

**“Between Autonomy And Hybridisation:
Urban Struggles Within The 15M Movement In Madrid”**

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BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND HYBRIDISATION: URBAN STRUGGLES WITHIN THE 15M MOVEMENT IN MADRID

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Abstract

Since May 15, 2011, the *Indignados* or 15M movement was the most significant social mobilisation against neo-liberal policies in Spain. Given the diversity of actions, campaigns, groups and messages involved in this movement, there is a great controversy about its consistence, duration and outcomes. However, it is widely recognised that a particular urban struggle, the one against the evictions of foreclosed houses (*PAH*), has exemplary represented the wave of uprisings unleashed by the 15M movement. In this paper I investigate to what extent this and other urban struggles have been developed within the 15M and due to the context of mobilisation that it fuelled. In addition to the PAH I focus on the protest camps in public spaces, the occupations of houses, the community gardens, the campaigns against the privatisation of hospitals and the protests against the cuts in the system of public education. What are the features of these urban movements? How do they faced urban neoliberalism? In this paper I argue that these urban movements have been crucial in the development of the 15M due to the specific 'hybrid autonomy' to which they have contributed. The hybrid nature of these struggles neither refer to their online and offline communications, nor to their

simultaneous local and global implications. Instead, (1) I identify the various ways in which autonomous and institutional practices have been combined by these urban movements, (2) to what extent the autonomous hybridity defined their nature, and (3) which mutual networks did they form.

Key words: urban movements, anti-neoliberalism, hybrid autonomy, Spain, 15M movement

The 15M movement

The 15M or *Indignados* movement appeared on the public stage on 15 May 2011 with a massive demonstration that took place simultaneously in more than 57 Spanish cities after the call launched by a coalition of groups then named DRY (*Democracia Real Ya*, which stands for “True Democracy Now”). Their first manifesto opposed the austerity and neoliberal policies implemented by the social-democratic government of the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) in the last period of its term in power, after the global financial crisis of 2008. The conservative party, PP (*Partido Popular*), was implementing similar measures in the municipalities and regional governments under their control, so they were criticised as well. When the PP won the general elections in November 2011 and went further with the austerity measures, the outrage even increased. Since its inception the 15M movement gained a wide social recognition and was able to mobilise thousands of activists and sympathisers, especially when dozens of squares at the major city centres were occupied with tents, sit-ins, public assemblies and various improvised infrastructures.

The demands of the 15M focused not only on problems stemming from neoliberalism and the economic crisis, but the movement also criticised the de-democratisation of the political system. Widespread political corruption, the bailouts of banks, unemployment at rates over 25%, evictions of houses affected by foreclosures, cuts in public services and a rigid two-party system and electoral regulations unleashed the anger of the population. The 15M catalysed that underlying frustration and started challenging both the actual political regime and its capitalist base. Claims for more participatory and direct democratic mechanisms, the implementation of a universal basic income, the legalisation of undocumented immigrants, as well as a more radical call for a participatory writing of a new constitution (the present one was approved in 1978, three years after the Dictator Franco's death) were made soon after (MPD 2014).

The various thematic working groups and regular assemblies that formed the most active core of the occupied squares at that time produced hundreds of additional and specific demands: abolition of the previous labour and pensions reforms, measures to end unemployment, reduction of military expenditures, reform of the fiscal system, public control of the banks, a citizens audit of the debt, provision of social housing and a guaranty of civil liberties (Adell 2011, Pastor 2011, DRY 2012). From the initial cry for "true democracy now", the 15M moved on to question the harsh austerity measures imposed by the financial and European Union powerholders. Furthermore, demands as those heard in Argentina in 2001, "*que se vayan todos*" ("we want to oust all the politicians") or beloved by the Italian autonomists of the 1960s and 1970s "*lo queremos todo y lo queremos ahora*" ("we want it all and we want it now") also resonated in the 15M from the first days on (Díaz 2011). Thus, the anti-austerity

protests combined anti-capitalist and pro-radical-democracy perspectives.

This mobilisation was initially fuelled by demands on the state for both radical reforms and preservation of basic welfare state rights and benefits. At the same time, the 15M stressed its genuinely autonomous nature, as no political party, labour union, private company or state institution was part of the pioneer coalition and protest campers (Abellán 2014, Bonet 2014). Flags and symbols of formal organisations associated with those or other social elites were banned from the squares and demonstrations, although not always successfully removed –in cases such as the *Marches for Dignity* in 2014 some were even explicitly accepted. This observation raises the question whether the tension between institutional and autonomous orientations was fruitful or not. In addition, given the anti-systemic nature of the 15M it is worth asking what role the various urban struggles within the 15M played. “Within the 15M” means here the struggles that emerged from its core or were strongly influenced by the wave of uprisings, demonstrations and initiatives loosely identified with the umbrella of the 15M movement.

A particular urban struggle, the one against the evictions from foreclosed houses (PAH), has represented the wave of uprisings unleashed by the 15M movement in most exemplary fashion. This chapter investigates what are the features of this and other urban struggles in their opposition to neoliberal policies -mainly, the protest camps in public spaces, the occupations of houses, community gardens, the campaigns against the privatisation of hospitals and the protests against the cuts to public education in the city of Madrid. I argue, first, that these urban movements have been crucial in the development of the 15M due to the specific ‘hybrid autonomy’ to which they have contributed. This key concept and the depiction of

urban neoliberalism in Madrid are the contents of the next section. Secondly, I identify the various ways in which autonomous and institutional practices have been combined by these urban movements.

Capitalism, the state and democracy: the tensions between neoliberalism, institutions and autonomy

In a recent interview, John Holloway (Fernández-Savater 2014) was reflected on the dilemma faced by autonomous movements once they are replaced by political parties, state institutions and progressive governments who claim to represent them or, at least, to channel or satisfy many of their demands. He considers autonomous movements in particular and autonomous politics in general, as capable of opening up and widening cracks within capitalism by creating social relationships and practices that differ from the logic of profit:

“The rejection of alienated and alienating labour entails, at the same time, a critique of the institutional and organizational structures, and the mindset that springs from it. This is how we can explain the rejection of trade unions, parties, and the state that we observe in so many contemporary movements, from the Zapatistas to the Greek or Spanish *indignados*.” (Holloway in Fernández-Savater 2014)

According to Holloway, then, not even leftist governments as the ones in Bolivia and Venezuela can get rid of the contradictions of capitalism -the same would apply to the hopes conveyed by electoral successes of *Syriza* in Greece or *Podemos* in Spain. Such governments might improve people’s lives, but could not create a profound and

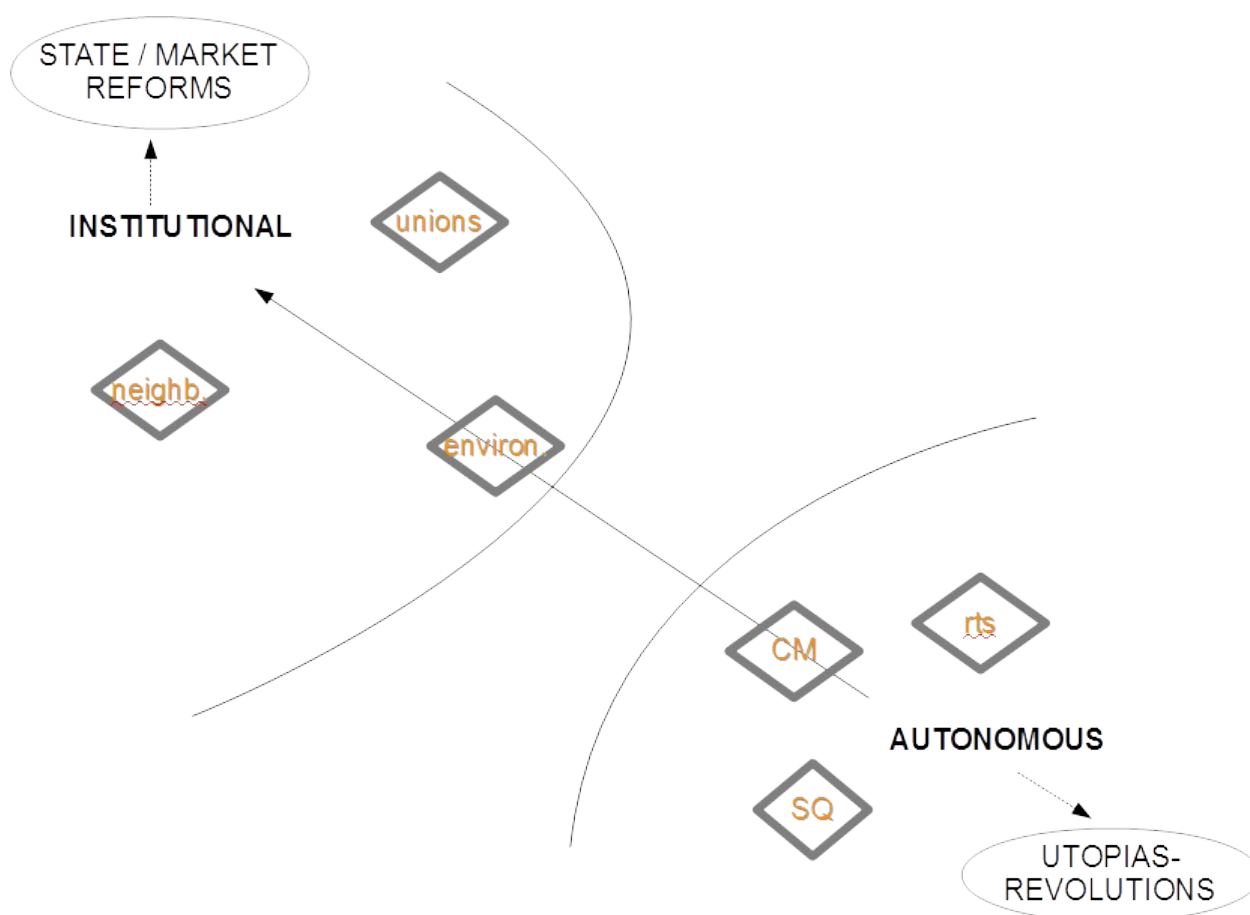
sustainable alternative to the exploitation of labour and the reproduction of capital. Thus, to take over the state is not the tactic Holloway prefers, as he sees an irreconcilable separation between autonomous and institutional politics:

“Whilst not considering parties of the left as enemies, since for me this is certainly not the case, I would say that the answer has to be thought of in terms of deepening the cracks. If we’re not going to accept the annihilation of humanity, which, to me, seems to be on capitalism’s agenda as a real possibility, then the only alternative is to think that our movements are the birth of another world. We have to keep building cracks and finding ways of recognizing them, strengthening them, expanding them, connecting them; seeking the confluence or, preferably, the commoning of the cracks. (...) We must work to reach a point where we can say “we don’t care if global capital isn’t investing in Spain, because we’ve built a mutual support network that’s strong enough to enable us to live with dignity.”” (Holloway in Fernández-Savater 2014)

However, instead of just advocating and praising the revolutionary capacities of autonomous movements, Holloway argues that the chasm between both types of politics should not be eliminated but bridged through constructive dialogue and by experimenting with temporary practices of emancipation:

“We need to keep a constant and respectful debate going without suppressing the differences and the contradictions. I think the basis for a dialogue could be this: no one has the solution.” (Holloway in Fernández-Savater 2014)

The plan to reach state power or to keep a foot inside the state institutions in case of failure of the more ambitious aspirations, to govern, conjures up the Weberian law of the iron cage. State bureaucracies mirror the increasing rationalisation, discipline and control over individuals that have enabled capitalist companies to conquer the most productive hubs of the world. Classic divides between Marxists and anarchists have emerged around this key issue (see Graph 1 for a simplified scheme of the classic oppositions between reformist-institutional struggles and revolutionary-autonomist ones). Once a revolution takes place, what kind of new institutions, regulations and rationality might organise social life if not a state, even a transitional one?



Graph 1. Classic opposition between “institutional” and “autonomous” struggles. [Examples: Neighb.: neighbourhood associations; Unions: labour unions; Environ: environmental organisations; CM: Critical Mass of bicyclists; RTS: Reclaim the Streets; SQ: squatting.]

Not only fears of becoming trapped inside the state-capitalist iron cage were criticised by anarchists, Trotskyists and autonomists, but also the risks of falling into extreme individualist, misanthropic, mystical and anti-organisational trends, which the autonomist and libertarian options would face. In a celebrated, polemical essay Murray Bookchin (1998) attacked the ‘primitivist lifestyle anarchism’ as reification of the autonomous individual mainly in terms of desire, imagination and nature. His was a theoretical critique that even aimed at some ‘practical cracks’ which libertarian subcultures had developed. For Bookchin,

“all claims to autonomy notwithstanding, this middle-class ‘rebel,’ with or without a brick in hand, is entirely captive to the subterranean market forces that occupy all the allegedly ‘free’ terrains of modern social life, from food cooperatives to rural communes.” (Bookchin 1998, ch. 8)

This critique also evokes the perils of co-optation of movements’ leaders, critical discourses and productivity by the elites (Piven and Cloward 1979, Souza 2006) and neo-liberal rulers of urban governance (Mayer 2012). Both Holloway and Bookchin advocate an escalation of some autonomous initiatives (such as ‘libertarian municipalism’ for the latter) in order to tackle the threshold of a revolution, but two crucial questions would arise in the meanwhile: 1) How to connect or con-federate the archipelago of autonomous

initiatives, organisations and movements in order to strengthen their potential to build up an alternative society and rationality? 2) What kind of ties should they establish and maintain with the existing (state or market) institutions in order to consolidate their alternative projects while, simultaneously, diminishing the power of capitalism to self-reproduce itself?

Obviously, these are not new challenges for radical activists and there is abundant literature that examines them (Alford and Friedland 1985, Katsiaficas 2006). However, once these premises and frames are made explicit, we can move forward and explore a territory not so often brought into the picture. Thus, what I consider a more nuanced intellectual puzzle to solve is the conception and analysis of the hybrid forms that autonomous projects or anomalous institutions entail (Martínez 2014). A hybrid autonomous initiative is one whose members do not accept the fate of remaining isolated alternatives to the dominant forces. Rather, they actively engage in creating strong or pragmatic bonds with other autonomous *islands*, but also, eventually, with state and even market institutions, all the while facing the contradictions and unintended consequences that may likely occur. Focusing on the case of Madrid there is abundant evidence that urban neoliberalism has been the main political direction of the city and the metropolitan region since the late 1980s (Díaz 2007, Alguacil et al. 2011, Walliser 2013, Rodríguez et al. 2013). I will follow Mayer's distinctions of the four main strands of urban neoliberalism to summarise the analyses provided by the above mentioned authors.

- (i) 'Growth first' started symbolically in 1992 with the mega-projects dedicated to promote the European Capital of Culture and the state-centralised high speed train to Seville in the beginning and to other cities later on. They were

followed with all the new infrastructures developed in order to compete for the Olympics -which involved, failure after failure, expensive campaigns of city branding and public-private partnerships. The incorporation of Spain to the European institutions in 1986 opened up very profitable opportunities for a massive urban construction and speculation by national and foreign capital -and subsequent housing bubbles and bursts, even before 2008. In parallel, an intense flow of international immigration of cheap labour force went to the major Spanish cities, being Madrid the main hub of reception and distribution. In the meanwhile, most of the biggest corporations who turned to global investments were located in a few avenues of Madrid or even developed their own private cities within the city (Telefónica and Banco Santander). The gentrification and beautification of large parts of the city centre by promoting museums, hotels, tourism and cultural events (such as the “White Night”) contributed to enhance the global image of Madrid and its lure for the *creative classes* in addition to the intense transformation and commodification of the whole metropolitan area.

- (ii) ‘Entrepreneurial forms of governance’ prevailed also in Madrid while backed by the continuing conservative rule of the Popular Party (in the local government since 1989). In accordance with their neoliberal ideology, the PP used the urban policies in Madrid to showcase how the market might lead the economic growth. Public infrastructures, such as the extensions of the subway and the airport, or the underground reconstruction of a major road (M-30), were based on *crony capitalism* and highly contested by urban

movements. They also made profitable concessions to private developers in many urban plans (the 4 Towers in Paseo de la Castellana, Triball in the historic centre, the more than 200,000 new houses in the PAUs of the peripheral areas, 800,000 new built houses in the region between 1995 and 2008, etc.) instead of opening up public debates and consensual decisions. Private schools, universities and hospitals bloomed due to the generous transfers of public budget to their assets. Since 2007, public bodies such as Global Madrid were leading the creation of private-public partnerships in order to sell the city as a never-ending source of profits for private capital. Cuts to all the municipal services (public education, in particular) and citizens' initiatives have accelerated since 2008.

- (iii) 'Privatisation' has been implemented in fields such as housing, public administration (tax management, information, welfare services, etc.), waste collection and so on. Regarding the municipal and regional stocks of public housing, the privatisation process has entailed a dramatic increase of rents and even the eviction of thousands of families. The main public company in charge of the water supply (*Canal de Isabel II*) has been continuously threatened with privatisation, although the process is partially delayed because of the strong popular contestation. The same has occurred with the most serious and failed for now attempt to privatise the public hospitals (see below), but 8 newly built public hospitals with full private management and the subcontracting of many medical services saw the green light after 2004. Most municipal kindergartens were also dismantled or out-sourced. Some high-speed roads from and

to Madrid (R1, R2, etc.) were privatised and, after their absence of profits, bought again by the state. The private-public company who run the re-construction of the M-30 road engendered the highest and possibly unbearable municipal debt up to then (and for the next decades) while contributing to fuel private projects of urban renovation in the surrounding areas.

- (iv) 'Social polarisation' is not just a common effect of capitalist cities but also a purposive neoliberal policy usually hidden for the sake of 'urban regeneration', the upgrade of popular neighbourhoods and the like. The unemployed population, migrants, women, poor elderly and precarious, and not only young, workers tend to be the main targets of residential displacement, harassment, overcrowding and peripheral location. The increasing and continuing unaffordable housing prices until 2008 point to the major cause of socio-spatial segregation, although it was the absence of sufficient public housing what exacerbated the problem. Local and regional authorities also favoured urban sprawl, gated communities and the rehabilitation of central areas (*Justicia, Cortes, Universidad, Palacio* and *Embajadores*, above all) with the same effects. Evictions, demolitions and authoritarian urban policies regarding the most marginalised groups living in the area of *La Cañada Real* illustrate the active role of the municipality in the reproduction and deepening of social polarisation. 77% of migrant students are concentrated in the public schools of the region, while 46% of the schools are privately owned and highly subsidised. Just to name another example on the opposite extreme of the social structures, the renewal of the old market of *San Miguel* closed to *Puerta*

del Sol turned a traditional accessible place of fresh food and groceries into an exclusive and luxury spot for tourists and the upper and *global* class –and the same dynamics applies to the recent pedestrianisation of central streets such as *Fuencarral*.

The triggering of hybrid mobilisations

The historical origins of the 15M take us back to the autonomist and global justice movements of the previous cycle of protests (Romanos 2013, Flesher Fominaya 2014). Many lessons regarding goals, skills, communicative resources and repertoires of civil disobedience were learnt from the preceding cycle where anti-war campaigns, student protests, housing struggles and others took place. Many of the claims made by the 15M activists were deeply rooted in previous local and transnational movements. In addition, the 2008 financial crisis provoked immediate social unrest transnationally –first in Iceland, then in Greece, France, the UK, Portugal and some Arab countries (Observatorio Metropolitano 2011). All became inspirational references for the 15M, and none of them were pure cases of either autonomism or institutionalism.

As DRY was immediately overcome by all the groups that mushroomed in and around the protest camps, no strong leading SMO emerged. Thus, the so-called “spirit of the 15M” pervaded most of the mobilisations between 2011 and 2014. This was due to that diverse set of claims described above as well as to its, organisational style –horizontal assemblies, inclusiveness, autonomy from formal organisations, abundant digital communication prevailing civil

disobedience in combination with institutional actions that many found acceptable, etc.

The practical side of the 15M was more autonomous than many of its institutional and anti-austerity claims. Thus, the latter coexisted with a rising interest in the development of self-managed and autonomous projects, campaigns, cooperatives, independent media, squats, etc. Popular assemblies in the neighbourhoods were the most visible alternative institutions: they were set up after the protest camps were dismantled, although many of them declined severely only months later. A new wave of occupations of buildings enjoyed more legitimacy than ever before (Martínez and García 2014), and many calls to civil disobedience were heeded by high turnout as well as positive media coverages. New sectorial mobilisations, self-called *tides*, emerged in the public education and public health systems, which represented the most direct contestation of specific neoliberal measures (Sánchez 2013). In the general and sectorial strikes called during those three years, labour unions worked along with 15M working groups, assemblies and *tides*.

As a consequence, the 15M was able to inaugurate a new wave of nation-wide contention, which integrated a wide array of autonomous and hybrid groups, and sustained its challenge to the elites with a constant flow of demonstrations, campaigns and protest actions (for a graphic representation of all the collectives and initiatives under the umbrella of the 15M see www.autoconsulta.org). However, for many the failures according to those ambitious aspirations overshadowed the (limited) success of a few initiatives and the pervasive politicisation of everyday life that occurred (Fernández-Savater 2013). This can explain the huge popular support given to new political parties and electoral platforms at the municipal level in 2014 and 2015. In particular, a significant shift has occurred since the European

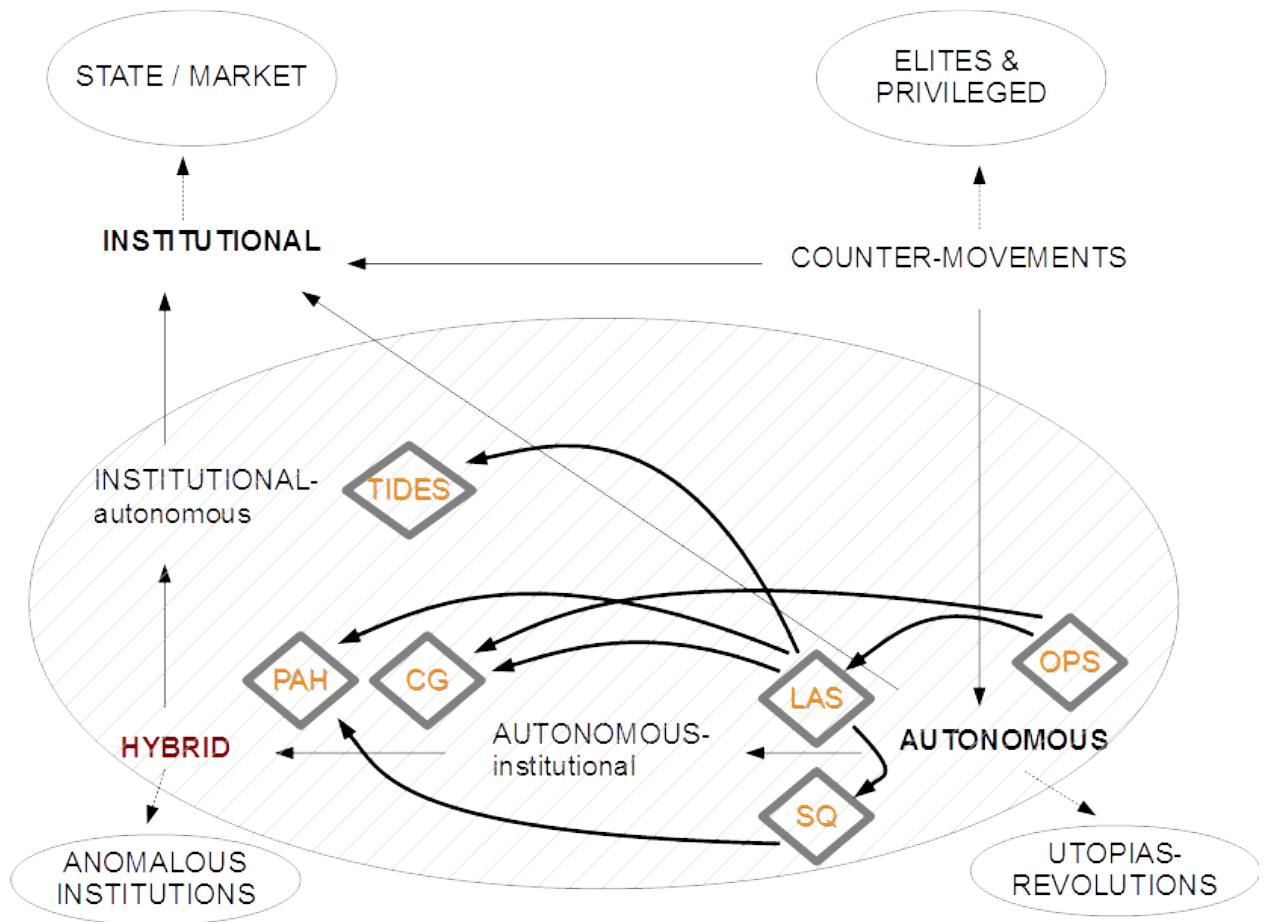
Elections in May 2014. One of the new-born political parties, *Podemos*, won 5 seats at the European Parliament, by articulating a straightforward opposition to the austerity and neoliberal policies. Since then, the upcoming electoral events have dominated debates among most of the 15M activists. In other words, the realm of institutional politics has again come to the foreground, and this recent scenario signals either the closing of the protest cycle of the autonomous orientation propagated by the 15M, or the entering of state institutions in order to implement some of the 15M demands. Given these developments, it is worth asking how the urban movements shared this hybrid identity and practice, as well as to what extent they were able to defy the urban neoliberal order in the metropolitan region of Madrid.

Urban spaces and struggles within the 15M

Across Europe, with intensifying neoliberalisation and the hegemony of global capital over the last three decades, urban movements have transformed significantly (Mayer 2012). Many urban organisations became entangled or neutralised in public-private partnerships, constrained by local austerity policies and the (limited) funding aimed more at the control of "dangerous" and marginalised classes than their inclusion. Autonomous and radical movements still persisted in some areas (cf. Shepard and Smithsimon 2011, Martínez 2013), but the scope and outcomes of their contention were far from challenging the powers that be. The alter-globalisation or Global Justice Movement at the beginning of the 2000s was loosely connected to some urban movements, and its counter-summits regularly would take over urban spaces, but mainly as a featured scenario for a battle ground (Scholl 2012).

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, popular unrest initially followed a similar path with the occupation of landmark urban squares. However, cities and urban problems now re-entered the core agenda of grassroots politics. Just like 15M as a whole developed 'hybrid autonomy' as outlined above, local initiatives tightly associated with the 15M did so as well. Scholars have adopted two major approaches to hybridisation, seeing it either as the mixture of global and local perspectives (Dhaliwal 2012) or as a merger of digital and spatial networks (Walliser 2013, Díaz and Candón 2014). Less attention has been paid to the hybridisation of the autonomous and institutional dimensions of urban movements (Souza 2006).

Six types of urban struggles are present within the 15M (all of them in Madrid, and many of them in other cities as well): 1) the occupation of public spaces, streets and central squares-plazas (OPS); 2) the organisation of local assemblies in the neighbourhoods (LAS); 3) the development of community gardens (CG); 4) new types of squatted houses and social centres (SQ); 5) a housing movement led by the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH); 6) the so called "tides" for the defence of public services and *commons* (TIDES). In what follows I will focus on their features as relating to their autonomy and institutional hybridisation. Graph 2 offers a synthesis of their differences and similarities.



Graph 2. Location and ties of six urban movements within the hybrid political space of the 15M. [OPS: Occupation of Public Spaces; LAS: Local Assemblies; CG: Community Gardens; SQ: Squatting of buildings; PAH: People Affected by Mortgages; TIDES: sectorial “tides” in public services. ‘AUTONOMOUS-institutional’ means that primary practice, identity and outcomes fall closer to the autonomous orientation while the ‘INSTITUTIONAL-autonomous’ category emphasises the opposite, a closeness to the institutional orientation.]

[1] OPS [Occupations of Public Spaces] were the starting point and spark of the whole 15M movement. Their radical autonomy exerted a strong influence on the groups and campaigns that formed subsequently. The occupied squares showed no evidence of state institutions' interference in their internal development. Assemblies, committees and working groups were able to self-manage most of their issues, although sometimes the police and municipal services interrupted or cancelled their activities. Their (infra)structures lasted for several weeks, far longer than initially expected. Their performance consisted of the creation of a counter-power or an anomalous institution while acknowledging that these could not last forever. At the same time, they had no intention of being mere 'temporal zones', since the activists wanted to make an impact in the political sphere at large, beyond the particular occupied spaces.

In Madrid there were a few and poorly attended calls to depart from the square and go to demonstrate in front of the parliamentary buildings, which cannot, however, be considered as institutional dimensions of the OPS. The occupation of *Puerta del Sol* (Madrid) and other central squares in different Spanish cities represented successful defiance of the authorities. They also spread the message of the feasibility and legitimation of civil disobedience tactics for creating deliberative fora in the public space. While assemblies as a form of direct democracy and deliberation were widely practiced in the Transition period (1975-1978), the technique has been very much enhanced and the manipulation attempted by political parties and partisan militants was very difficult (Corsín and Estalella 2013, Moreno 2013). The global justice movement and the autonomist movements may be considered the most significant precedents providing fruitful examples of working horizontally, without leaders and within a diverse range of contexts, social groups, and identities.

Regarding demonstrations in Madrid, between the spring and the fall of 2011, there was a huge number of *illegal* ones in the sense that the organisers neither informed the authorities of their intentions nor did they ask for permission –which is an additional sign of the autonomous orientation. This was not the case in most of the highly crowded marches, where due institutional arrangements were met. However, in both cases police repression was harsh and often ended up with numerous individuals beaten and arrested. Except for a few cases where demonstrators actively participated in clashes with the police, in general the great majority of participants in all the 15M events resisted peacefully in every situation of police-driven violence. The eviction of Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona was the most obvious example of this contentious interaction in which the police used extreme force and abused occupants.

[2] LAS [Local Assemblies]. Once the squares were voluntarily or forcibly evicted, the movement re-emerged in different neighbourhoods and municipalities. LAS also tended to meet in public squares and to install some infrastructures or information points, but not to camp or stay overnight. Many of these LAS created connective and alliance structures –which also declined after their first year, as happened in Madrid. Attendance was decreasing over the months and years, but many LAS remained active for more than three years. On the one hand, the OPS combined the centrality of the people’s assemblies with the creative appropriation and transformation of a (usually commercial or touristy) public space. On the other hand, LAS focused more on the local problems of the neighbourhood or city without being tied to a defensible and strong identity associated with a particular spot of the area where they met.

LAS again constituted an example of autonomous institutions, which possessed an even stronger counter-power outlook compared to the

OPS, because the former tended to (ideally) mirror the district institutional powers. In some case, these LAS started to interact frequently with the local authorities. This widened their institutional hybridity, although most of the LAS avoided co-optation and tried to stay away from political parties, with the exception of some that approached *Podemos* after 2014. LAS were also key actors in the support for the PAH and the sectorial tides as well as in the launching of CG and SQs initiated by their members. This entails that LAS evolved from their radical autonomy beginnings to share many of the features of the other struggles, in which they were involved -as members of the 15M network of alliances.

[3] CG [Community Gardens]. The case of the CG is a very special one in cities like Madrid because its sudden rise closely paralleled the 15M and many of CG members participated simultaneously in both movements. Before the 15M there were just a few autonomous CGs. In spite of many internal differences among them (not all the CGs were squatted as the result of taking over alien's vacant land, for example), their horizontality, self-management and social inclusivity connected immediately with the 15M call to autonomous politics. The interesting feature here is that most of the CG activists became rapidly coordinated and approached the municipal authorities in order to obtain recognition, stability and a regulatory frame. Their on a close connection with city hall while preserving their spaces of autonomy makes them different from other 15M groups and campaigns (Hernández 2014).

[4] SQ [Squatting] Regarding the squatters' movement, this has a long history for more than three decades in multiple Spanish cities (Adell and Martínez 2004). With just a few cases of legalisation (Martínez 2014), usually squats remained radically autonomous and outside of the law. However, the long duration and social acceptance

of many of them played in favour of their *anomalous* institutionalisation. They also became central hubs for wider networks of social movements. These observations apply more to the squatted social centres than to squatted houses, although they often coexisted in the same buildings and projects.

The OPS in the 15M obtained immediate support from many SQ activists. Active participants in the OPS and the LAS also launched their own initiatives of SQ in many neighbourhoods and cities –this was not limited to Madrid and Barcelona although most were concentrated here. Many of them rejected the imaginary and stigmas prevailing in the media about squatting and opted for sharing the *transversal* politics of the 15M. For instance, many of the new SQ called for press conferences in which mass media were invited, and activists expressed their will to negotiate and reach agreements with the local authorities. While most squatting of housing occurred by stealth, at the same time, the new housing movement led by the PAH also became involved in the public occupation of houses. Poor families, bank-owned properties, supportive media coverage and the demand for affordable rent should the negotiations open up, signalled a drastic turning point from the previous squatters' movement (see, for example, the case of the *Corrala Utopia* in Seville: Stelfox 2013, Granado 2014). The squatting of buildings, especially of those owned by banks, was widely applauded, and sparked regular media attention, which in many cases facilitated negotiations with the authorities -- instead of the quick and violent evictions which were the trend before. Even former radical-autonomous SQ respected the attitudes of the new squats or helped them to resist evictions. Therefore, a trend towards increasing hybrid institutionalisation within the squatters' movement was also the tool that released these

protest actions from their previous marginal identity (Martínez and García 2014).

[5] People affected by Mortgages [PAH] As mentioned above, the PAH was also involved in the squatting of buildings for housing purposes. Nevertheless, this was not its exclusive practice. Along with many other initiatives, the PAH represents a new housing struggle and one of the most significant public voices within the 15M. In its origin (2009), the PAH was a self-help organisation aiming at halting the evictions of people unable to pay their mortgages. They gathered people in order to peacefully prevent the police and judicial officers from kicking people out of their homes. These dramatic moments of civil disobedience were portrayed by the mass media in a way that tended to legitimate those actions. However, in parallel the PAH also tried to avoid that last resort of solidarity and opposition to the legal procedures by enrolling activists into negotiations with municipal governments and banks. The PAH offered legal aid, too. One of its most massive campaigns consisted in launching a citizen-initiated legislation that obtained 1.5 million signatures -although it was finally rejected through the Parliamentary process (Colau and Alemany 2012, Delclós 2013).

More than 200 groups of the PAH were formed across Spain. Their explicit campaign promoting the squatting of buildings owned by banks or state agencies while making clear their intention to pay affordable rents, turned into a strong challenge of governments and judges, especially given the soaring rates of unemployed and impoverished people. The success of many of PAH's radical-autonomous as well as institutional actions turned it into the most salient and effective organisation within the 15M. Even though PAH was not initially a pure 15M group as it was born independently in 2009, - but it joined DRY in its call for the first demonstration (Colau

and Alemany 2012). In a similar vein to what happened to the squatters' movement, the PAH experienced an intense and fruitful convergence with the 15M.

Compared to other urban struggles, the PAH has stood out for its ability to establish completely novel and strong networks of solidarity between people threatened by evictions and activists with many different backgrounds. It linked, for instance, migrants' associations, neighbourhood activism, political parties, squatters, students, lawyers, accountants, psychologists, etc. PAH differs from other manifestations of leaderless political culture (as disseminated by the more autonomous groups within 15M) in that its celebrated leadership, its official spokesperson, became the most visible head of a new electoral platform *Guanyem Barcelona*, first, and *Barcelona en Comú*, later on. In January 2015, the PAH showed a banner on its website with the figures of avoided evictions (1,135) and people rehoused (1,180), many of them in more than 20 squatted buildings (Colau and Alemany 2014).

[6] TIDES [Sectorial Tides]. The defence of public services under threat of being privatised or already commodified and deteriorated in various forms, engendered many revolts from inside the state institutions or public companies, and quickly gained public support from outside. These services started to be redefined as 'urban commons' in order to emphasise both the essential rights that should shape them institutionally and the required involvement of citizens in their management, rather than just using them as mere clients or consumers.

The so-called "white tide" within the public health system has been the most successful with its legal opposition to the privatisation of hospitals in Madrid (and elsewhere). The highest regional authority,

the Secretary of Health, stepped down when his plan was defeated in court (Sánchez 2013). Broad coalitions were formed in all the TIDES (workers and professionals in different ranks, labour unions, workers' assemblies, external associations and residents, 15M groups and activists, etc.), which often entailed a very unstable balance of power. The autonomy of each tide was always under strong pressure, especially in terms of showing different banners, flags and organisational allegiances at their continuous demonstrations as well as at the institutional settings for negotiation with the authorities.

In particular, some labour unions tried to lead the assemblies, the pace of the mobilisations and the meetings with the authorities. In terms of repertoires, two "illegal" public consultations against the privatisation of the water supply and of six hospitals in Madrid represented extraordinary examples of how determined the activists were to create alternative political institutions and autonomous mechanisms in order to influence the municipal and regional authorities. Both were very successful in terms of signatures collected (165,000 and 1,082,300 *votes*, respectively) and they were also combined with many other institutional (legal trials, meetings with political representatives, participation in municipal plenums, etc.) and non-institutional actions (demonstrations, sit-ins in public roads, human chains around hospitals, organised disobedience to facilitate health services to undocumented migrants, etc.).

The "green tides" in primary and secondary schools, or similar initiatives by the the universities' and research institutes' staff, as well as the "black tide" attempted by workers in public administration had a more modest trajectory, less impact, and more fragile connection to the 15M in spite of the efforts of many LAS or 15M activists.

What responses to the neoliberal violence?

In general, all who claim to be part or be inspired by the 15M shared a broad commitment to peaceful means of protest. Over the last decades, in the Spanish context every direct action of protest involving riots, clashes with the police, or the destruction of urban furniture, has rapidly been framed by the political and media elites as either plain or low-intensity “terrorism”. The conflict between the Spanish state and the Basque separatist armed group ETA provided grounds to divide the whole arena of politics, at the state level, into “violent militants” (labelled as “terrorists”) and “non-violent demonstrators” (labelled as “democrats”). Both, social-democratic and conservative governments enacted severe anti-terrorist laws and harsh police procedures, which were often applied to the repression of all kind of social movements and, above all, to the radical and autonomous ones (Fernández and Ubasart 2008, Fernández 2009). Police repression and arrests in demonstrations, were thus very common when any disruption of the motorised traffic or any overdue licensed time to demonstrate would be involved.

Those highly polarised views around legitimate violence employed by protesters remarkably constrained the movements’ options, even though ETA declared a cease fire in 2010 and confirmed it in 2011. In this context, the 15M gained wide social support, recognition and legitimation on the basis of its explicit embrace of non-violent means of protest -which was not always the case in some autonomist traditions. And, conversely, this contrasted with the widespread anger that the increasing police violence generated. The latter was a typical reaction and legacy of the most veteran autonomists, thus strong

anti-repressive alert campaigns were also effectively conducted within the 15M.

Three events were of particular relevance with respect to the role of violence for the legitimacy of the 15M:

- 1) In Barcelona, June 15, 2011, some politicians, while walking in the Catalanian Parliament, were insulted, spat on and jostled by activists. Three years later, in spite of strong criminalisation by the media, the activists were finally acquitted.
- 2) On March 29, 2012, many 15M groups were involved in the nationwide general strike. The strike was launched jointly by the two major and most of the minor labour unions. The pickets, sabotages and riots that occurred in many places were partially attributed to the 15M. Dozens of activists were detained and some even sentenced to jail terms.
- 3) A call to demonstrate in front of the Central Parliament in Madrid on September 25, 2012, warned potential participants that violent confrontations with the police might occur since some groups threatened to get access to Parliament by any means possible. Police violently dissolved the demonstration after a few hours.

These and other violent episodes involved 15M activists as apparent promoters. The so-called "*escraches*" are another example. With this method, individual politicians, who were against reforming the Spanish mortgage law, have been identified and publicly shamed (PAH 2014). Such actions engendered some internal splits and slightly undermined the public legitimacy of the movement. However, they remained isolated cases so that the movement did not lose the broad support already gained. Moreover, given the continuing abuses by the

police, especially in some dramatic cases of evictions of residents from their homes (<http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com>), and the rapid decline of the terrorism frame, the public was more prone to back intense and risky forms of direct action, including violent resistance to the police. This was evident in the street battles that occurred in January 2014 in the city of Burgos. The spark that set off these riots was ignited by the urban renewal of a street in a working class neighbourhood within a context of local corruption and severe cuts in social programmes. Instead of radical youngsters, residents of different age and political backgrounds took part in the mobilisations and also in the wave of solidarity with those arrested. A progressive current of public opinion thus justified the residents' violent resistance beyond the boundaries of the local conflict (López 2014).

More recently, the riots that occurred at the end of the Marches for Dignity in March 2014 were somewhat less controversial among the 15M supporters than previous ones (Al-khimiya 2014). Some international precedents such as the confrontations in Istanbul around Gezi Park and those in Rio de Janeiro (*Movimento Passe Livre*) might have provided more justification for the groups of young people who fought back the police, set up barricades and smashed the windows of banks. The political authorities were also accused of abusive intervention in and disruption of a highly successful and peaceful demonstration with the only aim of labelling protesters as violent people (DISO Press 2014).

My analysis thus indicates that physical violence had not been absent from the responses performed by the 15M to the neoliberal order, although riots and clashes have hardly been frequent or significant in the development of this protest wave. On the contrary, the intense state repression over 15M activists has notoriously backed the imposition of the austerity measures. In spite of their continuation at

the state level, urban movements within the 15M have been able to disclose and contest some of their local manifestations by usually resorting to peaceful means of protest.

Conclusions

Social movements evolve through periods of rise and decline. The most primary success of a movement is its continuation over time and making its claims visible to the surrounding society. The attraction of participants to its activities of protest, mobilisation and organisation, and, not least, the social support obtained and reputation achieved among bystander publics may also be seen as positive outcomes. Moreover, the persistent challenge to social forms of domination and inequality is, in my view, the most crucial benefit provided by those movements who aspire to achieve political influence without taking state power (Scott 1990, 2012; Viejo 2007: 34).

Most state and social institutions are indeed the result of historic anti-institutional and institutionalising forces of social movements. Thus, we can assume that autonomous and radical movements of the past played a creative role in the origin of present institutions. However, what my perspective of explaining social movements provides is less a focus on the key role of the state and the interactions between the state and the movements, but rather a focus on all the interactions, actors and contexts involved in the institutional creation. This implies the inclusion of hybrid dynamics, as a combination of autonomous and institutional practices, into the picture.

Are autonomous and radical urban movements old-fashioned and inefficient unless they become more like hybrids in terms of organisational coalitions, protest repertoires and institutional

capacities? I do not believe so. Rather, my analysis of the urban movements within the 15M has revealed a relatively virtuous political space for both autonomous and hybrid movements in which they can feed back on each other in a fruitful manner. That is to say, in being able to develop antagonist politics, empowering those at the bottom of the social structure, spreading a critical politicisation of the private everyday as well as public aspects of social life, they effectively challenge the reproduction of the dominant elites and achieve substantial changes in the capitalist regimes of production, consumption and governance. Instead of just counter-posing autonomous to institutional ways of action, mirroring the old disputes between reform and revolution, the distinction of hybrid forms urges us to focus on the relationships between hybrids and state institutions, on the one hand, and hybrids and autonomous struggles, on the other. Hybrid organisations, campaigns and means of protest may be the desirable and attainable ways of materialising many of the autonomous counter-powers, anomalous institutions, or movement inter-faces upheld by autonomous activists –and not only in the absence of a revolution but also in post-revolutionary contexts in order to deal with unavoidable conflicts.

The term ‘hybridity’ conveys meanings of mixture, mutual contamination, interdependence, flexibility, etc. It can be applied to multiple dimensions of social movements, such as their double-track regarding the local and global scales of their manifestation, and the physical and electronic spheres of communication, for example. My approach to the urban struggles within the 15M shows more specific characteristics. First, the most autonomous cases such as the OPS, LAS and SQ were either the *origin* of ulterior forms of the movement, or a continuous source of identity and symbolic reference to follow by other struggles, movements and even new political parties. In terms

of 'origin', the creation of LAS alongside many working groups and independent committees and campaigns was decided and often organised first at the OPS or in close engagement with the activists running the OPS. More than SQ itself, the fight against the evictions of houses and the underlying neoliberal policies that caused them became a core claim in the following critical discourses about national politics. The advanced techniques of conducting assemblies, deliberation and other organisational and protest skills which were adopted by all the 15M movements can easily be traced back to the long experience developed within the SQ and other autonomous movements.

Second, the occasional or tactical institutional orientation of two of the most autonomous forms (LAS and SQ) was due to their close connections to wider urban movements (such as the PAH, the TIDES and CG). The shifts that the former experienced were positive to amplify their own struggles for legitimisation, recruitment and self-reproduction, not the least to fulfil some of their goals and to create durable local impacts in urban affairs. None of these organisations forced others to participate in equal terms in the urban movements they were renewing thanks to the 15M. Their respective autonomy but also their mutual respect and aid gave birth to the strong hybridity that we saw at the very core of the 15M.

Third, a deep institutional involvement does not necessarily lead to higher impact. The green tide (education) emerged from a similar institutional cradle as the white tide (health), but they performed very differently in terms of outcomes. The neoliberal attacks to public services in the metropolitan region of Madrid were more successfully halted by the white tide than by the green one. While both relied on massive mobilisations and increasing hybridity, the green tide was weaker and less innovative when facing a low intensity process of

cuts and privatisations –compared to the astonishing plan to privatise most of the hospitals at once. The CG learned from the experience of the squatters’ movement and very quickly opted for institutional agreements, as they were helped by the more institutionalised federation of neighbourhood associations that guaranteed them longer duration and legal protection for their projects. During the process of those negotiations, most of the CGs autonomously self-managed the lots, resisted and had a significant impact in the daily lives of the communities where they were settled. Their consistent, unified and well planned institutional strategy also gained unexpected concessions from the municipality. Although they directly questioned the city growth model and the speculation with urban land, real estate developers and authorities might not feel threatened by them in a period of declining profits in the construction business. The PAH was born as an autonomous organisation as well, even before the 15M. However, their struggle was initially more in direct opposition with the institutions, and less dedicated to create new institutions, though this forced them to face state institutions in a creative way as well. Pushing for alternative legislation, exhausting negotiations with every kind of stakeholders and, finally, living communities in the occupied buildings for hosting the evicted families paved an exemplary hybrid path for the rest of the 15M. Their contestation of neoliberal housing policies and the public bailout of banks who owned many of the squatted buildings was a more direct one, although it met ebbs and flows of success.

Civil disobedience thus became a strong connection thread between all the 15M initiatives, even for those with a more institutional outlook such as those in hospitals and schools. While riots were not significant in the development of the 15M, institutional violence and repression of activists escalated to a considerable degree –even with the

enactment of new criminal legislation aimed at punishing activism. This can be interpreted as the elites' counter-response to the challenges that the movements expressed while questioning neoliberal politics. OPS criticised the dominant commodification and de-politicisation of public spaces. CG and SQ battled against the vacancy created by the long term processes of urban speculation due to widely de-regulated real estate markets and the absence of social housing policies. The PAH strived for the rights of those suddenly unemployed, impoverished and homeless in contrast to the huge privileges enjoyed by the banks according to the current regulation of mortgages and the policies that bailed them out. The TIDES opposed the cuts and the privatisation programmes on key public services such as health and education. The source and reproduction of autonomous politics has been a strong component in this process of movement networking, but it was equally fed by simultaneous institutional practices and struggles. As the above cases show, movements in the urban realm have occupied a central political space in the 15M movement in general, which was motivated by the more systematic and regime crisis.

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