activists in Portugal, whose redeployment prospects were severely limited under the dictatorship, the Indignados were able to easily and quickly redeploy all the knowledge and know-how they had acquired during 15 M into other political and/or professional spaces. Emilio, the 'old anarchist' who wondered 'if we had a life before that', succinctly summed up the general feeling of those interviewed and indeed the main idea defended in this article when he said that '15 M's legacy' was that it had 'created thousands of new activists who will go on to do other things'.

Note

1. All data extracts and all quotations from Spanish or French sources have been translated into English. Pseudonyms are being used to protect interviewee's identities. The ages and professions indicated are those given at the time of 15 M.

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Appendix 1: The numerical results

As a complement to the method section, the two tables below synthesize the sociodemographic and political profiles of those who took part in the two rounds of interviews. They include indications of the modes of engagement of each individual before, during and after 15M based on Prado Galán and Fersch's (2020) categorization. These overviews are nevertheless simplistic compared with the various phases of engagement and disengagement presented in greater detail in the article.

Table 1. Presentation of respondents who participated in the first round of interviews only

No	Respondent	Sex	Age	Profession	Engagement before 15M	Participation in 15M	Engagement in 2013–15
1	Victor	M	33	Photographer	None	Medium (Sol)	High
2	Marcos	M	22	Student	None	High (Sol/Arganzuela)	None
3	Javi	M	27	Lawyer	High (civil disobedience collective)	High (Sol)	High (Legal Sol)
4	Emilio	M	63	Journalist	High (anarchist, CGT)	High (Sol/Villaverde)	High (Periódico 15M)
5	Rafa	M	23	Journalist	Medium (student movement)	High (Sol/Lavapiés)	High (Periódico 15M)
6	Inés	F	40	Unemployed (cultural project manager)	High (neighbourhood associations)	High (Sol)	High (review committee)
7	Juan	M	27	Student	None	Medium (Sol)	None
8	Ariel	M	31	Software developer	High (anti-capitalism group)	Low (Sol/Carabanchel)	High (anti-capitalism group)
9	Paula	F	26	TV producer	High (neighbourhood association movement, Okupa, JSF)	Medium (Sol/El Retiro)	High (Podemos)
10	Evelyn	F	41	Unemployed (accountant)	Low ~ High (local mobilization)	High (Sol/Carabanchel)	Medium (Carabanchel)
11	Lucía	F	31	Telemarketer	Low (anarchist, CNT)	Low ~ High (Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel)
12	Julio	M	25	Performer	High (student movement, autonomous, Okupa)	High (Sol/Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel, autonomous collective)
13	Adriana	F	45	Unemployed (cleaner)	None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	Medium (Carabanchel)
14	Pablo	M	33	Consultant	High (student movement, Izquierda Unida, DRY)	High (Sol/Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel)
15	Salvador	M	64	Retired (bricklayer)	High (labour movement, CGT, PCE)	High (Parla)	High (CGT)
16	Eduardo	M	30	Unemployed (healthcare assistant)	High (student movement, anti-fascist group, Okupa)	High (Sol/Parla)	Low
17	Pilar	F	29	Librarian	Medium (local community movement)	Medium (Parla)	Medium (local community movement)
18	Lola	F	23	Student	High (student movement, JSF)	High (Sol)	High (Podemos)
19	José	M	69	Retired (journalist)	High (CCOO, anti-racism collective)	High (Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel)
20	Alberto	M	57	Unemployed (screen printer)	High (libertarian activist, Okupa)	High (Sol/Moratalaz/Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel)
21	Amalia	F	36	Educational psychologist	High (International solidarity NGO, Izquierda Unida, CCOO)	High (Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel/Izquierda Unida)
22	Fernando	M	36	Unemployed (scaffolder)	None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	High (Carabanchel)

Notes

1. Low = occasional participation in non-political associations, demonstrations, protest events; Medium = recurrent participant in associations, protest event association, protest events; High = member of/collaborator in political organizations, unions, social movements. Regarding 'Engagement before 15M': Low ~ High = high level of engagement in the period immediately prior to 15M; High ~ Low = disengaged following a period of engagement (often as a young activist). Regarding 'Participation in 15M': None/Low ~ High = participation began a substantial time after the camps (one or more years after).

2. JSF and DRY are acronyms for Juventud Sin Futuro and ¡Democracia Real Ya!, two organizations that preceded 15M and that called for people to join the demonstration on 15 May 2011. Izquierda Unida is a left-wing coalition that includes the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) is a trade union with historical links to the PCE. The CGT and CNT are anarchist trade unions, and Okupa is a squatter movement that sets up squatted self-managed social centres.

3. The respondents' main areas of participation in 15M are shown in parentheses: the camp and assemblies at Puerta del Sol, the neighbourhood assemblies (Carabanchel, Parla, etc.) and the committees that still existed at the time of interview (Legal Sol, Periódico 15M, etc.).

Table 2: Presentation of respondents who participated in both rounds of interviews

No	Respondent	Sex	Age	Profession	Engagement before 15M	Participation in 15M	Engagement in 2019
1	Javier	M	42	Unemployed (sound and lighting manager)	High (Okupa) ~ None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	Medium (Okupa)
2	Mónica	F	45	Concierge	None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	Medium (Okupa)
3	Elena	F	28	Healthcare assistant	Medium (Izquierda Unida)	High (Parla)	None
4	Miguel	M	32	Unemployed (warehouseman)	None	High (Parla)	None
5	Natalia	F	37	Primary school teacher	High ~ Low (Okupa)	High (Parla)	High (local collectives)
6	Esteban	M	51	Secondary school teacher	Low	High (Sol/Parla)	High (libertarian collectives)
7	Clara	F	37	Lawyer	Medium (NGO)	High (Sol/Parla)	High (feminist, environmental and animal rights movements)
8	Ruben	M	35	Accountant	None	High (Sol/Parla)	High (environmental and animal rights movements)
9	Luis	M	16	High school student	None	Medium (Parla)	High (libertarian groups)
10	Isabel	F	32	Unemployed (community worker)	None	High (Sol/Carabanchel)	High (feminist movement)
11	Gabriela	F	33	Cleaner	None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	High (feminist association)
12	Manuel	M	44	Unemployed (surveyor)	None	None ~ High (Carabanchel)	None
13	Gloria	F	36	Freelance psychologist	Low	High (Parla)	Medium
14	Sergio	M	41	Library worker	Medium	High (Parla)	Medium
15	Camila	F	22	Student	Medium (NGO)	Low ~ High (Parla)	High (Podemos, municipal team)
16	Mario	M	24	Maintenance technician	Low	Medium (Sol/Parla)	Low
17	Andrés	M	36	Instructor	High (local community movement)	High (Sol/Parla)	High (Izquierda Unida, municipal team)
18	Dolores	F	49	Retired (secondary school teacher)	High ~ Low (feminist movement)	High (Parla)	High (libertarian and feminist collectives)