The new social movements in Spain: the Protests for the Right to Housing as an immediate predecessor of the 15M Movement

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Summary

Recently, we have witnessed the emergence of a large number of social protests that seem to be changing the geopolitical map, the structures of power and social conscience all across the globe. These movements, although different from each other in origin, socio-political context, development, aims, members and results, have a fundamental similarity: the occupation of public spaces by crowds gathered and organized through Information and Communication Technologies [ICT].

In this article we study the Movement for the Right to Housing [MRH] as a paradigmatic model of the New Social Movements [NSM] and as an immediate predecessor of the 15M Movement in Spain. We will provide a description of its origin and development, of its impact in the media and politics, and of its subsequent decline. The inclusion of the MRH in a theoretical framework based on social struggles and organized demonstrations on the network society will allow us to identify the features that define the NSMs gestated through new technologies and to differentiate them from the NSMs from the postmodern industrial era.

Keywords: crowd, cyber-crowd, cyber-democracy, network society, social movements, Spain, elections, Web 2.0.

Overview

ICTs have created a new spatial logic, flow before physical space, which makes sense in a globalized world in which markets, societies and cultures are linked through large-scale communication and interdependence relationships between countries. In this context, ICTs have become an essential tool of the anti-establishment, as they have fostered the creation of an alternative global model. These are "bottom-up" new social movements [NMS] with a global, but not exclusive, framework; that is, they assimilate
In Spain, the 15M Movement has become the biggest paradigm for Internet crowd calling and organization. On the week from May 15th to May 22nd, 2011, the day of local and regional elections in our country, thousands of people took to the streets and squares in Spain and many countries worldwide, becoming visible to their governments and public opinion. Their aim was not to interfere with the outcome of the election, but to demand that the role of citizenship was not limited to that of registered voter, census entry, audience or consumer (Sampedro, 2000). The aim was to "challenge the gags to, and perhaps the very system of, democratic representation" (Sampedro and Sánchez-Duarte, 2011: 1).

The 15M Movement is the last act of a civil disobedience flow that has been materializing almost every five years during the past two decades in this country (Sampedro and Sánchez-Duarte, 2011). It is a direct heir of the grassroots social movements that occupied the streets in support of military disobedience, 0.7%, the abolition of external debt, Never Again [Nunca Más] and Not War [No a la Guerra]. Its most immediate precedent is the online crowd unstable and intermittent (Sampedro, 2005) that took to the streets in Spain on March 13th, 2004 in response to electoral manipulation of the attacks of 11M, and the Movement for the Right to Housing

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1 Currently, we do not have enough perspective to analyze the impact of this movement in Spanish politics and society, but we can counter some of the arguments held by politicians and the media. This new initiative of citizen participation has been qualified as a partisan maneuver and as a "one-off" that will not stand the test of time and a "spontaneous" occurrence without history that is not due to any particular cause, nor has a specific authorship (Sampedro and Sanchez-Duarte, 2011: 1). First, despite the spontaneity in the decision made by the 40 first people who decided to camp in the Puerta del Sol main square once the demonstrations led by Real Democracy Now [Democracia Real Ya], Young Without Future [Juventud Sin Futuro] and other organizations was over, we can not describe the whole movement as "spontaneous". The campers at Puerta del Sol on the night of the 15th to the 16th of May, were not isolated or idealistic young subjects without intent or knowledge of how to organize a movement. They were activists involved in a highly mobilized network, who began operating that very same evening through tools like Facebook, Twitter and mailing lists. Within hours, they achieved international visibility by raising Twitter Trending Topic #solcamp [#acampadasol] globally and calling thousands of activists to congregate in different square throughout the country. The citizens who, in turn, organized campings, were organized in commissions and issued invitations to the concentric circles of non-mobilized citizens (Sampedro, 2005). After the violent eviction of 200 people in the early hours of Tuesday July 17th, called by the media, "Magical Tuesday" ["martes mágico"]; 8,000 people showed their support and outrage at the Puerta del Sol main square and thousands more in squares throughout the country and the rest of the world. At Midnight, Friday 20th to Saturday 21st of May, exactly at 0.00 pm, more than 50,000 people peacefully disobeyed the electoral law, thus starting a new chapter in the history of social movements in the country.
[MRH], whose crowds broke the instability and intermittence of 13M (Gil, 2008) and demonstrated the ability of ICTs to organize, coordinate, mobilize and provide resources to activists, as well as the impact of the New Social Movements [NSM] in Spain.

This article examines the MRH as a paradigmatic case of aware multitude\(^2\) that have cropped up, organized and developed entirely from a telematic dimension. The year 2003 saw the birth of the Platform for the Right to Housing [Plataforma por una Vivienda Digna], an organization focused on the problem of the housing market in Spain, where the median home price increased by 180% between the years 2000 and 2005, while working conditions, especially among the younger segments of the population, gradually worsened. However, this Platform, made up of different social groups (including political parties and trade unions), had no impact on the public opinion until it leaped to the Internet (Gil, 2008:4) and acquired characteristics of the new NSMs model. In 2006, a chain of emails and SMS called for the first sit-in on May 14\(^{th}\) to demand affordable housing, to be followed by subsequent weekly sit-ins until the 4\(^{th}\) of June. It is from this sequence of sit-ins that the movement expanded, began to organize a network and formed a citizens' movement that was plural, pacifist, horizontal and self-organized.

In the theoretical analysis that we present in these pages, we will offer a detailed description of the origin and development of the MRH. We will explore how the use of digital communication, meaning digital communication, decentralized tools such as forums and mailing lists, blurred the boundaries between sender and receiver, giving them both an active role in the process (Gil, 2008: 3) and drawing crowds. And we will show how the political system, coupled with a growing conservative presence in cyberspace, managed to neutralize their protests, weakening the movement. However, despite our initial thought that all left-wing cyber-activism had been encapsulated in a digital environment (Sampedro, 2010), the 15M Movement has demonstrated that it merely remained dormant. Lastly, the inclusion of the MRH in a theoretical framework based on social struggles and organized demonstrations on the network society will allow us to identify the features that define the NSMs gestated through new technologies and to differentiate them from the NSMs from the postmodern industrial era.
1. We Have No Place to Dwell, So We'll Stay in the Square [No tenemos casa, nos quedamos en la plaza]

One of the recurring criticisms that the 15M Movement has received has been the lack of specificity in their demands and policy proposals. The response of the participants has been overwhelming: "You are asking us to do in a week what you have not been able to do in years in power." Concrete measures are required because the general demands are a point of vulnerability. This request was also made to the MRH, and their disappearance from the political and media presence is related to the fact that their set of proposals was feasible and agreed at meetings, so it never reached the ears of the public. It is remarkable how politicians and journalists keep calling for specific public requests, when they already know their basic demands thanks to the methods they have been using for long to know the public opinion: polling (Sampedro, 2000).

The CIS barometer of May, 2011 placed the political class as the third cause of concern of the Spanish people (22.1%), only behind the unemployment (84.1%) and economic problems (46.5%). Reactions to the economic crisis and to representative democracy and prevailing bipartisanship in Spain. These data are reflected in the slogans of the demonstrations. The first 15M demonstration was called under the following slogans: "They do not Represent Us" ["No nos representan"] and "No Home, No Job, No Pension, No Fear" ["Sin Casa, Sin Curro, Sin Pensión, Sin Miedo"]. In March, 2007, the most pressing concern for Spanish people was housing and "You'll never get a fucking home" ["No vas a tener casa en la puta vida"] was one of the slogans of "H for Housing" [V de Vivienda] under which several demonstrations and actions were organized. The movement and its demands have been incorporated into the 15M Movement, where from the first day of camping you could hear the chant "We have no place to dwell, we will stay in the square" ["No tenemos casa, nos quedamos en la plaza"].

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2 Term based on the concept of aware vigilant citizenship proposed by Sampedro (2005:259).
3 CIS Barometer No. 2888, May 3rd, 2011.
4 CIS Barometer No. 2681, March 17th, 2011.
1.1.- The Bubble Bursts

The Spanish real estate market experienced, from 1998 to 2008\(^5\), the longest growth cycle of the last forty years. This was joined by average 180\% increase in the price of housing from 2000 to 2005. As stated by Professor of Economics at UPF José García Montalvo (2007:2), "The strong price growth in recent years would not have been possible without the substantial relaxation of the conditions for access to loans and their duration, together with the apparent decline in interest rates. Thus, many families have had to set aside a growing share of their income, for a growing period of time, to pay the mortgage." While in 1995, paying the full price of a home required 4.9 years of work, ten years later, the average had risen to 10.9 full years of work.

**Figure I. Years of work to pay a mortgage in Spain (1995-2005)**

\(\begin{align*}
&\text{Source: Calculations based on the average price of of a new 90 m}^2\text{ home and the average annual salary made by the Ioé Collective [Colectivo Ioé] from the Labour Force Survey [Encuesta de Población Activa]. Average of the four quarters in each year.}
\end{align*}\)

However, this upward trend in the number of years required to fully pay for a home is not only due to escalating prices, but also to the stagnation in wages. This situation has increased over the years and, together with the amount of debt of Spanish households, has prevented the emancipation of a generation of young Spanish people. While the

\(^5\) Year in which the international economic crisis started.
average age of emancipation\(^6\) in the European Union in 2008 was 25 years old, in Spain it is 32 years old. Some authors argue that, in addition to housing prices, there are other factors that explain the late emancipation of Spanish. Fernández and Roldán (2007, cited in Aguilar and Fernández, 2010: 685) point out that families in Southern Europe are more likely to associate emancipation with the purchase of a home, marriage and job stability, unlike those in Central and Northern Europe, who associate it with the onset of higher education. However, the cultural factor does not seem to be so critical when comparing the situation of European and Spanish youth in recent decades.

"The statistical analysis shows that the period of 'housing bubble' that began in the late 90s has been quite different from that of previous periods. Although the most important factors behind the rise in prices until 1996 were real (GDP growth and lower unemployment), in the expansion phase after that year, the main factors are of a financial nature, i.e. interest rates, credit conditions and stock market developments. The State have tried to reduce the pressure of demand, especially based on the use of housing as a means of maintaining wealth, through bold steps that would have balanced the conditions of purchase and rental, such as eliminating deductions for rent, establishing renting of all new state-subsidized houses, and so on. Unfortunately, governments have simply kept going with "Business as usual". (García Montalvo, 2007:22).

**Figure II.- Rate of permanence of 30-49 year old workers in Spain (1988-2005)**

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\(^6\) Term referring to access to housing, whether buying or renting, independent of their parents
While European students are supported by a system of grants and loans by their governments, the Spanish youth have faced an escalation of housing prices, public policies that have increased demand pressure and more precarious working conditions than the previous generation. Spanish young people do want to leave their parents' households, but they either cannot afford to purchase or rent a house, or they have had to go back to their family homes when they were no longer able to cope with a 30-40 year debt to the banks before they could even secure stable employment.

1.2.- The Movement for the Right to Housing (MRH)

The MRH started in the year 2003 with the creation of the Platform for the Right to Housing or PRH [Plataforma por la Vivienda Digna o PVD], a movement made up of different groups united in the struggle for easier access to housing and a more sustainable real estate planning.

The property ownership was linked to the prevailing model of economic development, based on construction and housing speculation. But the ramifications in terms of political corruption and environmental damage were also unavoidable in the most politicized speech, which took shape in a progressive manner. In a way, the single issue movement (the issue of gaining access to an owned house) was connected with a

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7 A survey by the Youth Institute [Instituto de la Juventud] found that "the vast majority of young people (more than eight in ten young people) state that they would prefer to live independently in their own home, whether bought or rented." In, Youth and Housing. 2005 Youth Opinion Poll (3rd survey) [Juventud y Vivienda, Sondeo de opinión y situación de la gente joven 2005 (3ª encuesta)].

8 Article 48 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 [Artículo 48 Constitución Española 1978]: "All Spanish people have the right to decent and adequate housing. The Government shall promote the necessary conditions and establish appropriate standards to make this right effective, regulating land use in accordance with the public interest to prevent speculation."

9 For this chronology of the movement we have consulted works by Gil (2008); Aguilar and Fernández (2010); Huelmo, Martínez and Tommei (2007); and Robert Gonzalez (2010), as well as various records and working papers facilitated by the organization and also available on the website of the Platform for the Right to Housing [Plataforma por una vivienda digna] (www.viviendadigna.org) and the websites of the H For Housing Movement [V de Vivienda] (www.vdevivienda.net).
lifestyle policy (gaining independence from the family and economic empowerment) and broader subjects, distinctive of the classic NMS (political transparency, anti-corruption -and environmentalism-, support of sustainable growth models and defense of territory). Even though it defined itself as a citizen initiative, independent and non-partisan, the less pro-government and conventional social fabric always accepted them with scepticism.

The first organizational step was the launch of the website www.viviendadigna.org and the development of e-mail listings that facilitated organizing and coordinating working groups and the first protests (almost invisible in regular media). Together with the Regional Federation of Neighborhood Associations (Federación Regional de Asociaciones de Vecinos, FRAV), a historic neighborhood fight organization, they created the "Table of Initiatives for the Right to Housing" ["Mesa de Iniciativas por el Derecho a Techo"] which attracted unions (CCOO, UGT and CGT), political parties (IU and PCE) and environmental groups (Ecologists in Action [Ecologistas en acción]) (Aguilar and Fernández, 2010:687-688). The first major collective action took place on June 20th, 2004, when 10,000 people marched under the slogan "For the Right to Housing. Stop speculation" ["Derecho a techo. Stop especulación"], which was followed by several actions, including the "Housing Festival" ["Festival Por nuestra vivienda"], organized by the CCOO Youth in Leganés [Juventudes de CCOO de Leganés]. They all got little media coverage.

The turning point of the movement was the anonymous announcement of the first sitting on May 14th, 2006 without the support of the PRH, through a chain e-mail and mobile messages. After the 13M, geographical and ideological barriers were dynamited again when people were called again "Under no acronyms or flags" [“sin siglas ni banderas”] through new technologies (Gil, 2008:4). The result was a demonstration of thousands of people in 19 cities across the state. In Madrid, 5,000 people attended what became a "Reclaim the Streets" march [“reclama las calles”] which first went to the Congress [Congreso de los Diputados], and then go to different points of the city.

Since then, three more sit-ins were organized on May 21st, May 28th and June 4th, 2006. From the second sit-in, open and democratic meetings were organized in the cities with most participants to organize the social mobilization that emerged from the first
spontaneous actions. After the disproportionate police aggressions during the second and third sit-ins\(^{10}\), meetings also became a way of "support and self-defense against the repressive police response to a citizens' pacific movement"\(^{11}\).

Madrid originated the Assembly Against Poverty and for the Right to Housing (AAPRH) [Asamblea contra la precariedad y la vivienda digna (ACPVD)], formed by different groups, associations and individuals, which began to operate through working committees (organization, content, communication, support for detainees and expansion) coordinated through a weekly plenary meeting of the Assembly. The organization and coordination of the movement was done through mailing lists, a common portal (www.vdevivienda.net), with links to the websites of the organizations in different cities, and a discussion forum where they could spread and coordinate actions and initiatives from other cities.

Although the PRH and the "Table of Initiatives for the Right to Housing" ["Mesa de Iniciativas por el Derecho a Techo"] continued their work in parallel, the various city and neighborhood assemblies drove the movement and began to prepare working papers and proposals and to issue calls for different actions. The first demonstration by H for Housing [V de Vivienda] was held on July 2\(^{nd}\), 2006 to highlight demands before the Summer break. In Madrid, it gathered 3,000 people. The following actions were a demonstration in Barcelona on September 30\(^{th}\) attended by 15,000 people, and another on October 28\(^{th}\) in Madrid, attended by 18,000 people that made the cover of El País, one of the leading newspapers in the country.

As early as 2007, a new demonstration on March 27\(^{th}\) gathered 25,000 people in Madrid, the largest in the history of the movement. Two months later, local and regional elections held on May 27\(^{th}\) created an opportunity for visibility, as the movement decided to hold a sit-in in the campus of the Complutense University in Madrid for two weeks (from the 13\(^{th}\) to the 27\(^{th}\) of May). From there, they did another round of demonstrations on May 5\(^{th}\), October 6\(^{th}\) and December 23\(^{rd}\), with a much lower

\(^{10}\) In the second and third sit-in, people conducted peaceful disobedience actions agreed by the movement consisting in marches through the streets of the city. These actions resulted in 17 detainees on charges including disorderly conduct, disobedience, public disorder and serious resistance to authority.

attendance, although the movement was stronger in participation thanks to new groups and individuals and even if the housing problem remained one of the main concerns of Spanish people (Aguilar and Fernández, 2010: 690). So, just two years after the rise of the MRH, the 2008 general elections were held, with the problem of housing built in political parties' programs, but with no specific proposals to solve it. The MRH was eclipsed by other domestic issues in an ongoing campaign, negative and personalized (Sampedro and Seoane, 2009) where "cyercampaign" strategies were introduced for the first time.

Figure III.- Estimation of participants in the protests of the MRH in Madrid


1.3.- Impact and Decline of the MRH

Following the elections on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2004, the Socialist government came to power with a list of good intentions under the arm to respond to the greater cycle of protests that were happening in the country (Sampedro, 2008). During the last term of President José María Aznar in power, thousands of people mobilized against the Prestige oiler tanker crisis and the war in Iraq. One of the first steps taken by President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, in addition to keeping his promise to bring back Spanish troops from Iraq, was the creation of the Ministry of Housing [Ministerio de la Vivienda] in 2004, as "the Department responsible for exercising the powers that, as established in
Article 149.1 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, correspond to the Central Government in matter of housing and land ownership.

In practice, the Central Government has limited ability to intervene in housing and urbanism, since those competences are under the jurisdiction of individual Autonomous Communities [Comunidades Autónomas] and municipalities. However, the Central Government can promote legislative initiatives in key issues such as land ownership (50% of the final price of the house) and manage state spending for housing through the country budget. The government also always has the possibility to transfer jurisdiction in issues where it appears that the current system is not working (Huelmo, Martínez and Tommei, 2007:12).

The strategies stated by the Ministry were\textsuperscript{12}, among others, "expanding the scope of housing policies so that the existing stock is sufficient and stable, while completing it with new types of subsidized housing to meet the demand of citizens and promoting renting as a way to access adequate housing" and "mobilizing publicly owned land free of administrative use, to be used, preferably, for the construction of subsidized housing".

Significantly, in a country of 44 million people, with more than 3 million empty homes\textsuperscript{13}, the new government's plan to mitigate the problem of access to housing was promoting construction, even if it was of subsidized housing.

The demands placed by the MRH and their catalog of more immediate proposals (the same ones economic experts and theorists were proposing from the beginning of the housing bubble), such as eliminating tax breaks for the purchase of housing (to reduce speculation), favoring rental to purchase, stopping reforms to the legislation of land ownership whenever there is a cycle of expansion in real estate, prosecuting corruption or putting an end to the myth that a home is a sure investment, were ignored by the government. Their main alternative was a set of measures announced in September


\textsuperscript{13} During the boom of the housing bubble in Spain (44 million people), the same number of dwellings were built per year than in Germany, France and the UK together (203 million people). [Cinco Días
2007 by President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the then Minister of Housing, Carme Chacon, focusing on tax relief for rent and financial assistance for young people under 30 years old. The MRH described them as electioneering measures (with the eyes set on the general elections to be held a few months later), and clearly insufficient.

After 2008, which was an election year in the country, the housing problem was displaced in a campaign that, as defined by Sampedro and Seoane (2009) was permanent (continuous, beyond the election period), negative (focusing on criticism of the opponent) and with a high degree of personal attacks. Research conducted by the research project of which this work is part (Sampedro, 2010) and particularly the studies focused on profiling the election Web users during the 2008 elections has identified possible causes of the neutralization of the MRH (Sampedro and Polleti, 2010).

The panel of social cyber-activists analyzed in the aforementioned research indicates that leftist organizations did not act in coordination with the counterinformation networks (such as the Nodo50 platform, which had already shown potential on 13M and in subsequent calls by the MRH) and the campaigning strategies of left-wing parties. This was not the case for the conservative axis, which the cyber-activists interviewed felt was "more instrumental in electoral terms and more effective in their combined strategies through conventional media, politics and e-politics." (Sampedro, 2010:25).

What is more, left social movements did not adapt to social networks like Facebook because they are regarded with distrust, since these parties try to promote free culture and the common good, and they reject so-called "user-controlled" tools. However, the
conservative parties made use of them from the start, which may explain the ideological right-wing (or nonpartisan) leaning that social networks developed since then. (Sampedro, 2010:25).

The second cause of neutralization of the MRH Sampedro (2010) highlights in his investigation of the active Internet users during the election campaign, is the social domestication process that took place during the PSOE government between 2004 and 2008. During those four years, the conservative party initiated a series of online and offline protests aimed to wearing down the government on policy issues (the "conspiracy theory" on 11M, the government negotiations with ETA) and social issues (family values threatened by the laws of homosexual marriage or abortion, which moved to various offline events). The success of these movements was much higher than the MRH in terms of calling to non-mobilized citizens (with a much greater presence in mainstream media and more favorable treatment) and political terms, as it "hindered the process of negotiating with ETA and turned citizens against the implementation of the progressive measures adopted by the Social Democrats in education or social issue" (Sampedro, 2010:25).

Finally, Sampedro (2010:26) highlights the institutional co-opting and repression suffered by the MRH, which is also one of the biggest risks for the 15M Movement if they want to maintain their legitimacy and permanence. The mainstream media, in both ideological ends of the spectrum, paid much more attention to the campaigns against the PP than to the MRH. Political parties managed to neutralize the movement with a heavy police repression during the first sit-ins of 2006, which succeeded in criminalizing it, in part by linking it to violent practices and the presence of "radicals". Those associations made it difficult to mobilize non-partisan citizens that were not already participating in militant groups and their networks of trust.

The movement was further neutralized by co-opting\(^\text{16}\) thanks to the incorporation of their demands (general, often vague or focusing on support for young people, lowering rents or facilitating mortgages) in the 2008 election campaigns. Even though the

\(^{16}\) One of the features of the new social movements as political actors is identified by Sampedro (1997:147): "The political activity of social movements ends when they become marginalized or co-opted by the institutions, that is, when they are unable to interact with said institutions."
economic crisis at the end of the year ended all efforts when the housing bubble burst, they public still had the impression that the political parties were responding to popular demands (Sampedro, 2010:26).

Thus, in late 2008, the MRH had disappeared from the political and information highlights on the Internet, which had marked its origin and evolution, and had been displaced by other technological issues such as the debate against digital canon and free culture. This seemed to indicate that cyber-activism in Spain could have suffered a gradual encapsulation towards issues within the Internet itself, and that the aware multitudes (Sampedro, 2005) had mutated into virtual multitudes (Sampedro y Sánchez Duarte, 2011) which were only active in the fight for freedom on the Internet.

The 15M Movement dispelled these preconceptions and demonstrated, in part, that there are no barriers between online and offline arenas and that, now more than ever, hybrid practices are consolidating that confirm the logic of a network society.

2. NETWORK LOGIC

In 2004, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt launched their vision of a "multitude project" based on the possibility of a global democratic society, open and inclusive, promoted by multitudes fighting for justice and a free world. Perhaps we are currently witnessing its first steps, and the nature of the demonstrations that take place all over the world may are proof of that. The authors point that analyzing the nature and conditions of crowds helps to "identify the real creative forces that are emerging with the potential to create a new world" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 95). This new world will be built over current scenario, the contemporary post-industrial world, which the theorist Manuel Castells defines as network society, a concept that replaces that of information (or knowledge) society.

"The term network society refers to the social structure resulting from the interaction between social organization, social change and technological paradigms built around information and communication digital technologies" (Castells, 2006:21).
We will describe the features that ICTs have contributed to this new network society, and how the new social movements have adapted to this scenario in order to combat power. To do this, we will define the traits that characterize these new social movements and how they differ from the preceding movements.

2.1. Global Society, Internet Fighting

The network society has a social structure composed of networks powered by information and communication technologies based on microelectronics. In this context, power is redefined but not gone. Domination and resistance change character according to the specific social structure in which they arise and which they modify with their actions (Castells, 2006:65). In a network society, the power structure follow the logic of "network creation power" (Castells, 2009:76) and exercises control over others through two basic mechanisms: the ability to program-reprogram the networks according to assigned objectives and the ability to connect different networks to ensure their cooperation by sharing common goals and increasing resources (Castells, 2009:78).

Given this historical context, resistance is also exercised through networks, which are in turn networks of information provided by information and communication technologies (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2002), and whose dynamics are based on networking and network attack and defense strategies. (Castells, 2009: 81). The new social movements have been the first transnational organizations to network and to use network features to organize direct actions, share information and resources, and coordinate campaigns through long-distance communication in real time.

"The expansion and diversification of networks is much more than a specific organizational purpose: it is also a valuable cultural goal in itself. Self-generated, self-developed and self-managed networks become a pervasive cultural ideal that provides not only an effective model of political organization, but also a model for the global reorganization of society" (Juris 2006).

ICTs have also created new possibilities in terms of political structure and information sharing for new social movements to create a system of alternative media with the
ability to reach large numbers of people through horizontal communication networks and beyond the control of the media business companies. The advantages these tools provide for controlling the flow of information cause the public - passive by definition - to become an active audience (Sampedro, 2005: 90). New social subjects gain the ability to communicate without intermediaries, something previously restricted to political parties or big companies with large resources.

This new situation has encouraged academic debate about public opinion, and Sampedro and Resina (2010: 153) talk about cyberoptimists and cyberskeptics (Resina, 2010:150). The cyberoptimists praise to the potential of the Internet as a medium that encourages participation, sharing and deliberation, which constitutes an advancement of discursive public opinion (debate and social mobilization) vs. aggregate public opinion (polls and election results) (Sampedro, 2000). This, in turn, also means the possibility of building a supranational (European or even global) public opinion. (Sampedro and Resina, 2010). Meanwhile, cyberskeptics underscore the importance of contextual issues over technological potential (Resina, 2010:150), such as unequal access to ICTs, the so-called digital divide (Ballestero 2000).

However, above their deliberation potential, ICTs have created a new category of social movement that is characterized by network organization, coordination and action, as well as decentralization, flexibility and collective action. New social movements have managed to mobilize the multitudes (Negri and Hardt, 2004) and have characteristics that differentiate them markedly from previous social movements.

### 2.2. Characteristics of Telematic New Social Movements

The crisis of representative democracy and the technological revolution brought about by ICTs have created real alternatives to the current system. Hardt and Negri speak of a democracy based on relations of equality and freedom as "a dream originated by the great revolutions of modernity, but not actualized until today. Today, the new crowd characteristics and biopolitical productivity inaugurate new and powerful ways to pursue that dream." (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 94).
Here, we will present the features that distinguish these crowds and new social movements from their predecessors and evaluate their potential to reclaim physical and virtual spaces as spaces of deliberation in order to rebuild our system into a real democracy.

2.2.1. From Masses to Multitudes

The first feature we identified in telematic new social movements is that their origin, development and success are linked to multitudes. A new category of social mobilization that can be linked (or not) to a social movement and that goes beyond the concept of masses traditionally believed to be the main agents of social movements (Freud, Ortega y Gasset or Cannetti). This new category refers to mobilization or collective actions that take place in the offline and online arenas, which are unplanned and intermittent in nature (Sampedro, 2005) and have received various denominations, with slight differences in conceptualization, during the last decade.

In 2002, Howard Rheingold (2004: 18-23) proposed the term Smart Mob, to define collective action organized through SMS and e-mail with a political purpose. He differentiates this from the Flash Mob, which uses the same tools for convening a public meeting of strangers to carry out absurdist acts and then dissolve. Juan Urrutia, on the other hand, called them cybemob (2003:16). Authors like Amparo Lasén and Iñaki Martínez (2008:251) point out that there are more similarities than differences between the two groups, since the manifestly apolitical nature of flash mobs is in itself a political identification and manifestation, and propose the concept of hybrid politicized masses [masas híbridas politizadas] as a global term for these "protests that do not generate collective identities or lasting or stable forms of organization" (2008:254) and that differ from the masses in their heterogeneous and rational nature.

As previously pointed out, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri propose the concept of multitude in 2004 and define it as the manifestation of collective intelligence that Lévy predicted on the fringes of cyberspace in 1995: “The development of computer-assisted communication and global digital networks appears to be the realization of a more or less well-formulated project to deliberately create new forms of collective intelligence, which are more flexible and democratic and based on reciprocity and respect for
singularities. In this sense, we could define collective intelligence as a fully distributed intelligence that is continuously enhanced and synergized in real-time" (Lèvy, 1999:76). However, Negri and Hardt's concept of multitudes transcends virtual profiles and asserts its presence in public spaces and offline arenas. It differs from the traditional category of people in that the people is homogeneous whereas the multitude is plural (2004: 16), it is not an identity and, in contrast with the homogeneous, irresponsible and easily manipulated mass, the multitude is plural and highly rational. "The common ground of a multitude is not discovered, it is built" (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 17).

Víctor Sampedro (2005) adds the "online" descriptor to the concept of multitude to emphasize the role of ICTs in the creation and development of these collective actions, and highlighted their unexpected and one-off nature when these online multitudes took to the streets on March 13th, 2004 to express their outrage and demand accountability from politicians. The same multitude that once acted as one in peaceful disobedience in a pre-election context disappeared without taking steps to establish further organization. This "emptiness" of the 13M multitude of was overcome by the MRH, since this was the first case of a social movement generated in Spain by a smart mob, or by the reclamation of a public space by a multitude, and it spurred a process of organization and decision-making aimed at starting a social movement.

Sampedro links online multitudes and cybermultitudes, pointing out that these online crowds develop on the Internet, but are physically reclaiming public spaces. But there are other cybermultitudes, the virtual multitudes (Sampedro and Sánchez Duarte, 2011), collective actions limited to the struggle for social rights and freedoms on the Internet and only from the Internet. In Spain, these cybermultitudes became active during the legislatures of 2004 and 2008 as the first protests focused on the digital canon and progressively built up to a whole ideology of basic rights for Internet users17. This struggle connected highly vocal activists proposing activities and demonstrations

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17 In the years between 2008 and 2011, the movement has been directed against politics and the Sustainable Economy Act or "Sinde Law" [Ley de Economía Sostenible or “Ley Sinde”] (it takes its name because it was proposed by then Culture Minister Ángeles González-Sinde).
limited to within the Internet. These actions were greatly supported by varying degrees of active citizens, but only when their involvement came down to a click on a website.\footnote{Internet activist group called Anonymous called for protest against the “Sinde Law” ["Ley Sinde"] at the Goya Film Academy Awards 2011, and even though the message ran through social networks, alternative and mainstream media, only 200 people attended. [http://www.europapress.es/sociedad/noticia-200-miembros-anonymous-abuchear-estrellas-puertas-teatro-real-20110213194233.html. Last access: July 2nd, 2011]}

We have observed a number of different relationships between new social movements, multitudes and areas of action. Figure I shows our proposal for a categorization of new social movements based on to the role of multitudes in their development and evolution.

**Figure I: New social movement categories based on the role of multitudes in their development and evolution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Instigator</th>
<th>Area of action</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13M</td>
<td>Local, mobilized social fabric, spreading on a national scale</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Offline</td>
<td>Dissolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRH</td>
<td>Local, mobilized social fabric, spreading on a national scale</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>On- and offline</td>
<td>MRH social movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15M</td>
<td>Local, mobilized social fabric, spread on a national and global scale</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>On- and offline</td>
<td>Creation of the international 15M movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinde Law protests</td>
<td>National-scale online social movement</td>
<td>Cyberactivists</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Restricted to digital sphere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own work

Although not included in the above table, the Nunca Máis demonstrations also deserve a mention, as they foreshadow many of the traits that would come to characterize later cybermultitudes (Sampedro and López Rey, 2006). The 13M demonstrations were the
first occurrence of self-assembled crowds organized through ICTs. The protests originated in the more heavily involved sections of the Madrid social fabric. However, the appeal to action was anonymous and the core instigators “do not share a common political affiliation, workplace or area of residence, they are not associated to any organization, they have different occupations and their residences are temporary. (…) The movement, as such, does not exist. (…). Strictly speaking, the instigators of the 13M protests were mere telematic endpoints of a global alter-globalization network, united by a common technology tool set but neither by their geographical location nor their set of principles. Their activism is, therefore, unstable, even more so if we shift our attention to the concentric circles of citizens that joined them over time” (Sampedro, 2005:290).

This distinctive trait of the 13M protests is shared by all three protest movements that have recently emerged in Spain (the MRH movement, the Sinde Law protests and the 15M Movement). The online backlash against the so-called "Sinde Law", however, differs from other protests: even though its core instigators are people whose lifestyle is based around permanent activism “expressed through new languages and means of communication linked to freedom of information movements” (Sampedro, 2005: 292), and in spite of the fact that they do not belong to a single party or organization, its core is easier to identify. Their actions were organized by well-known hacktivist alter-globalization platforms \(^1\) operating via social networks and non-mainstream news outlets.

The area of action in the 13 March 2004 protests was clearly offline, as the streets of Madrid became spaces for public discussion and hundreds of citizens gathered in peaceful civil disobedience. This kind of political action lifestyle-based: “Everybody mistrusted mainstream media and career politicians. To one degree or another, everyone debated and coordinated the protests in their own name and using their own means. (…) They positioned themselves in the transformative left or, at the very least, in a state of vigilant citizenship” (Sampedro, 2005:291-292).

The reclamation of public spaces as a meeting point and a space for dialogue among citizens was a recurrent element in the MRH movement. However, in this case, the
crowds overcame the instability and attendance fluctuations shown during the 13M protests and took over the streets for months on end, retreating and coming back with every new call to action, and engaging on a process of political pedagogy along the way. The participants did not just support the protests with their presence; they focused on suggesting and debating improvements to the system. This achievement was possible due to the movement's intense activity in the online sphere.

The protests against the Sinde Law, on the other hand, were the exact opposite, as their area of action was limited to the online arena. Their actions, which will be described in further detail later in this document, were mostly virtual in nature. In the rare occasions where offline actions were attempted, they were supported by a mere fraction of the multitudes that were active online. This phenomenon is known as *slacktivism* or *clicktivism*. Yet, although the use of the word *slack* could mislead us into considering this as a minor form of activism, the power of these movements should not be underestimated. Moreover, they can become the source of new democratic practices revolving around the use of ICTs.

In Spain, the 15M Movement has learned the lessons of its predecessors and managed to combine its online and offline activism strategies in a drive to strengthen and motivate the crowds. At present, it stands as the greatest example of social movements originated from an anonymous call to action using ICTs. The 13M did not manage to coalesce into a social movement and disappeared after the morning of the 14 March 2004. The Sinde Law protests did result in the creation of a social movement, albeit one that operates solely in the online sphere and so far has been unable to break free from its digital shackles. The MRH was the first demonstration to become a full social movement capable of bringing together significant multitudes in the streets. Although it was eventually neutralized, it served as a test bed for the procedures and experiences that ultimately enabled the 15M Movement to take place.

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21 An example of this is citizen involvement in the constitutional reform process in Iceland [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/Islandia/reforma/Constitucion/via/Facebook/elpepuint/20110627/elpepuint_2/Tes. Last access: July 29, 2011].
Starting with the 13M demonstrations, and throughout the aforementioned cycle of protests, activists have demanded a number of structural reforms, going beyond the emergence of single issues and addressing the need for policy changes brought about by the evolution in lifestyles. Where the 13M demonstrations were a call for honesty in politics and media to enable the upcoming general elections would meet essential democratic standards, the MRH called for a sustainable economic model, capable of meeting the basic needs of the people while avoiding political corruption and environmental damage. Finally, the Sinde Law protests called for the universality of the Internet and free access to culture.

The 15M Movement has assimilated these demands and is currently proposing structural reforms in areas such as citizen representation in the media and in political parties, as well as denouncing social and economic cuts. Its greatest success so far is bringing these issues into the agenda of both politicians and media\(^\text{22}\). There has been a sharp increase in the number of peripheral public spheres, i.e. those segments of civil society that are unable to raise their concerns to the main public sphere (Sampedro, 2000). These peripheral anti-establishment spheres are now exerting their influence on the media and on centers of hegemonic political power. Overall, civil society agents “are increasingly centralized, able to develop their messages and make them public, to constantly interact with each other and with the seats of power, forcing the latter to increase their transparency” (López, 2006:241).

The centralization of these peripheral public spheres, as well as their success in raising their concerns to public debate, is based on the emergence and subsequent learning of the multitudes. It is, therefore, essential to pay attention to the mechanisms that govern their organization and circulation.

2.2.2. Anonymous organization, multiple identities

The 15M appeals to the vigilant society, which had remained latent but inactive since the MRH was defused, going beyond the concepts of cybermultitudes and online

multitudes. The 50 000-plus people who expressed their peaceful disobedience with their presence in squares all over Spain on the night of the 20 May had not all been called into action there using ICTs: the power of social networks and generalist media had also been tapped to summon concentric circles of citizens. The most heavily involved sections of social fabric first reached out to concentric circles of citizens (Sampedro, 2005) via their networks of trust. Once the multitudes took to the streets, their numbers got the attention of the media, which became “unwilling heralds of their existence and demands” (Lasén y Martínez, 2008:247).

In the case of the 15M Movement, new developments in social networks and of mobile technologies also played a vital role. While the public image of the MRH was spoiled by police charges and linking it to violence and radicalism, the 15M activists were able to record police excesses with their cell phones and upload their videos to the Internet in real time, putting the legitimacy of police and government actions in question and stressing the peaceful response of the citizens during their demonstrations. This had two immediate consequences: on the one hand, it greatly contributed to the increase in citizen presence on the streets; on the other, it confirmed Internet as an essential mechanism to control political powers and catch the attention of mainstream media.

**Figure I: New social movements and the mechanics of calls to action**

![Diagram of social networks and calls to action](source: Own work)
Figure I shows the agents and tools used in the organization of new social movements. The core instigators are members of the social fabric with a high level of involvement. Many of them are permanent activists linked to freedom of information movements (open source software, collective knowledge…) As stated by Sampedro (2005: 292), “the very social and generational barriers of this technology-focused culture prevent them from assuming leadership of the crowds they have assembled”.

Using mailing lists, text messages and social networks, the core demonstrators call upon their trust networks, which do not just include activists, but also people who share a bond with the organizers even though they are not politically active. These groups, however, are united by their mistrust of the political class and mainstream media. An important part of this process is forwarding the call to non-mainstream media outlets such as Nodo50, Rebelión, Periódico Diagonal and Indymedia, as well as blogs and sympathetic websites, reaching out to large groups of people who share their mistrust of mainstream channels.

In the eyes of the recipient, information received through such trusted networks is more credible than that originating from standard channels: the strength of the message lies in the backing of the person who sends it (Francescutti, Baer, García de Madariaga and López, 2005:78). Such is this strength that the first recipients forward the call for action to their own trust networks, building up a chain of information based on personal relationships as each link passes the message on to their contacts.

This chain can mobilize a very significant number of people to take to the streets, attracting the attention of generalist media and generating feedback that enables the protesters to keep momentum with the help of social networks. This results in a large-scale circulation of the protester's message, which enables them to mobilize citizens with no direct connection to the core instigators.

We can therefore state that ICTs, by themselves, are not capable of mobilizing crowds: the success of these appeals relies on personal connections and peer-to-peer communication, even though this communication may not be simultaneous or involve the physical presence of both parties.
These calls for action are self-circulated, since the original appeal is anonymous and its transmission is based on the credibility and legitimacy of each individual forwarder. Anonymity is one of the main defining traits in new social movements, and it constitutes an essential element in their success. Pledging support to a movement lacking a definite identity allows every individual to identify with the core demands, without forcing any identifying traits “beyond the matter at hand, which could result in conflict between diverse groups and social agents. In the absence of identifying traits, everyone can feel identified” (Candón Mena, 2010:274).

This constitutes a break with one of the core elements in the study of new social movements, the theory of Resource mobilization, which stresses the importance of creating a collective identity and states that achieving a sense of belonging to a group is one of the core motivations of modern activists. The anonymity of these calls for action also means it is difficult to allocate responsibility for them and, therefore, they are not easily capitalized on. “The collective may be paramount among the most heavily involved sections of the social fabric, but within the multitudes it is the individual, the personal sphere, that takes precedence” (Sampedro, 2005:294).

As a phenomenon, the emergence of multitudes is utterly unpredictable because it requires a number of circumstances to come together, the political juncture being one of them. In the particular case of new Spanish social movements, the factors we previously described when discussing previous mobilization efforts are combined with an antagonistic bipolarization of the public sphere and with the citizens' subsequent mistrust towards politicians and mainstream media. This scenario results in new social movements with specific organization and methods.

2.2.3. New approaches to collective organization and action

Different social contexts generate different approaches to collective action (Tilly, 2009). Much like factories generated a specific organizational system which served as a base for modern workers' movements, Internet has shaped the approach to anti-establishment in the network society (Castells, 2003:181-182). At present, social struggles develop via networks: domination and resistance dynamics both revolve around the creation of networks and their use in offensive and defensive strategies (Juris, 2006).
New, information-age social movements are structured in flexible, horizontal and decentralized networks. The MRH is a good example of a network-based organization that piggybacks on "glocal" movements for global justice, contemplating the creation of an alternative society based on a different model, with a greater emphasis on democracy and globally configured using the Internet. ICTs allow these movements to communicate, organize and coordinate on a large scale (national in the case of MRH, global in the case of 15M).

As a result, new social movements have resorted to a number of techniques based on the use of ICTs to enable their actions, both online and offline (Ortiz, 2010). We can categorize these as follows:

a) **Virtual meetings and assemblies:** in the MRH movement, these were conducted using forums, mailing lists and chat rooms, all accessible via Web sites\(^{23}\). Their core role is to facilitate coordination of face-to-face assemblies. They allow the activists to set meeting dates and locations, share discussion materials\(^{24}\) and suggest courses of action and debate guidelines. However, these virtual meetings are not involved in decision-making; that is the sole preserve of face-to-face meetings.

b) **Calls for offline actions:** in the MRH movement, initiatives to take over public spaces (demonstrations, sit-ins...) were coordinated using a combination of e-mail, mailing lists, Web sites, forums, chat rooms and SMS. The 15M Movement expanded this tool set to include commercial social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, which helped the message reach out to an ever wider circle of non-mobilized citizens, many of whom did not have a direct connection to the core demonstrators.

c) **Coordinating actions in real time:** the ability of activists to communicate in real time from a number of strategic locations allows the movement to "reach a much higher level in the rationale of collective action" (Ortiz, 2010:6). In both the MRH movement and the 15M Movement, when spontaneous protests broke out, a communication

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\(^{23}\) The [www.vdevivienda.net](http://www.vdevivienda.net) Web portal includes links to currently active Web sites for several Spanish cities.

\(^{24}\) Within the 15M movement, an open source tool called n-1 is used to enable internal organization and sharing of materials [https://n-1.cc/ Last access: July 12, 2011].
commission was quickly set up and some of its members were sent to locations away from the protest site, keeping in touch with the core demonstrators using laptops and cell phones. This enabled them to keep the network operational and maintain a permanent, secure flow of information in the event of police intervention.

c) Reporting on actions in real time: The constant evolution of ICTs also contributes to the effectiveness and impact of new social movements. As we have previously discussed, both the MRH sit-ins and the first 15M campsites were removed by the national authorities with disproportionate use of force. In the year 2006, when MRH supporters were cleared by the police, the media portrayed the movement in a negative light, linking it with street violence and causing serious damage to its public image. However, when the 15M campsites were removed, the first images to circulate had been taken by the activists themselves, who had recorded them with their cell phones and immediately posted them on YouTube. From there, they quickly spread via social networks and e-mail, until they were eventually picked up by newscasts and mainstream media. Their impact in public opinion resulted in a very significant increase to the number of participants in offline events organized by the movement.

e) Information circulation: ICTs, from the movement's own Web sites to sympathetic websites and counterinformation portals such as Indymedia, Nodo50 and Rebelión, allow direct access to information about the MRH movement.

f) Online shows of support: These actions are aimed at increasing visibility of the protests. They can include, for example, collecting signatures or sending letters to specific organizations. We could describe this as “one-click activism”. These actions gather widespread support among those supporters who do not or can not attend live events.

g) Electronic civil disobedience: These actions are restricted to the online sphere and instigated by hackers or protesters who identify with cyberactivism organizations. Much

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25 No study would be complete without mentioning Wikileaks as a textbook example of ICT impact on the circulation of information. In November 2010, this organization leaked over 250,000 diplomatic cables related to USA foreign policy, instantly becoming responsible for the biggest leak of confidential documents in history and contributing to the causes leading up to the current citizen protests in Arab countries.
like the previous category, these actions tend to garner widespread support. These may include invitations to send e-mails en masse to overflow the recipient's inbox, usually a politician or institution (note that, although mail bombing actions can be performed without the aid of other supporters, this requires more technical know-how). Also frequent are online demonstrations and sit-ins, also known as netstrikes, where a massive amount of participants simultaneously and repeatedly attempt to access a Web address in order to block access to it (Ortiz, 2010: 8). Following the deactivation of the MRH movement, these practices became quite widespread among online social movements focused on defending the rights of netizens. Starting in 2010, the international collective known as Anonymous launched a campaign of constant initiatives in defense of freedom of speech and fundamental rights on the Internet. As a result of this, and of the initiatives taken by Spanish collectives, an amendment to the Spanish Criminal Code was passed on on the 23 December 2010 to categorize launching denial of service attacks as a crime punishable with 6 months to 3 years in jail.

Sampedro describes the protests against war in Iraq and the 13M as “more expressive than substantive, insofar as they did not respond to a demand of social change as much to the protesters’ desire to stand and be counted” (Sampedro, 2005:264). In order to achieve this goal, activists do not simply resort to the means offered by ICTs: they also take the language and format of commercial and political marketing and make it their own27. “The protesters propose new interpretations of widespread cultural products. However, they are no less deceptive than mainstream marketing, since they do not appeal to consideration nor involve any commitment beyond drawing attention to their message and passing it along” (Sampedro, 2005: 260).

The MRH movement reused the same practices, reinventing pop culture and political marketing icons in their calls to action to draw the attention of mainstream media and increase their visibility. However, it managed to combine the above with a process of political pedagogy that served as a template for the 15M protesters. Although the MRH

27 The slogan that headlined the protest organized by “H for Housing” [V de Vivienda] on the 23 December 2006 was “We're not coming back to our parents' for Christmas because we never managed to leave” [“No volvemos a casa por Navidad porque todavía no nos hemos ido”]. This is a play on a
movement appeared to have been defused (Sampedro, 2010), it has now revived with the resurgence of the crowds in May 2011, incorporating its demands into a broader, more inclusive movement. Its goals feature now among the most widely supported demands of the 15M movement. As mentioned earlier, the 15M Movement not only picked up the MRH's demands, but also those of earlier protests: honesty in politics and the media (13M) and the defense of free access to knowledge and culture on the Internet (Sinde Law protests). Drawing on these principles, it demands structural reforms in areas such as citizen representation in the media and in political institutions, as well as denouncing social and economic cuts.

Aside from obtaining a greater visibility of its demands on an international scale and securing their inclusion in the political programs of left-leaning parties, the 15M movement has managed to stop a number of evictions through coordinated interventions arranged using ICTs. Among its achievements, it has led to the creation of a subcommittee in Congress to study claims of unfairness in mortgage clauses and foreclosure procedures, as well as the possibility of establishing a legal framework for dation in payment. Meanwhile, a so-called green party is blocking attempts to submit to Congress an initiative enactment (known in Spanish as ILP or “Iniciativa Legislativa Popular”) to implement dation in payment.

As the crowds advance, challenges grow and increase in number. We are witnessing a social shift as citizens reclaim an active role and denounce the hypocrisy of the system, a system that even supranational organizations are beginning to put in question. Power structures will always seek new ways to keep their status, but nowadays society has gone beyond vigilance: from the squares of our towns, it is coming up with entirely new answers.

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traditional Christmastime ad by a nougat candy maker, showing a family welcoming their son back home to spend the Holidays together.


31 “La ONU afirma que los indignados obligan a replantear el sistema global de gobierno” (The UN claims that the protests show the need for a rethink of the global government system) [http://internacional.eluniversal.com/2011/07/04/la-onu-afirma-que-los-indignados-obligan-a-replantear-el-sistema-global-de-gobierno.shtml. Last access: July 4, 2011].


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