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'We are not on Facebook, we are on the streets!': The Harvesting of Indignation

Because we are more humane. Because we are more decent.
Because we are more respectable. Because we are more.
YouTube video of Democracia Real Ya promoting the 15th of May 2011 demonstration[1]

While the world was still under the spell of the Arab Spring, a new social movement, inspired by the events taking place in Tunisia and Egypt, made its tumultuous appearance in debt-stricken Europe. Spain, one of the European countries worst affected by the global economic crisis, became the first site in the West to adopt the 'Tahrir model' of popular protest, with its combination of social media and mass sit-ins. Beginning on the 15th of May 2011 (known in Spain as 15-M), the day on which the first demonstrations were called in 58 Spanish cities, it was a '#revolution' or, better, a '#spanishrevolution' in '#sol', as its supporters were to celebrate it in the language of Twitter hashtags. After the demonstrations, a handful of protesters occupied Puerta del Sol in central Madrid. Refusing to leave, they were soon joined by thousands of others summoned through the social media.

The protesters gathered in central Madrid, and soon in tens of cities across Spain, came to be known as the 'indignados', or the indignants, from the booklet *Indignez vous!* (2010) authored by the nonagenarian French politician Stephane Hessel, who by calling on young people to rise up against economic injustice had inspired some of the initiators of the movement. Rejecting any Left/Right identification, they announced that they did not feel represented by existing parties and trade unions and were opting instead for a form of participatory democracy, or 'democracy 2.0', using Facebook and Twitter. 'Nobody expects the #spanishrevolution' proclaimed one sign held by a protester, wearing a Guy Fawkes mask from the film *V for Vendetta*, introducing a slogan that was to be re-tweeted and reposted hundreds of times. But why was nobody expecting

it? Where was the 'indignation' hiding before it came into public view in the cities of Spain? And what was the role of social media in bringing this indignation into view?

In this chapter I discuss the role of social media in the mobilisation of the Spanish indignados. I will show how social media contributed to fashioning a choreography of assembly, resembling a 'harvesting of indignation', the physical and symbolic concentration of a constituency, united by a common sense of victimhood and indignation around public squares like Puerta del Sol, acting as a symbol of the 'people'. Social media like Facebook and Twitter contributed to transforming individual sentiments of anger into a collective identity animated by a desire to take back the streets after years of demobilisation. The emotional tension that underscored this choreography was expressed in slogans like 'take to the streets' and 'we are not on Facebook, we are on the streets', reflecting a widespread desire to break out of a situation of isolation and passivity characterising Spanish society in the midst of the crisis.

The indignados or 15-M movement has often been described by its own participants using the imaginary of networks. For example, in her book *Nosotros los Indignados* (2011), Klaudia Álvarez, the communication coordinator of Democracia Real Ya, portrays it as a 'cerebro en red' (networked brain) made up of 'inteligencias conectadas' (connected intelligences) (Álvarez, 2011: 12). Castells himself, in a speech delivered at the protest camp in Plaza de Catalunya in Barcelona, described the movement as a form of resistance against the 'manipulation of brains',[2] and presented the emergence of the indignados as made possible by the greater scope for grassroots organisation available in the contemporary system of 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009).

As stated in Chapter 1, I am suspicious of this cognitivist understanding of social movements as networks of brains, and my aim here is to recuperate a sense of the role of the body and emotions in the process of contemporary mobilisation. In the specific case of the indignados movement, it is precisely the emotion of 'indignation' that deserves to become the focus of analysis. Interestingly, the movement is also described by its own participants as 'un estado de animo' (an emotional state), as seen in the collective experience of enthusiasm throughout the 'acampadas' (the protest camps). But how was this emotion harnessed and triggered by the movement's organisers?

OF ALCOHOLIC GATHERINGS AND ILLEGAL DOWNLOADS

To understand the rise of the indignados movement and the reasons for the high level of participation it attracted we need to take into account the exceptional gravity of the economic situation in Spain at the time. Alongside Portugal, Italy, Ireland and Greece, Spain was one of the 'PIIGS',[3] to use the infamous label applied by financial analysts to those European countries whose sovereign debt ratings plunged in the wake of the financial crisis of 2007–8. Of the national economic indicators, the most staggering one in the case of Spain is youth unemployment: at 41 per cent in 2010 and topping over 47 per cent in the third quarter of 2011 (Eurostat, 2011), the highest in Europe. Yet, as always happens with social movements, these grievances alone cannot explain the appearance of the indignados (Buechler, 2000). Why, otherwise, did the Spanish people not mobilise before the 15th of May 2011, given that such grievances were to a great extent there already?

Asking the activists who participated in the 15-M movement the reasons for the earlier lack of mobilisation, one often gets in response an array of adjectives like 'pasmaos' (stoned), 'anestetisados' (anaesthetised), 'atontados' (stupified), 'apalancados' (paralysed) – all terms conveying the sense of a society, and its youth in particular, incapable of voicing its discontent at the effects of the economic crisis. My interviewees almost invariably described Spain as a country in which people were trying to forget their troubles by indulging in the pleasures of Spanish nightlife and its *bar de tapas*.[4]

This widespread resignation must also be attributed largely to the incapacity of the existing institutions and organisations to become a focal point in the mobilisation of emerging popular demands. The Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) of José Luiz Zapatero embraced the neoliberal response to the crisis, cutting public spending, and reducing labour rights. The trade unions, for their part, were accused of offering only a timid response to the government's austerity plans, given their traditional closeness to the Socialists. While in Greece in 2010, ten general strikes took place, in Spain there was just one, and even that had limited impact. Apart from the 'institutional Left' of parties and trade unions, the radical grassroots groups stemming from the anti-globalisation movement also seemed to be going through a phase of latency. Despite such lows, legally and illegally occupied social centres like the Tabacalera, the Patio Maravillas, and Casablanca in Madrid, maintained their role as outposts of alternative culture and sociability and would come to

constitute an important resource in sustaining the occupation of Puerta del Sol.

Spain is well known the world over for its thriving street life. Yet in the period before the blossoming of the indignados movement, the country had been subjected to an intense sanitisation of public space, inspired by a 'fear of crowds', which affected both political and social gatherings in public space. Sofia de Roa, a 32-year-old journalist active in the 15-M movement and a member of the organisation Estado del Malestar (Badfare State), recounts how the government and the mass media had begun to stigmatise any outbreak of protest in public space:

> Before the protests of the 15-M, there was a strike by workers on the Metro (the underground railway system) here in Madrid. And newspapers and TV presented them like criminals, just because they were using their right to protest. And the same happened with air-traffic control workers. Independently of what you think of a certain struggle ... the government responded by issuing a decree on protests sending a message to society to be careful about protesting. The general sense was that if you protested you must be a bit crazy. And many progressive people were also disillusioned, because in the past there were a lot of protests which didn't achieve anything.

This stigmatisation of public gatherings also affected subcultural practices of youth sociability, as exemplified by the government's campaign against the 'botellon'. The botellon – literally 'great bottle' – is an outdoor gathering in which large groups of young people spend the night in public squares, drinking, chatting and listening to music (Baigorri and Fernández, 2004). The practice emerged in the 1980s among students and young people wanting to avoid the high costs of 'legitimate' establishments. Its increasing popularity in the 2000s led to the creation of national and regional laws against the botellon. In response, in 2006 young people coordinated on the web to organise a number of 'macro-botellones' which attracted thousands of participants. The organisers made it clear that they saw the banning of botellones not simply as a measure against 'vandalism', as the government had it, but as a veiled attack on people's freedom of assembly and use of public space.

In the face of this stigmatisation of public gatherings, in the months before the 15-M, a glimmer of hope for radicals came from a series of online campaigns protesting against restrictions

on so-called 'internet freedom'. The Zapatero's government 'Ley Sinde' – a law aimed at curtailing file-sharing in a country which had been dubbed a piracy paradise by media-industry lobbyists[5] – angered many digital activists, who organised online to oppose the approval of the law. The campaign received a boost after US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks revealed that the Spanish government was submitting to pressure from American majors. Seeing this as a betrayal of the people's mandate, Spanish activists initiated Twitter feeds with the hashtags #leysinde and #redresiste (the Net resists) and #nolesvotes (don't vote for them), to contest the approval of the law. Various blogs and popular download websites like Cinetube[6] and Series Yonkis[7] blackened their pages in protest. Profile pictures on Twitter and Facebook were changed to an image designed by the cartoonist Eneko, representing the internet as an endangered dove.

After being defeated in the Senate in December 2010, the law was finally approved in February 2011. In response, a group of activists including Ricardo Galli, professor at the Balearic Islands University, and Carlos Sanchez Almeida, known in Spain as the 'hackers' lawyer', set up the website nolesvotes.com. On the 16th of February they launched a manifesto asking people not to vote for those parties who had approved the Ley Sinde in the upcoming local elections scheduled for the 22nd of May. In a note posted on the blog of the lawyer Javier de la Cueva, one of the initiators of the campaign, the group proposed to 'develop ... citizens' initiatives based on the self-organisation of independent and reproducible territorial cells'. The note concluded on a techno-utopian note, claiming that 'the existence of the internet makes traditional representation unnecessary: a citizen can already represent himself without utilizing an alien voice'.[8] Hundreds of local groups coordinated through Google groups were created to spread the campaign locally, targeting specific candidates from the 'traitor parties', and the 'No les votes' campaign soon went beyond the single issue of 'internet freedom'. A Google map appeared on its website, documenting several cases of corruption, and the group circulated pictures accusing the two main Spanish parties of being united in resisting transparency and in maintaining their privileges.

The 'No les votes' campaign remained at the level of a diffuse online contestation and never managed to materialise into street demonstrations (Sampedro and Haro, 2011: 165). Nevertheless, around the time of its unfolding, a number of other campaigns were emerging emphasising the importance of re-appropriating public

space, and which also came to influence the rise of the indignados: Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth without Future), Estado de Malestar (Badfare State), Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform for Mortgage Victims) and Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now).

Juventud Sin Futuro (JSF) was a radical student and youth movement coalition incorporating leftist activists of different ideologies. On its website it described itself as an organisation of 'young people, affected by unemployment and precarious jobs' and rallied behind the slogan 'sin curro, sin casa, sin miedo' (without a job, without a home, without fear).[9] Its novelty stemmed from its innovative use of social media like Twitter and Facebook as vehicles for mobilisation. At the same time the group also maintained a strong local footing. As Segundo Gonzales, a member of the group, explains: 'we always used social media, but we also always had a plan of physical action, because we are an organisation with some tradition and are rooted in different universities across the country'. JSF organised a demonstration on the 7th of April which, while attended by only a few thousand, would be seen in retrospect as an important 'dry run' for the 15th of May protests.

Not as ideologically explicit as JSF, but still recognisably 'progressive' in its discourse and imagery, was Estado de Malestar,[10] a group of activists campaigning against unemployment and cuts in public services. Since early 2011, Estado de Malestar had been staging protest performances every Friday in Plaza Callao and

Figure 3.1 The 'thumb down' logo of Estado de Malestar.

Puerta del Sol in central Madrid, and in 30 other Spanish cities. However, as Sofia de Roa admits, 'our Friday protests had only had a limited degree of success. People would pass by and briefly look with curiosity or disdain and just move on.' This group also focused on the use of social media in its communications – its very logo took the form of a Facebook 'thumb up' reversed into a 'thumb down' and accompanied by the words 'no me gusta' (I don't like it), and all its performances would be uploaded regularly on YouTube.

Less innovative in terms of its communications was the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca[11] (PAH), a group founded in February 2009 to defend people's right to housing and to protest against the eviction of 'mortgage victims'. PAH constituted an important link with the tradition of the 13-M housing rights movement, which in 2006 (from May 13th and through to June) had staged a series of sit-ins in public squares organised through SMS and emails (Sampedro and Haro, 2011: 159). While all these campaigns and organisations played an important role in the preparation of the 15-M protests, the group which gained most prominence was 'Democracia Real Ya'[12] (DRY), originally established online to campaign against austerity and corruption. Democracia Real Ya, the last actor to appear on the activist scene, would also be the one which came to act as focal point in the process of mobilising the indignados movement.

'WE ARE NORMAL, COMMON PEOPLE'

> We are like you: people who get up every morning to study, work or find a job, people who have family and friends. People who work hard every day to provide a better future for those around us. Some of us consider ourselves progressive, others conservative. Some of us are believers, some not. Some of us have clearly defined ideologies, others are apolitical, but we are all concerned and angry about the political, economic, and social outlook which we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless, without a voice. This situation has become normal, a daily suffering, without hope. But if we join forces, we can change it. It's time to change things, time to build a better society *together*.[13]

This excerpt from the manifesto of Democracia Real Ya, published on the group's Facebook page, illustrates well the collective identity which came to define its online campaigning. Claiming to transcend the Left-Right spectrum, DRY's stated intention was to represent all those people who regardless of their political beliefs and lifestyles were affected by the ravages of the economic crisis and the politics of austerity imposed by Zapatero's government. Through the inclusivity, or some might say vagueness, of its identity, DRY would in the months before 15-M become an attractor for thousands of largely unpoliticised young people, creating a platform of emotional condensation to transform individual experiences of frustration and indignation into a collective political passion.

The initial nucleus of Democracia Real Ya was the result of an online encounter between two young people: 26-year-old Fabio Gandara and 23-year-old Pablo Gallego. Both Gandara and Gallego fell into Paul Mason's category of 'graduates without a future' (Mason 2012). Gandara had specialised in public law but after working for a time at a famous legal firm in Barcelona had been laid off. He had some minor activist experience having attended the European Social Forum in Paris in 2003 and then joined in the spontaneous protests against the ruling Partido Popular of José María Aznar after the Madrid bombing of March 2004. Pablo Gallego, a fresh graduate from the business school of Cadiz University, was without prior activist experience. He was motivated to engage in organising by his first-hand experience of the dire state of the Spanish job market. 'I realised that things were very bad, and there was no solution to anything', he explains.

The story of the emergence of Democracia Real Ya is the story of two individual manifestos, both published online months before the indignados movement would materialise in the streets. In October 2010, Fabio Gandara published his own manifesto in a Facebook group called 'Yo soy un/a joven español/a que quiere luchar por su futuro'[14] (I am a young Spaniard who wants to fight for his future), which later took the name of Juventud en Accion[15] (Youth in Action). 'This is not a movement of the Left or of the Right. We do not adhere to any theoretical groupuscule, be it Marxist, neo-Leninist, or anarchist. We are *simply* young people', proclaimed Gandara in the manifesto.[16] Although it managed to attract only a handful of signatories at the time, the manifesto already pre-figured in its tone and ingenuity the post-ideological refusal of Left and Right identifications which was to be a key feature of Democracia Real Ya. Unaware of Gandara's manifesto, in early 2011, Pablo Gallego published his own on his personal blog. 'A May '68 in Spain is possible' was the opening line of his 'Manifiesto Juventud' (Youth manifesto).[17] In simple almost amateurish language, the

manifesto called on young Spaniards to break out of their state of passivity, to fight against corruption, a stalled two-party system, and trade unions by and large subservient to the ruling Socialist Party. Gandara came across Gallego's manifesto and began chatting with him online. Together they decided to set up a new Facebook group called 'Plataforma de coordinación de grupos pro-movilización ciudadana'[18] (platform for the coordination of groups for a civic mobilisation).

'Initially we were few people, me, Pablo and another person', recounts Gandara. 'Then bit by bit, people involved in different movements, from the internet movement to the student movement, started joining our forum.' In this phase the group organised exclusively online using the Facebook chat service as its means of coordination. As Gandara explains, the strategy agreed within the group was to 'use the power of the internet and the structure of the web to organise ourselves at the state level and develop a civic mobilisation for mass protest in the whole of Spain'. 'I initially had a leading role (voz cantante) in the group', explains Gandara, scrupulously adding that 'there was no administrator who had an exhaustive role. There was a debate every time a decision had to be taken.'

Once the group managed to attract more people, they began 'doing brainstorms, noting specific ideas, or slogans, and we would discuss what was the specific social and political change that we were asking for'. During chat sessions on Facebook the slogan 'Democracia Real Ya: no somos mercancia en manos de politicos y banqueros' (Real Democracy Now: we are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers) was coined and later came to be adopted as the group's name. Then, a 'bombarding work' began, as Gandara goes on to recount:

> We would enter internet forums of social and political discussion to see what they were saying in that group and to comment on what they were saying and inviting people to participate and adding comments to Facebook groups, and posting on profiles of any kind and sending emails to associations and NGOs and political groups and telling them a bit about this idea.

As testified by its emphasis on openness to new members, the identity of the group centred on its techno-libertarian emphasis on the possibilities of participatory democracy offered by the web,

of the kind that had previously been invoked by the 'No les votes' campaign. But the group also strived to avoid being pigeon-holed as 'political', constantly emphasising its 'civic' character. For this reason, as Gallego explains, in all the group's communications words which might sound 'too political' or 'too ideological' would be studiously avoided, and substituted by a more colloquial language, such as those typical of Facebook status messages. For Gallego the 'secret of DRY's success was the use of euphemisms':

> A euphemism [for example] is to say that those at the bottom are against those at the top, instead of talking about class struggle. You are saying the same ... but you are not scaring people. The use of a new language has been fundamental to the movement's success ... At a moment when the citizenry is highly individualized and vulnerable in the face of the system it is a way to create an aggregate of people united not because of an ideological affinity, but by a protest affinity.

The same kind of anti-ideological spirit also animated the design of the group's website and publicity material. The main colour used as a background both in the website and in its publicity was a politically neutral yellow. This tint, similar to the one used in the public communications of the Spanish state, was the same as that adopted by Estado de Malestar and Juventud Sin Futuro, in an attempt to escape tight ideological identifications. A similar style characterised the group's logo, which carried only the organisation's name under 'DRY' in big letters. Written in a stencil font, the logo softly echoed the subversive language of graffiti and street art, thus giving the group's identity a youthful while studiously unobtrusive creative edge.

The online branding of the group, with its almost obsessive focus on inclusivity, registered its desire to move away from the antagonistic subcultural identity of the anti-globalisation movement and of the radical Left more generally. Aitor Tinoco, a key DRY organiser in Barcelona, speaks proudly of the fact that 'we were able to abandon flags and ideologies and talk about concrete problems to mobilise the citizenry'. While in some quarters this post-ideological approach earned DRY accusations of 'political childishness', it was also arguably precisely what allowed the group and its Facebook page to become 'a place to go beyond', as Sofia de Roa puts it.

Figure 3.2 The youthful logo of *Democracia Real Ya*.

While eschewing a clear ideological orientation, DRY owed the coherence of its identity to a direct appeal to the people against the system – a move which deeply resonates with Ernesto Laclau's description of populism as the construction of a popular unity against distant and corrupt institutions (Laclau, 2005). The clearest illustration of this orientation is offered by a YouTube video used to launch the demonstration on the 15th of May. At its centre stands a chessboard on which a standard set of black pieces is overwhelmed by a mass of white pawns. This was accompanied by a series of flashing captions which, after listing a series of grievances about corruption and unemployment, affirmed in Spanish: 'because we are more humane, because we are more decent, because we are respectable', ending with 'because we are more'.[19] This majoritarian orientation, clearly visible in this video as in all the communication of DRY, constantly highlighted the separation between 'politicians and bankers' and the 'common people', as illustrated by a scathing message posted on the Facebook page on the 3rd of April: 'thieving politicians and bankers remember that you are nothing and will never be anything without the people!'

Seeing in the campaign an opportunity to overcome division and inertia, different groups eventually decided to put their weight behind the 15-M call launched by DRY. The call was eventually supported by thousands of individual internet users and also by 200 civil society organisations, including well-established groups like the anti-globalisation group ATTAC and the environmental NGO Ecologistas en Accion (but not trade unions).

'REVOLUTION BEGINS ON THE 15TH OF MAY'

Besides being employed in the construction of a common identity, at the inception of the 15-M movement social media were also used as a means of generating an *emotional impetus* towards the protest, by firing up people's enthusiasm and constructing a contagious sense of anticipation for the upcoming event. 'The most important thing about these new tools was to give people an *ilusion*', Fabio Gandara explains, 'an *ilusion* that we could change things'. Interestingly, the word 'ilusion' in Spanish has a double meaning, the most immediate one being 'hope', the second one 'illusion'. This ambiguity captures well the way in which the DRY activists motivated prospective participants by putting forward a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy about the success of the demonstrations. Since the opening of the Facebook page in early March 2011, two months before the protests, organisers had worked hard to give the impression that the protests were going to be 'huge'. Despite the scarce resources they had at their disposal, and shielded behind the anonymity of the collective name of their Facebook group, they eventually managed to trigger a mood of collective euphoria among the page's users.

The page became a site for the accumulation of an emotional energy (Jasper, 2011), capable of motivating people to make the 'jump to the streets' (salto a la calle) and overcome their isolation and passivity. A cartoon published by the popular satirical magazine *El Jueves* in support of DRY a few days before the 15th of May illustrated the imaginary which underscored this operation. It depicts an overweight man, his eyes glued to a computer screen, in a sort of social media adaptation of the stereotype of the 'couch potato'. Instead of TV it is the internet which feeds his addiction. 'I am on Second Life' – says the character in the balloon – 'I go to many demonstrations'.[20] Against this perception of a widespread apathy, it is significant that the campaign adopted the simple but evocative slogan 'Toma la calle!' (take to the streets). Similarly to what had happened with the *shabab-al-Facebook* in Egypt, young internet-connected Spaniards were summoned to transform themselves from a secluded Facebook youth into a politically active street youth.

Just a few days after the opening of the Facebook page, the admins were already launching boastful messages like 'LA REVOLUCION EMPIEZA EL 15 DE MAYO'[21] (revolution begins on the 15th of May) and 'EL 15 DE MAYO ES NUESTRO DIA!' (15th of May is our day!). Almost every day they would report on the increasing numbers of supporters. Here are some of the examples of the

motivational messages conveyed: 'Menos de 48 horas despues ... Ya somos 500!!!' (After less than 48 hours ... we are already 500!!!). 'En menos de 4 dias ya somos mas de 1,000!! Sigamos creciendo!' (Less than 4 days in and we are already 1,000. Let's keep growing!') 'Vamos a por los 10.000!!' (We are reaching 10,000 people). The increase in support – though nowhere near as momentous as it had been with the Kullena Khaled Said page discussed in Chapter 2 – was invariably celebrated by the page admins as a clear indication of a high turnout in the upcoming demonstrations. 'Esto va a ser algo grande' (This is gonna be big) wrote the admin on March 27th. Status messages abounded in exclamation marks and 'smilies', displaying an exuberance which proved very effective in grabbing users' attention and building up their motivation to act.

The admins skilfully exploited the interactive features of Facebook, striving to 'give people the impression that thanks to these instruments people could participate directly' in public affairs, in the same direct way in which they could post a message or a picture, as Fabio Gandara explains. They presented their group as being completely spontaneous and leaderless, and continuously restated that 'it was open to the participation of all and all those who want to get involved'. Status messages posted on the page constantly invited participants to help with the mobilising efforts by sharing the page and inviting their friends to 'like' it. 'Invita a todos tus amigos a la pagina. El 15 de mayo la calle tiene que ser nuestra' (invite all your friends to join the page. On the 15th of May the streets have to be ours) pleaded the second status message posted. 'Nos esta cuestando llegar a los 11.000 ... no puede ser hay que difundir!' (It is costing us to get to 11,000 ... it's not possible ... we need to reach out!) was one exclamation during the second week of the page's existence, when the growth in membership seemed to be slowing down.

Tens or hundreds of comments would follow each of these status updates, sometimes complimenting the admins, more rarely criticising them, almost always contributing to the collective sense of exaltation. As Wael Ghonim had done with the Khaled Said page, the DRY admins spent a lot of time acknowledging and replying to the comments, so as to sustain the impression that users were taking part in an interactive conversation rather than simply 'liking' the content fed to them. Moreover, they repeatedly asked users to contribute content to the page in the form of texts, pictures and videos. For example, on the 29th of April users were asked to record a video explaining their reasons for taking to the streets on the 15th.

Dozens responded to the invitation, recounting their own personal experiences of frustration with the economic and political system, thereby giving a series of faces and names to a phantom movement which was yet to make a physical appearance.

Besides the DRY page, in the months before the protest a number of other channels, including Facebook pages, blogs and websites, contributed to circulating the call to participate far and wide. Compared to Egypt, where it had a minor role as a means of mobilisation, in Spain Twitter played a significant part in attracting attention to the movement and creating conversations among activists, journalists, bloggers, academics and sympathisers. In the weeks preceding the 15th, the hashtag #15M became a trending topic several times on the Spanish Twitter, which itself sparked further waves of enthusiasm, triggering an avalanche of related tweets and Facebook messages. This and other hashtags like #indignados, #tomalacalle (take to the streets), #spanishrevolution became a venue not only for sharing pent-up anger against 'the system' but also for a collective cultivation of hope about people's ability to react. 'On the #15m we can be 10,000, 100,000 or 1,000,000, but we will always be one less without you' read a message posted on the DRY Twitter account a few days before the protests and re-tweeted 58 times. The tweet 'Real Democracy now: because we are fucking fed up' (estamos hasta los cojones) appeared on the 13th of May on *El Jueves* magazine's official Twitter account, using a brazen language quite typical in the warm-up for the 15th.

The launch campaign was to a great extent a web-based operation. But as had been the case in Egypt, as the day of the protest drew closer organisers progressively shifted their efforts towards street communication. The activists of DRY and other groups like Estado de Malestar and Juventud Sin Futuro were convinced that the movement had to become visible in the streets, in order to draw in those Spaniards cut off by the digital divide. Mobilising operations progressively came to encompass what Fabio Gandara calls 'a trabajo a pie de calle' (street work). As Sofia de Roa explains:

> Bit by bit people worked on outreach on the internet, and then in the last months the outreach for the event leapt onto the streets in the form of posters, debates, conferences and word of mouth and everything at that level, because it was necessary to do communication on the streets as well. There were posters in all the cities, and word of mouth worked very well.

Local groups printed out the posters made available on DRY's website or self-produced and put them up in main streets and public squares all across Spain. The intention of local organisers like Asun, an activist based in Salamanca, was to 'begin to make visible the movement on the streets, where people would pass by and see a poster we had put up, even those who were not on the internet, or did not have a Facebook account'.

The street communication campaign was particularly important because the demonstrations of the 15th were being organised not only in Madrid and Barcelona but in a total of 58 cities across the country. In order to ensure a decent turnout organisers were compelled to reach out locally to people beyond the core constituency of the movement. To help this street-level campaign, 'different local groups were created and there were face-to-face meetings in different cities, and this way we made the transition from the network to physical reality, and those two levels were made complementary' explains Fabio Gandara. These meetings saw the participation of experienced activists, but also hosted many people for whom this was their first experience in politics. Aitor Tinoco recalls how this 'was the first time that I was not seeing the same faces around the table'.

Throughout the work of preparation for the first day of protest, the main weakness appeared to be the scarcity of coverage in the mass media. National TV and press almost completely snubbed the event. In truth, activists were not counting heavily on the use of mass media as a mobilising channel. They were convinced that by using the internet and working locally 'they could jump over *Publico*, *El Pais*, and any other TV and newspaper' as de Roa puts it. However, given the wide support the protest was gathering, they thought it fit to try to use this channel as well, in order to broaden their outreach. In the weeks before the demonstration Pablo Gallego, Fabio Gandara and other spokespersons for the movement appeared on several radio programmes. But when a few days before protest they held an official press conference, they were astounded that only two news media showed up: the Left *Publico* and centre-Left *El Pais*. 'We asked ourselves what we had done wrong', says Gandara. The disinterest of the mass media provoked angry reactions among many activist tweeps. But paradoxically it also appeared to confirm the organisers' sense of worth: it seemed the upcoming protest was so significant that they needed to be censored, a view reflected in a number of tweets circulating at the time: 'Today's front pages are ignoring the protests. They demonstrate that the big media are part of the problem', wrote one tweep on the morning of the 15th. A few hours before the beginning of protest, user @grcanosa, an industrial engineer, condensed the collective indignation against the national news media: 'when in a country there are 60 simultaneous demonstrations and it does not go out on any media, something is happening isn't it?'

A MAGNETIC SUN

> When I arrived to Calle de Alcalá and I saw all the people there I was very happy. And to see that there were so many people of different age, and to see that it was growing, and to see that we were a lot ... and now that I am telling you this I get goosebumps.. really I was so happy. When we arrived to Puerta del Sol, people started sticking big posters on the buildings. The people who were there were so unbelievably happy ... I remember that at the end of the demo I met some friends of mine. We sat on the square, and there were many people who also began sitting. And it was strange. Because normally after the end of a demonstration you go home.

Sofia de Roa's account of her experience during the 15th of May demonstration reflects the sense of exhilaration in witnessing a movement, nurtured online, eventually materialising in the streets of central Madrid. On the day, around 50,000 people marched in the streets in the Spanish capital alone, while thousands of others took to the streets in 57 other cities. The big turnout immediately sent emotional ripples across social networks. Pictures of the demonstrations were circulated to counter those who would say that 'we were 5 or 6' (from a tweet by user @kurioso), and angry accusations were launched at the big TV channels for not covering the protests. But it was what happened later in the night that would turn the 15-M protest from an isolated event into the beginning of a momentous protest wave. Instead of returning home at the end of the demonstration, some participants decided to camp out in Puerta del Sol. The square in central Madrid was turned into an 'acampada', a protest camp, which, also thanks to the intense social media messaging radiating from it, came to act as an almost irresistible *magnetic gathering* or *trending place* for the thousands of Spaniards who would flock there in the following days.

'Mas de 100 personas durmiendo en Sol en Madrid. Difundelo y unete!!' (More than 100 people sleeping in Sol in Madrid. Share and

join!!!), was how @Anon_VV, a Spanish Twitter account connected with the international hacking group Anonymous, broke the news. After skirmishes with police at the end of the demonstration, a total of 50 people decided to spend the night in the square. Despite its reluctance to get involved in potentially illegal actions – wanting to retain its reputation as the moderate front in the indignados movement – Democracia Real Ya gave its stamp of approval to the occupation on its Facebook page. However, people like Gallego and Gandara decided to stay on the sidelines so as not to 'interfere in the spontaneous process' of the popular assemblies which developed in the camp. In fact, given their lack of experience in ground activism, these digital activists had little say on how the camp developed. The leading role in setting up the camp and its system of general assemblies and working groups was taken by people from the so-called 'okupa' or squatters scene in Madrid.

The taking of the square was celebrated as 'spontaneous', which indeed it was in the sense that nobody had planned it thoroughly in advance. But as Carmen Haro Barba, a press officer for the radical social centre la Tabacalera, one of the hotspots of the activist scene in Madrid, points out: 'while for some this was their first experience of politics, most of the people who slept there on that night were experienced activists, part of the active fabric of this city. Many of them were militants of the social centres, people for whom politics is a full-time endeavour.' Social centres like Tabacalera, Patio Maravillas and Casablanca, all located within walking distance from Puerta del Sol, contributed to the logistics and provided materials to set up the protest camp and keep it going. For all the importance of internet communication in reaching out to prospective participants and setting the scene for the protests, the actual construction and maintenance of the camp required a know-how which the digital activists who had launched the campaign did not possess. As had already happened in Egypt, once the movement 'camped out', the focus of communication and organisation progressively shifted from the internet to the streets.

The tipping point for turning the sit-in into a fully-fledged protest camp came on the 17th of May when in the early morning the police arrived to clear the square. 'I live in a country in which you can camp out to see Justin Bieber but not to defend your rights', commented @TheDirtyMachine sarcastically. If an episode of police repression had given the movement its first impetus, a second gave the occupation of Puerta del Sol an aura of legitimacy which over the following days attracted an inflow of thousands of supporters

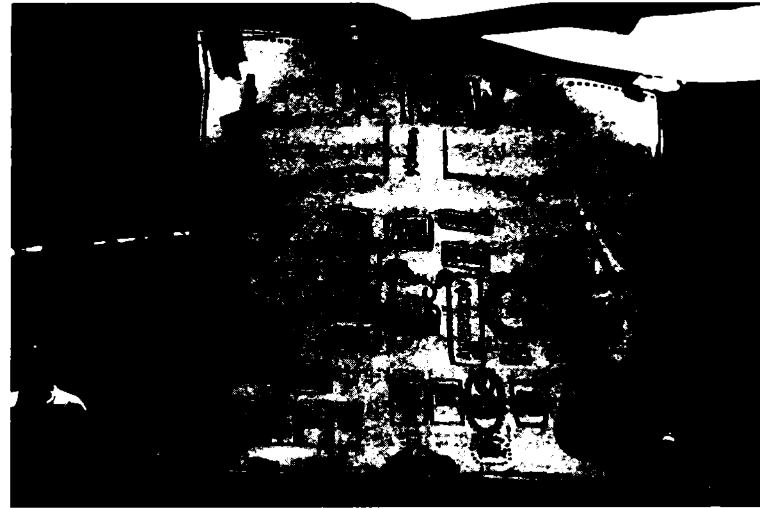

Figure 3.3 Map of the protest camp in Puerta del Sol. (Courtesy: Lara Pelaez Madrid)

to the camp. Twitter hashtags like #nonosvamos (we don't go) and #yeswecamp (a pun on Obama's slogan 'Yes we can') became a channel for expressing support for the occupiers and for circulating information about how to help the occupation.

The number of tweets posted per day on the hashtag #15M shot up to 58,000 on the 17th, reaching more than 200,000 on the eve of the local elections of the 22nd. A video presentation prepared by a group of researchers at the University of Zaragoza represents the flow of tweets as a glow of blue light flowing out of Madrid, reaching a climax on the day preceding the elections.[22] This visualisation captures the way in which the enthusiasm experienced by those occupying the square was *radiated* out to those keenly following the events from afar. In the ensuing days many of these internet followers would turn into actual participants by joining the occupation either full time or part time. As Sofia de Roa recounts:

> On Monday, when there was the eviction in the night, there was a call [se convoco] on the social networks saying to everybody to go the streets at 8pm in Puerta del Sol. And at 8pm there were more people than there had been on the 15th of May. Which means that it was really impressive [especially given that it was a Monday night, rather than the weekend]. On that Tuesday the

support on social networks was growing exponentially with many people saying 'I go!', 'I go!', 'I go!' And people were really coming.

In the late afternoon of the 17th the first General Assembly after the re-occupation decided to erect an 'acampada'. In a matter of hours Puerta del Sol was turned into a Spanish adaptation of Tahrir square with a circle of tents in the centre – a powerful image which would later not only be popularised through social media but finally also reported by the newspapers and TV.

Since the first days of the encampment, social media, and Twitter in particular, constructed and sustained an emotional attraction to the occupation, facilitating the ongoing mobilisation of supporters and sympathisers. 'URGENTE! Hay que ir YA a #acampadasol, están cerrando los accesos' (Urgent there's a need to go to #acampadasol, they are closing access points) wrote @SpainRevolt on the 18th, when the occupiers had just set up the basic infrastructure of the camp and feared a new eviction. Later that day another user incited people to join: 'Estamos en #acampadasol y necesitamos mas gente. Tenemos q movernos y no dejar q los politicos hagan lo q quieran, por favor ...' (We are in acampadasol and we need more people. We need to move and not leave the politicians to do what they want, please...). Similar messages were sent in the following days informing people about the needs of the camp (which accepted only material donations and refused monetary ones), keeping them updated about the events taking place, as well as maintaining an ongoing conversation between those who were in the square and those who for whatever reason could not join the occupation, or could not join it just yet.

Exemplary of the way in which these and similar messages contributed not only in generating widespread sympathy but also in increasing the numbers involved is the story of Asun, a 40-year-old activist who joined the protests in Sol after having learned about them on Facebook. 'I knew through Facebook that people had decided to stay', recalls Asun, who had participated in the 15-M protests in Salamanca and went to Madrid as soon as she knew that activists had set up a protest camp there. 'It was a very quick decision, because I did not know that this would happen. I told myself "si hay una chispa hay que follarla"' (literally 'if there is a spark you need to fuck it': a figurative expression referring to an opportunity not to be missed). For many Spaniards the occupations in Sol and in tens of other squares appeared not only as an event not to be missed but also one that had to be experienced in person rather than simply followed through social media. Messaging on hashtags like #sol and #15M contributed to turning the squares into contagious or *magnetic gathering places*, creating a mediated spectacle from which emanated an irresistible sense of exhilaration capable of transforming 'spectators' into 'actors'.

When I visited the Puerta del Sol camp on the evening of the 20th of May, at the very peak of the occupation, what impressed me the most was the sheer bodily density in the square. Streams of people were trying to make their way into the square from the seven roads leading into it. Inside the square itself the crowd was almost suffocating, and indeed there were rumours that many people had fainted because of the crush. 'Please try to move to side streets and squares' pleaded a voice from the camp megaphone, 'we need to extend beyond Sol in order to avoid the crush'. I was also astounded by the sense of fellowship exuding from the General Assembly held every evening in the centre of the square. The interventions – delivered by people of different ages and class backgrounds and lasting no more than a couple of minutes to abide by the assembly rules – usually involved a testimony to the experience of personal hardship in the midst of the economic crisis, and almost invariably concluded with the ritual formula 'yo tambien soy un indignado' (I also am an indignant). It was as though the indignation which had previously been geographically dispersed and held together only symbolically on the web was now being physically 'harvested', stored in one place and given not only a collective name but also a physical centre, an anchoring point in public space.

THE NET WAS *NOT* THE SQUARE

Spanish academics José Manuel Sánchez Duarte and Victor Sampedro Blanco have interpreted the actions of the indignados movement as a sort of *transfer* to the streets of practices of cooperation first developed on the web. Their argument is summed up in the claim that before the 15th of May 'The Net was the square':

> The internet logic has been *transferred* to public life; from there those who do not understand the first, cannot understand what is happening. We don't either, but we do notice that the practices of the net (self-summoning, forum deliberation, consumption of counter-information, the weaving of affective and effective networks, to produce and to operate in peripheral and digital spheres) have become tangible. The traits of digital communication

– co-operation, instantaneity, self-nurturing, horizontality, de-centralisation, flexibility, dynamism and inter-connection – have become present in assemblies and camps.[23]

The protest camps in Puerta del Sol and several other squares across the country cannot, however, be understood as a simple *transposition* onto public space of practices first established on the web. Rather, as documented in the course of this chapter, the use of social media involved an emotional choreography, which effected a deep transformation of the experience of solidarity and cooperation constructed among an online public, and the symbolic and physical harvesting of individual indignation. By contrast, the practices developed in the square were characterised by an immersion and corporeality which had little in common with the kind of 'virtual proximity' constructed on the web in anticipation of the protests. The process of mobilisation reached its climax in a re-appropriation of public space and a reinvention of the tradition of street politics, which to some extent developed in competition with the culture of digital activism which had been crucial in the initial phase.

The oft-heard cry 'no estamos en Facebook, estamos en la calle!' (We are not on Facebook, we are on the streets) came to express the joy generated by the rediscovery of a sense of physical communion that reversed the spatial and communicative dispersion epitomised by social media interactions. Rather than posting status messages, people stuck hundreds of post-it notes at the entrance of Sol undeground station, where groups of people would stop to read them. Instead of discussions held over internet forums, participants immersed themselves in commissions, working groups and assemblies (practices invented long before the appearance of the Net). Rather than browsing through hundreds of profile pictures they became acquainted with other people's faces. Instead of Facebook 'pokings' they resorted to collective hugs like those frequently seen during the first days of the camp. There was no doubt among most of the people I interviewed that the face-to-face interactions conducted in the square were by far superior to the kind maintained on the web, seen by many as running the risk of exacerbating people's isolation and loneliness. As José Ordóñez, a protestor in his late thirties puts it: 'it is only when you go to an assembly that your solitude disappears. The web runs the risk of isolating you.' Thus while social media were undoubtedly important in getting people 'there', once they were gathered physically in public

space, it was as though they were almost embarrassed about the way they had got there in the first place.

The protest camps became centres in the network, physical points anchoring a diffused movement. As Aitor of DRY notes, 'that's why the camps have been so important, in order to overcome the *fragmentation* of the net, to move from that social atomisation which is well reflected in the very structure of the net'. He describes the occupied squares as a site of 'incarnation', and as stages for a process of 'social recomposition' in which a new social body would be formed. This process of recomposition came to revolve around a symbolic and material *concentration*, of which the suffocating bodily density experienced in Puerta del Sol at the peak of the protest was the manifestation. The importance of physical centres as focal points for the action of contemporary popular movements goes against the grain of the claims to de-centralisation and irreducible multiplicity made by many activists inspired by the likes of Deleuze, Negri and Castells, with their allergy to centres of any kind. Nevertheless, it is an element which is crucial to understanding the indignados movement and their 'popular' or 'populist' character. Puerta del Sol, alongside other major occupations like the one in Plaza de Catalunya in Barcelona, became a 'nodal point' through which to transform the people from a phantom public into a tangible crowd.

Figure 3.4 An assembly in Puerta del Sol. The signpost reads 'they call it democracy and it is not'. (Courtesy: Lara Pelaez Madrid)

We must not forget that for Spain, Puerta del Sol constitutes the geographical and legal *centre* of the nation. It is the 'Kilómetro cero', the point from which all distances are measured and the point of departure for the *radial network* of roads. But it is also the 'national square', what the Place de la Bastille is for France, or Parliament square for Britain, and Tahrir square for Egypt – that is, the place in which, several times throughout history, people have petitioned or revolted against their national government. Bearing in mind this deep symbolic connotation, we can understand why the mere name 'Sol' seemed to say so much about the *unity* of the movement, its holding together despite its internal diversity, and its refusal of forms of delegation and representation. This toponym became a popular hashtag for activist Twitter feeds (#sol, #acampadasol), material for domain naming (acampadasol.org, sol.tv), a short-hand for the movement as a whole, and an imaginary point of reference for all those who were not physically present 'in Sol' but were nevertheless orientated towards it, following events closely through social and mass media alike.

Like a sun, its rays radiating through space, during the heyday of the occupation the 'plaza tomada' (the taken square) seemed somehow capable, thanks to the bodily density it attracted, of redeeming an economically down-trodden and politically humiliated nation. For Helena, an activist involved in acampada Sol, 'Puerta del Sol with its seven esoteric rays was the point of departure for the awakening of Spain and humanity.' This quasi-religious dimension should not be overlooked, given that the acampada in Sol, among its many (for some too many) commissions and working groups, also featured one devoted to 'love and spirituality'.

Naturally, the powerful ritual space constructed in Sol through the occupation could not last forever, and after almost a month, on the 19th of June, the indignados decided to lift the camp, given the strain on those maintaining it, and the growing complaints from local hotels and shop-keepers. But in an expression of the movement's emotional attachment to the square, they left behind 'InfoSol' – an info-point made of recycled material – so as to outlast the bodily gathering of the movement; though this popular 'monument' of sorts was soon to be trashed by the Spanish police.

After lifting the main occupations the movement focused on 'extending' itself, spreading the 'indignation' it had accumulated in symbolic spaces like Puerta del Sol and Plaza de Catalunya. Activists set up assemblies in different neighbourhoods throughout the big cities, while indignant marchers traversed Spain to encourage

the creation of assemblies in remote Spanish towns. This was a remarkable attempt to give the movement a capillary presence throughout Spanish society by constructing local organisational structures. Nonetheless, arguably this emphasis on de-centralisation, which to a great extent reproduced practices and discourses dominant during the anti-globalisation period, also ran the risk of depriving the movement of its *concentration*, of the physical and symbolic density it had worked hard to harness. While in Madrid activists decided to continue holding a weekly assembly in Puerta del Sol, in Barcelona they decided to move completely to the neighbourhoods, without maintaining a central assembly. That decision proved 'a complete hara-kiri', as Aitor Tinoco puts it. 'We de-centralised our struggle to the neighbourhoods and thus lost a *central focus*.'

Bearing in mind the vital role of occupied squares as ritual *centres* and organisational *foci* of the movement, rather than simply as nodes in a network, we can appreciate the role played by social media during the phase of *sustainment* of the occupation, besides the phase of *initiation* discussed in the previous sections. Social media helped to sustain a sense of *emotional attraction* to the mass sit-ins. Facebook pages, tweets and posts were involved in the continuous weaving together of an emotional texture around the occupied public spaces, connecting these places with dispersed publics. Live-stream broadcasts by the website Sol.tv received almost 10 million visits during the first week of the protests,[24] just as the city council of Madrid switched off its webcam in Puerta del Sol in an attempt to black-out the protests. Hundreds of videos posted on YouTube conveyed the experience of collective enthusiasm in the square, while several dedicated websites, including tomalaplaza.net (take the streets) and tomalosbarrios.net (take the neighbourhoods), sprang up to give supporters and sympathisers timely reports on what was happening.

These and other websites also allowed the movement to connect with those who for whatever reason could or would not attend the protests. As Luis, an activist involved in the communication commission of the 'acampada' in Barcelona, explains: 'in the physical square are 2,000 people. But our Facebook page has received 2,000,000 visits in 15 days, with people from every part of the country, who are connecting, sharing and thanking.' The diffuse and distant forms of involvement which the 'acampadas' managed to attract through the use of social media allowed 'those who could

not physically attend to feel part of the movement', as Teresa, a freelance web-designer involved in the movement, observes.

CONCLUSION

The 15-M movement in Spain was characterised by an intense and enthusiastic resort to social media as a means of mobilisation. In using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter activists constructed resonant emotional conversations across the internet and managed to harness a widespread collective indignation transforming it into a political passion driving collective action in public space. Movement organisers wove together a 'choreography of assembly' which facilitated the gathering of a diverse and dispersed constituency around Puerta del Sol and the other main occupied squares of the movement, transformed into symbolic points of convergence for the movement. In the process, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds constructed loose collective identities characterised by an appeal to 'normality' (as in DRY's self-definition as 'normal and common people') aiming to intercept prospective users regardless of their political and cultural affiliations.

Naturally the process of mobilisation in the indignados movement was not all about Twitter and Facebook, however much these media allowed organisers to reach out to diverse sectors of the Spanish society and exploit the participatory imaginary of the web 2.0. Similarly to what happened in Egypt, activists soon resorted to street-level agitation to go beyond the movement's core constituency and break the barrier of the digital divide.

Furthermore, television stations like La Sexta and centrist and progressive newspapers like *El Pais* and *El Publico* contributed to shaping the image of the indignados, to mobilising people, and to building a consensus for the indignados far and wide. In an opinion poll published by *El Pais* on the 5th of June 2011, 66 per cent of Spaniards expressed their sympathy towards the indignados, and even 81 per cent agreed that they were right to be 'indignant'.[25] Such figures demonstrate that the indignados have to a large extent fulfilled their majoritarian ambitions, and drawn a diverse following of supporters and sympathisers. Furthermore, thanks to its numerous local occupations beyond the main squares, the movement has also managed to create local infrastructures accessible to people outside of the metropolitan areas. Compared to the anti-globalisation movement, whose mobilisation potential

was for the most part restricted to an urban middle-class youth, this constitutes a major achievement.

Despite its initial success, however, the 15-M movement slowly began to wane during the last months of 2011. Local neighbourhood assemblies saw their numbers progressively drop, and within the movement itself the differences became more acute between the so-called moderates identified with Democracia Real Ya and the more 'radical' members represented by the so-called 'okupas' activists rooted in the squatters movement. At the time of writing, the movement was celebrating its first annual anniversary with protests beginning on the 12th of May, but was internally torn between the initiators of the movement led by Fabio Gandara, who had decided to turn Democracia Real Ya into a legal organisation, and others who wanted the movement to remain a 'network' without any formal structure.

The irksome question of leadership is thus finally coming to the fore and being openly discussed. This is a testament to the fact that the indignados, like other such movements, were not and are not 'leaderless'. As we have seen in the course of this chapter, a handful of young digital activists like Fabio Gandara and Pablo Gallego had a decisive role in steering the actions of the movement, by 'setting the scene' for or 'choreographing' public protests. While these activists' doings were hardly visible in the public spaces they contributed to creating, the way in which they used social media to construct collective identities and to fuel an emotional tension towards participation deeply shaped the way in which the movement emerged and developed.