



# The 15-M laboratory of democratic transformation: How a contemporary Spanish movement contested neoliberal hegemony in an impoverished democracy

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## review of

Fominaya, C.F. (2020) *Democracy reloaded: Inside Spain's political laboratory from 15-M to Podemos*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (PB, pp 368, \$29.95, ISBN 9780190099978)

Only nine years ago, in 2011-2012, history appeared to be ‘born again’ (Badiou, 2012) in the Mediterranean basin and across the world, through the Arab Spring, the ’15-M’ (or ‘Indignados’ movement) in Spain, the ‘squares movement’ in Greece, and the global Occupy movement. Today, the boisterous scenes of democratic uprisings, the contestation of neoliberalism and austerity policies, the glimpses of egalitarian ‘real’ democracy and popular aspirations to progressive change in countries such as Spain and Greece seem consigned to a remote past. The global hegemony of neoliberalism remains firmly in place, while reactionary right-wing politics is on the rise. A gradual normalization of ‘the crisis’ has taken hold in many countries, while mass mobilizations for stronger democracy are a rare occurrence in Europe. Yet, the looming ecological catastrophe, popular

disaffection with elitist politics, and the devastating consequences of neoliberalism for equality and democracy remain our historical horizon. More than ever, it is time to act, but also to step back, to rethink political strategies for change, to re-imagine democratic politics.

Cristina Flesher Fominaya's *Democracy reloaded: Inside Spain's political laboratory from 15-M to Podemos* is a valuable aid in facing up to these paramount political challenges in our times. Beyond a mere academic study of recent social movements in Spain, this is an extensive, well-grounded and insightful inquiry into how contemporary civic action can foster democratization and contest the neoliberal hollowing-out of liberal democracies. Investigating the 'Spanish laboratory' of new democratic politics since 2011 (and even earlier), she brings out specific practices and emergent political imaginaries, which can help us to tackle the question of how we can save democracy today, without offering, of course, a fully-fledged and definite answer.

The 15-M movement, named after the first date of its massive public appearance on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2011, stands out as one of the most popular, influential and transformative insurgencies of this period in Europe and across the world. Indeed, a core contention of Fominaya's research and argument in this volume is that

the movement reconfigured Spain's political landscape and inspired a process of democratic experimentation that continues today not only in non-institutional spheres and social movement networks, but also in the municipal movements that in 2015 won elections to govern Spain's major cities, and in the new political movement/party Podemos. [4]

Substantiating the political impact of 15-M and fleshing out its transformative effects takes up the nub of the author's discussion in the book. Herein lies also her contribution to one of the key tasks for social movement studies: evaluating and explaining the impact of specific mobilizations [7]. In this respect, what marks off her distinctive account of the rise and the force of 15-M is (a) her contextualization of the movement in relation to the 'legitimation crisis' of liberal democracies and austerity policies; (b) her emphasis on activist networks whose intervention is required in order to

transform political opportunities (political-economic crises and popular grievances) into massive action; (c) her genealogical approach to the emergence of 15-M, which is combined with the analysis of organizational networks in order to refute simplistic notions of spontaneism and digital facilitation [8-10]. In more concrete terms, the thrust of her argument is that 15-M was an *autonomous social movement*, anchored in the recent tradition of such mobilization in Spain. Autonomous movements can effectively tackle the challenges of achieving broad outreach, strength and convergence across diversity through praxis and processes of political culture and collective identity formation, rather than through centralized power, ideological convergence, abundant resources and access to institutions. Showing how this can happen is presented by the author herself as a chief contribution of the volume [10-11].

The accent on political culture and related practices as configured by 15-M thus lies at the core of Fominaya's study. 'Ideational frameworks' of interpretations, beliefs, values and symbols which motivate action, along with the types of action they inform, make up political culture. Contentious social movements do not simply construct their own alternative cultures. They also engage with common sense and the hegemonic political culture, seeking to shift and resignify them so as to stimulate different forms of action and new practices. Hence, the efficacy of social movements needs to be also evaluated in terms of their imprint on culture and politics, which is hard to quantify and may take time to bear fruit. In the case of 15-M, the two 'master frames' concerned austerity – the contestation of its policies and its grounds – and democracy, coupling a critique of actually existing democracy with a revindication of this regime for the people. Another 'hybrid' cultural synthesis highlighted by the author is that between the political culture of autonomous movements – horizontal, egalitarian participation without strong leadership etc. – and neo-Gramscian populism, which strives to build a new hegemony of the people [12-16]. This is, indeed, a notable innovation of 15-M's political philosophy and action, whose tensions and significance need to be investigated in depth – and, as I will argue, in greater detail and in different ways than the author pursues in this volume.

## 15-M and democracy

The first part of the book delves into the relationship of 15-M with democracy, starting with ‘Spanish democracy’. Notably, 15-M signaled a rupture with the culture of ‘Transition’, the passage from Franco’s dictatorship to a liberal regime in the late 70s. This was the result of a pact among elites, which set up institutional mechanisms isolated from civic pressure. The lack of access to institutions, and the austerity policies ascribed to this institutional isolation, were targeted by 15-M, finding massive social resonance and sparking a debate about Spanish democracy, which repoliticized it. The quest for an alternative ‘real democracy’ spawned a diverse experimentation, which ranged from the consensus-oriented public assemblies to the ‘municipal platforms’ and new parties such as Podemos [24-29]. This questioning of elitist or domesticated democracy was fueled by the financial crisis, the rising unemployment and austerity policies. 15-M took issue with the dominant narratives about the crisis. It shifted the targets of critique from the welfare state and social policies to the banks, the elites, the democracy of the two-party system and the Transition. Discourses about the crisis and democracy became a battleground through the intervention of 15-M, which delegitimized ‘actually existing democracy’ but held on to the value of democracy itself and sought to resignify it. They thus forced on the political agenda new or marginalized issues: political corruption attributed to institutional mechanisms, and the need for electoral reform, greater civic participation and enhanced institutional transparency [30-37].

Coming to grips with hegemonic discourses and the common sense in order to swing it in other directions while connecting with it, e.g. through the valorization and re-interpretation of democracy, was one of the three main planks of 15-M’s populist counter-hegemonic strategy in Gramsci’s sense. The other was its identification with the ‘people’ and the endeavor to attain popular outreach. The third was reclaiming democracy and the need to grapple with state institutions in order to reform them in the interests of the many. These gestures differentiated 15-M from prior ‘autonomous social movements’ such as the Global Justice Movement, which tended to speak mainly to an ‘activist ghetto’ [37-41]. According to the author, challenging the necessity of austerity policies, tracing their causes to the qualities of the

dominant model of democracy, and stressing thereby the need to rethink and reshape democracy was the ‘major impact’ of 15-M on political culture and common sense, which is hard to quantify and likely to persist for some time [41].

## 15-M: A genealogy and anatomy of its political culture

Part II of the book is devoted to an in-depth account of 15-M itself, its moments or faces, its precursors, its distinct political culture and orientation. Key objectives of the argument are to debunk the ‘spontaneist’ approaches to the rise of 15-M, to uncover its ‘autonomous’ logic as a social movement and to trace out its genealogy, the precursor mobilizations and initiatives, which laid the groundwork for its emergence. Hence, the author differentiates between the original ‘protest event’ on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 across Spain, the month-long occupation of public squares with Puerta de Sol as the hub of this activity, and an ensuing movement, which was more diverse and diffuse in time and space. The logic of autonomy, which marked off the movement, according to the author, is governed by the principles of self-organization, direct democracy, diversity, direct action, autonomy from political institutions and formal political organizations and an ‘anti-identitarian’ spirit, which opposes the identification of the movement with any particular collective, acronym, symbol or political ideology/identity [43-49].

Fominaya’s genealogical angle, which discloses the role of pre-existing trajectories of social contestation on particular mobilizations, is arguably a significant input of the author to research methodologies and interpretations in social movement studies. Such genealogies enable us to grasp how movement actors exploit effectively emergent political possibilities, how precursor mobilizations and movement learning processes inflect the structure and the orientation of later mobilizations and how a new creation is entangled with preceding political cultures and events. The roots of 15-M’s political culture can be traced back to the Global Justice Movement and later protests in Spain. The Arab Spring was a main inspiration contemporaneous with its eruption. Predecessor movements close to the genesis of 15-M include *Juventud Sin Futuro* and, crucially, *Democracia Real Ya* (DRY), the co-

ordinating platform, which called and organized the 15-M protests. In both initiatives, we can discern the endeavor to break with classic leftist discourses and practices, to connect with social majorities through shared problems, to critically converse with common sense so as to swerve it in new directions, and to organize action through assemblies (the ‘asambleario’ orientation) [51-71].

Chapter 3 describes the event of the protest on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 and explains how it was an outcome of preparation and negotiation among movement actors rather than a spontaneous outburst. The twin critiques of austerity and the democratic deficit, exacerbated by the collusion of political with financial elites, were the cornerstone of this preparatory action. The framing around the revindication of democracy and political institutions, and the division of ordinary working people and citizens versus politicians and bankers managed to be widely inclusive, appealing across political parties and generations [73-80].

Unlike the demonstration itself, the second moment of 15-M, the encampments in Puerta de Sol, Madrid’s central square, and in other cities in Spain, was neither planned nor authorized [81-86]. Chapter 4 narrates how the camp incubated the movement and generated core components of its political DNA, the ‘asambleario’ politics organized around a general public assembly and thematic groups, which attended to process [87-90]. According to first-hand ethnographic testimony gathered by the author, the collective identity of the camp gave rise to a distinct 15-M identity. This was shaped around the construction of a life in common, assembly decision-making and a hacker/technopolitical component, which nurtured a commitment to free software, open access and encryption/security [95-104].

The camp developed its own dynamic, beyond the plans of those of orchestrated the initial protest, involving newcomers, intensifying its energy and raising new challenges of organization amidst an apparent chaos. Nevertheless, Acampada Sol managed to sustain multiple assemblies and a complex internal structure over time. This was achieved thanks to experienced activists-facilitators but also to its hallmark politics – its commitment to inclusivity and nonviolence that welcomed anyone, with any

skills, who was willing to participate. Its political orientation crystallized by May 20, when the general assembly endorsed a manifesto calling for financial and political reform that would eliminate the privileges of elites, while asserting the right to housing, work, public services and the political participation of citizens. Crucially, the rise of a distinct feminist politics in the encampment sought to redefine mainstream politics, redirecting it towards care for citizens and the common good [105-119].

The camp decided to dissolve itself on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2011, but with the aspiration to expand, to multiply and to ramify into neighborhood assemblies and other modes of mobilization and political self-organization. It thus gave rise to the broader 15-M *movement*, whose central emphasis on democracy and its distinctive political culture, welding together autonomy, feminism and the hacker ethos, bore the indelible marks of the earlier Acampada Sol. Chapter 5 fleshes out the significance of the encampment for the ensuing movement, indicating how it consolidated a collective identity of citizens reclaiming their common political power and their participation in political decision-making. Core components of the 15-M political culture became also the deliberative processes of decision-making, which intended to be non-hierarchical (horizontal) and inclusive, and the collective care for people's material and reproductive needs, including childcare and food. Crucially, moreover, the Acampada brought together concerned people and ordinary citizens from all walks of life, embodying the will to reach out to society at large, beyond the 'activist ghetto' [123-127].

Hence, the thrust of this transfiguration of political culture lie in the endeavor to 'common politics', that is, to turn politics and government into an activity of any and all, reclaiming democracy for the people. More specifically, according to the author, the 15-M *heterotopia*

expressed a rejection of dominant forms of social relations (violence, hierarchies, inequalities, exclusion, marginalization) and tried to embody an alternative to these forms: caring, solidarity, collective empowerment and endeavor, horizontalism [...] drawing on, inter alii, feminist, autonomous, pro-commons, DIY, and anti-charity models. [128]

The political DNA of the 15-M movement took shape around three main political lineages and orientations: autonomy (commitment to participatory democracy, inclusivity, diversity, assembly-based decision-making, non-hierarchy, prefiguration); feminism (overturning patriarchy, care, non-violence); and hacker ethics (open source, collective intelligence, knowledge sharing, hacking as the collective search for better solutions, harnessing digital technologies). These political-cultural frameworks, the ensuing ‘way of doing politics’, combined with the ideational frameworks of reclaiming democracy and challenging crisis imbued diverse later mobilizations of the 15-M ‘movement’. Communication networks, built before and during the 15<sup>th</sup> May protest and the subsequent encampments, catalyzed the organization of multifarious collective action, giving the lie to facile claims of a spontaneous, digitally enabled, aggregation of individual logics. The encampment generated, rather, a collective *commons* logic forged in assemblies, working groups, common spaces of encounter, shared experiences of organizing material life in common. This thesis lies at the heart of Fominaya’s argument in her portrayal of 15-M as a political phenomenon [133-140].

In the aftermath of Acampada Sol, the 15-M movement exhibited a wild diversity of new or reframed older projects, protests, mobilizations, organizations, assemblies, initiatives and networks. What brought them together was the way in which they protested against austerity and sought to renew democracy, their re-enactment of key elements of the 15-M political culture and their self-identification with it [141-150].

## 15-M movement after May 2011

Part III of the book sets out to explore this rich ecology of 15-M social and political interventions from June 2011 onwards. The chapters 6 and 7 linger with two protest movements ('preferentes' and '15MpaRato'), which targeted particularly the banks and financial elites involved in fraud and 'crimes against citizens', but also the corruption of the political class across parties. Chapter 8 discusses PAH, the housing movement which predated 15-M, but was revitalized and inspired by it. Beyond the right to housing and the defense of indebted citizens against the banks, which evicted them, PAH contested the

dominant narrative about the crisis and protested against a democratic system which did not care for its citizens, while it strengthened a belief in ‘people power’ and fostered horizontal, collective self-empowerment [184-190].

Chapter 9 looks into the activism of ‘indignant and precarious youth’ connected with 15-M, featuring interviews with individuals, ethnographic narratives and in-depth accounts of various involved groups such as ‘Juventud sin Futur’ and ‘Oficina Precaria’. These politicized the everyday reality of precarious people in the spirit of 15-M, and they paired anti-austerity with pro-democracy discourses. Their shared sense of belonging to 15-M and their common way of ‘doing politics’ shaped the contours of a broader 15-M movement, even without an overarching organizational structure or formal label [216-217].

## The electoral turn

The ultimate part IV traces the ‘electoral turn’ of certain sectors of 15-M towards the party Podemos, established in 2014. The author sets out to dispel the paradox of a movement against formal representation, which veered towards representative party politics. She claims, thus, that Podemos’ founders participated in the preparation of the discursive terrain before its eruption in 2011 [224]. The ‘electoral turn’ was partly motivated by the 15-M disposition to reclaim democratic institutions, by the proximity of some 15-M actors to party politics and by the activism fatigue, which had set in by 2014. Certain 15-M participants did not regard autonomy as the sole appropriate political form, viewing it rather as complementary to other modes of political engagement. Podemos realized thus the desire of some 15-M components to move to the electoral terrain in order to exert influence on institutions [231-34, 244-245]. Podemos did not claim to represent 15-M but incorporated at the outset central elements of 15-M culture, from participatory democracy (through the initial ‘circles’ of grassroots participation), the hacker ethic and feminism to the anti-austerity and pro-democracy discourses. It thus seemed to construct a ‘hybrid party’ that embraced the tension between party and movement logics of collective action. This is the subject of chapters 10 and

11, which recounts how Podemos reneged on its promises, turning into a heavily centralized party under a strong personal leadership (of Pablo Iglesias) and embracing a new mode of technopolitical plebiscitarian populism.

The ‘Conclusions’ sum up and underline the author’s unique perspective on social movement politics and her purported contribution to this field. Her in-depth study of 15-M sought to challenge the focus on formally organized, vertical and institutionally integrated movements, which are often held to be more effective in the literature (Giugni, 1998; Giugni et al., 1999). It also contests a statist bias in the assessment of the political effects of social movements. These tendencies, which lead to marginalizing or underrating ‘autonomous’ social movements, are exacerbated by an analytical emphasis on mobilization rather than movement culture and by the near self-concealment of autonomous movements, which do not rally together around fixed ideological or identity markers. Hence, a research approach, which digs into the subterranean spaces of experimentation, the internal dynamics of autonomous movements and their diverse genealogies. These critical methodological choices can help us to better grasp both the processes of movement emergence, and the impact of emergent movement cultures on the political system and political action more broadly [286].

Fominaya’s distinct outlook and ethnography also brings out how, despite fashionable arguments to the contrary (see Gerbaudo, 2012; 2017), ‘communication’ as such does not organize digitally facilitated movements, in which communicative and organizational structures remain separate. Movements with digital engagements such as 15-M carefully and reflectively develop their communicative practices according to their organizational patterns, their deliberations and negotiations. Against portrayals of contemporary movements, which dwell on online initiatives and interactions, Fominaya highlights the decisive role of ideational patterns or ‘imaginaries’ even in the hacker component of 15-M [296-299]. Moreover, in the ‘digital age,’ too, the power of autonomous social movements derives from their logic of autonomy itself, which nurtures an open culture and identity, allowing for adaptation to complex contexts and variable opportunities [301]. In this respect, the innovative politics of 15-M consisted in combining the practice

of democracy in the movement with demands for reforming actually-existing democracy, breaking thus with the inward look of past autonomous movements [304].

The standpoint of the author is informed and, in turn, nourishes a particular understanding of the aims and the ethos of critical research into contemporary democratic movements, which is concisely formulated in the closing chapter ‘Democracy reloaded’. Rather than seeking a new vanguard deploying the best strategy towards a predefined end, it is

more illuminating to explore the cultural logics and ideational frameworks that enable a process of democratic experimentation, contestation, and regeneration to flourish, and to tease out their limitations and challenges, not as a prescriptive recipe for success but as a contribution to critical reflexive knowledge on political engagement that seeks a democratic society based on equality and the common good. [303]

Seen through these lenses, the political import of a movement such as 15-M to reinvigorating democracy has been the constitution of practices, spaces and ideational frames, which revindicated people’s power and democracy for the common good. By dint of such practices and discourses, which put the blame for austerity and the economic crises on the elites and a hollowed-out democracy, the movement engaged in true counter-hegemonic politics. It took on hegemonic accounts of the crisis and democracy. It appealed to popular majorities. It shifted common sense by propounding alternative narratives about democracy and the crisis, but also by nurturing a different political culture. Furthermore, 15-M forged alliances among heterogeneous groups, pitting them against ruling elites, and it threw up new political opportunities in electoral politics, which enabled the rise of parties such as Podemos and the municipal ‘confluences’ in 2015 [304-5, 314].

Fominaya insists that it is the imprint on the dominant political culture and the prevalent democratic imaginary, which constitutes the main achievement of 15-M. The collective identity and political culture crafted from the original occupation onwards sustained the movement over time and space, across diverse actors, and enabled it to shift the public debate and political agenda about crisis, austerity and democracy itself [306-307]. To grasp this, we need to forsake the state-centered idea of politics, which measures success

quantitatively in terms of effects on policymaking, parties and ruling elites. Veering away from statism in political thought and practice allows us to capture how 15-M transfigured the political itself in the direction of collective empowerment, plurality, inclusivity, common care for the common good and life over capital. The rise of feminism in the movement triggered also a ‘feminization’ of the political, which nourished solidarity, care for relations, concern with everyday reproduction, empathy and listening over and against the patriarchal, competitive and domineering style of politics.

## An appraisal

This in-depth, comprehensive and insightful study from a researcher deeply immersed in social movements and, particularly, in recent democratic mobilizations in Spain, including 15-M, illuminates crucial grassroots fermentations, displacements and reconstructions of the political beyond the statist system of politics. The author uncovers how the political understandings and practices of ‘ordinary people’ were concretely transformed in this massive and protracted cycle of contention since 2011. While another recent contribution to the discussion, Donatella della Porta’s (2020) *How social movements can save democracy*, focusses on how recent collective action reinvigorated participation and deliberation by promoting innovations in *institutional* political systems, her emphasis on ‘political culture’ enables Fominaya to explore more broadly these creative contestations and mutations in an alternative democratic direction, beyond a narrow attention to institutional changes. Her inquiry into how social movements spread emergent cultural norms is far from new in social movement studies (della Porta, 2020), but this does not detract from the value of the author’s distinctive angle. It is from this precise standpoint that certain important ambivalences or gaps in her account can come into sight.

First, how can we establish claims about transformative effects of a certain cycle of contention on the hegemonic political culture? Second, would this endeavor call also for an analysis of the subjectivity of movement actors, its socio-historical formation and its residual attachments to the status-quo? (Substituting ‘class-composition’ for ‘subjectivity’ might add analytical

clarity and concision, but at the cost of reducing complexity and nuances by subsuming diversity under supposedly unified class subjects). Finally, how do shifts in political culture bear more specifically on questions of political strategy if the aim is wider social-cultural transformation?

The author surveys a wide spectrum of mobilizations, movements and party formations to highlight the appearances and impact of 15-M's political culture. But the depth and the scope of changes in this culture remain unclear. Hence the author's own ambiguous assessments:

15-M developed its own movement political culture, but it also, through its intense mobilization, transformed Spain's political landscape and *shook up, if not transformed*, national political culture. [310, emphasis added]

Beyond transforming the political opportunities for the emergence of new parties, 15-M forced established parties to integrate at least *cosmetic* changes. [311, emphasis added; such changes included a rhetorical commitment to transparency and citizens' participation]

Given how unresponsive the state has been to movement demands, it is remarkable how sustained the movements against austerity in Spain have been. This ability to sustain itself despite 'political failures'... [311-312]

If mobilization is in decline, party formations have regressed into vertical politics, municipalism did not live up to its promises of radical democratic change, while established parties have made only cosmetic changes, what evidence is there to substantiate the depth and the strength of the 15-M's influence on political attitudes, ideas and practices beyond the 5-6 years of intense civic activation and contestation? To answer this, we would need to inquire into broader social practices 'on the ground', which are still running and bear the imprint of 15-M, from economic activities to local self-organization, solidarity networks, and so on. We would also need to look into other contemporary cultural manifestations, for instance in art, media and theory, which are likewise infused with the 15-M spirit. Finally, we would need to conduct empirical studies on the political culture (political ideas, values, attitudes towards politics), which informs popular majorities today, several years after the eruption of the 15-M mobilization.

Such a broader investigation would need to probe in greater depth the subjectivity – modes of thought, evaluation, imagination, feeling and action – of a large sector of 15-M actors. Critical analysts such as Emmanuel Rodríguez-López have scrutinized the potentials and the limitations of 15-M transformative politics by dwelling on its predominantly ‘middle-class’ character. This is marked by residual attachments to the (neo-)liberal, capitalist value system and by lingering aspirations to individual ascent, consumerism, ‘meritocracy’ and a distance from labor unions. The fraying middle classes have not yet articulated a new social subject and project of rupture (Rodríguez-López, 2016). Even if such a reading tends to suppress heterogeneity, complexity, new fermentations and contradictions, the more enduring subjective ‘substratum’ of 15-M actors should receive critical attention in an attempt to evaluate both the ruptures and the limits of their political interventions.

The ‘subjective ties’ to the dominant order, which rein in transformative imagination and action, belong to the politics of hegemony in Gramsci’s and Laclau and Mouffe’s sense, the prevalent relations of power and associated dominant ideas, discourses and affects. Through the lenses of hegemonic politics, system change turns on a protracted and potent counter-hegemonic contestation, which effectively and persistently wrestles with power relations, institutions, popular discourses and affects. Fominaya rules out such a strategic path by starkly contrasting the logic of autonomous movements with the logic of populist hegemony [278, 289, 302]. This outlook obscures how autonomous movements can and do work out strategies of counter-hegemony, which could induce powerful system-changing effects.

Indeed, the 15-M movement (or ‘Indignados’) embraced pivotal aspects of hegemonic politics in Gramsci’s (1971) and Laclau’s (2005) sense: the quest for popular unity, the formation of a collective identity, the concentration of force, leadership and political representation. Hence, the movement converged around common ends, practices and signifiers (such as ‘the 99%’ and ‘ordinary people’). It centralized the co-ordination of action in certain ‘hubs’ (such as Puerta del Sol in Madrid at the beginning). It sought to reach out to broader sectors of the population affected by neoliberal governance, and it strove to initiate processes of deeper democratic transformation (‘real

democracy'). But 15-M also reconfigured these political logics and practices in tune with its own egalitarian vision of horizontalist participatory democracy. Hence, the 15-M assemblies and networks took aim at the institutionalized separation of political leaders from the people and the sovereign rule of representatives. The movement set out, instead, to collectivize political representation and leadership, opening them up to ordinary citizens. Moreover, diversity and openness became themselves the principle of unity in its collective action. Open pluralism has been persistently pursued through a multiplicity of norms, practices and organizational choices, such as the network form and the promotion of a certain political culture, which dismisses dogmatic ideologies in order to appeal to all people in their diversity, while it cultivates tolerance, inclusion, critical respect for differences, civility, and an affective politics of care and love among diverse people who struggle in common despite their differences (see Kioupkiolis, 2018).

When the aspiration is a long-term and profound renovation of the political in the direction of a 'real democracy' of the commons and common people, political culture should not be divorced from questions of effective political strategy. Rather than disjoining or opposing the two, the main query should be how a radical democratic culture can inform a powerful strategy for real change. Even if this question is not addressed in Fominaya's profound and detailed study of 15-M, the light this inquiry sheds on the alternative political culture of the movement is highly illuminating for those interested in taking on the challenges of effective strategy.

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