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Divided We Stand, (Oftentimes) United We Fight: Generational Bridging in Spain's Feminist Movement and the Cycle of Antiausterity Mobilizations

Martin Portos¹

Abstract

After a general campaign that aimed at changing the political and socioeconomic system, the 15M/Indignados abandoned the visible occupation of central squares decentralized through neighborhood assemblies, and specialized around different issues, such as housing, and the health and public education systems. Although often cohabitating amid tension, feminist activists of different generations forged internal and autonomous spaces that prioritized feminist aspirations and permeated dissent in the shadow of the Great Recession, sharing arenas with people who would not have been reached otherwise. Despite the feminist movement(s)' heterogeneity, intersectional character, and organization through polycephalous networks, it has in recent times grown to stand out as the movement with the highest mobilization capacity in the country. Based on original qualitative data from 12 semi-structured interviews with key informants and activists, the piece of research sheds light on the tensions between different generations of feminists. It will explain the continuities and discontinuities between veteran and younger activists' world views when it comes to their forms of politicization, theoretical underpinnings, strategic priorities, organizational configuration and resource mobilization, repertoires of action and cultural foundations. In addition, it contends that the ability of veteran and new activists to forge arenas of encounter, fostering debate and synergies during the antiausterity cycle of protest, were key to account for the cross-generational alliance-building

¹Scuola Normale Superiore Istituto di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Firenze, Italy

processes, which have hitherto seldom been explored in the feminist movement(s) and beyond.

Keywords

feminism, 15M/Indignados, Spain, anti-austerity protest

Introduction

The Great Recession, the 15M campaign and the broader wave of contention against austerity and the political status quo have a generational component. Although the antiausterity protests did not consist merely of a youth movement, it has been widely acknowledged that the youth—though not teenagers—were overrepresented in protests in the shadow of austerity (Antentas, 2015). The highly educated, urban and digital native

youth that embodies the rising instability of the middle classes and the upper echelons of the working class, and that is facing life prospects that are much more uncertain and fragile than what their parents faced. The indignant generation represented young middle class with uncertain personal biographies and future perspectives. (Antentas, 2015, p. 147)

For many, the recession that came about was a reality check; it made patent that hopes for social mobility were unrealistic.

The 15M/Indignados was a broad episode of contentious politics that has shaken the Spanish socioeconomic and political systems. When it abandoned the occupation of central squares, including the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, it decentralized through neighborhood assemblies and compartmentalized by focusing on specific issues, such as housing, the public health, or education systems (Portos, 2017). Although often cohabitating amid tension, feminist activists forged internal and autonomous spaces that promoted a feminist agenda, prioritized women's aspirations, and permeated dissent in the shadow of the Great Recession, sharing arenas with people they would not have reached otherwise. Moreover, the 15M/Indignados was key to politicizing a whole generation of activists who seek to contribute to building and developing spaces for dissent in the feminist movement (and elsewhere).¹

This was the case of Sa. (Int.ES.F2): when she was only 16 years old, she joined the assemblies at Sol. With neither a previous record of activism nor a particular affiliation, she shared the widespread hopes for change. In the camp, she approached activists from the Comisión de Feminismos Sol (Commission of Feminisms in Sol), and engaged with their activities during and after the *acampadas*. She eventually joined different grassroots organizations and became a key promoter of the Bloque Feminista Estudiantil (Student Feminist Block) while studying at the university. In the Comisión de Feminismos Sol, she met L. (41 years old; Int.ES.F3) who had engaged in myriad organizations and assemblies where she promoted feminist insights and committees, including the Global Justice Movement, Izquierda Unida,

student unions, and Comisiones Obreras, to name but a few. J. (62 years old; Int. ES.F9) became politically involved in 1973, still under Franco's regime, as a rank-and-file member of the feminist movement. During these 45 years, she was to become a key figure within the Spanish feminist movement and other progressive clandestine organizations. She was to be a promoter and founder of umbrella organizations that drew together feminist milieus and coordinated the political activities of the movement beyond the formal institutions in the country's recent democratic history, such as the Asamblea Feminista de Madrid and the Coordinadora Feminista.²

All these three women are part of what we call the feminist movement, and are all committed to some of the same basic goals. They decided to work for social change outside established institutions. In the past few years, they converged in the same platforms, which took the lead in the organization of feminist mass dissent in Spain. All three show different activist trajectories and engaged to some (yet arguably different) extent with formal actors. These commonalities notwithstanding, these women understand feminism, the movement, and its sociopolitical involvement in different ways. One important factor that is often overlooked in social movement studies in general, and in those on the feminist movement in particular, is the impact of political generations. As Nancy Whittier (1995) reminds us, "what it means to call oneself 'feminist' varies greatly over time, often leading to conflict over movement goals, values, ideology, strategy, or individual behaviour. In other words, coming of political age at different times gives people different perspectives" (p. 15).

I contend throughout that tensions and compromise around generational issues manifest along different dimensions and aspects of the feminist movement(s), and are of utmost importance for organizational strategies. This article seeks to contribute to theories about the role of political generations and cohort replacement in social change (e.g., Braungart, 1974; Feuer, 1969; Mannheim, 1952), and especially to the efforts at bridging these theories with social movement studies (e.g., DeMartini, 1992; Ross, 1983; Schneider, 1988; Whittier, 1995, 1997). Complementing political process, resource mobilization and frames for mobilization, the generational approach puts its finger on the internal dynamics of recruitment and its importance for understanding social movement origins, trajectories, and evolution, including decline and demise. While evolving political opportunities may provide an impetus for change, "generational processes of recruitment and cohort turnover are one micro-level mechanism by which such change occurs" (Whittier, 1997, p. 761). Along which dimensions can we trace the continuities and discontinuities within the feminist movement? What role do cohort and generational difference play in terms of approaches to feminism, activist engagement, and outlooks? How are cohort and generational differences constructed and deconstructed among activists, what kind of tensions do they generate, how are they dealt with, and ultimately what makes cross-generational alliances succeed or fail?

This contribution will try to shed light on these questions. Based on original qualitative data from 12 semistructured interviews (see the appendix) with key informants and activists,³ it will first examine the sources of age-graded power and tensions between different generations of feminists that might affect movement stability. It will

address the continuities and discontinuities between veteran and younger activists' worldviews when it comes to their forms of politicization, theoretical underpinnings, strategic priorities, organizational configuration and resource mobilization, repertoires of action, cultural foundations, and innovations.

On the other hand, this article will shed light on how cross-generational alliances can be built. Despite the feminist movement(s)' heterogeneity and organization through polycephalous networks, it has grown to stand out recently as the movement with the highest mobilization capacity in Spain. I will suggest that three factors were key to account for the cross-generational alliance-building processes, which have hitherto seldom been explored in analyses of the feminist movement(s) and beyond. First, veteran and new activists forged arenas of encounter, fostering debate and synergies during the cycle of antiausterity protest. Second, middle-aged activists were able to act as brokers, facilitating the communication between younger and older actors inside the movement. Third, the need for generational replacement is part of the feminist activists' identity, which facilitates compromise around generational discontinuities.

In the next section, I present my theoretical framework and develop the central arguments. Subsequently, I survey some key sources of tension between activists across generations. In the fourth section, I present the evolution of the Spanish feminist movement and try to explain how alliances across generations were built in order to organize mass dissent. I focus on three aspects: (a) the historical trajectory of the feminist movement, (b) how the 15M came about, and (c) the evolution—upheaval—of feminist mobilizations from 2013 onward. In the conclusion, I summarize the main findings and highlight some avenues for further inquiry.

Bridging Feminist Generations in Social Movement Studies

There is a wealth of contributions that shed light on the factors undermining feminists' unity of action. Even though external factors play an important role, we know that activists often become burnt-out due to internal battles, such as the feminist sex wars of the 1980s or the gay/feminist split and the interactions with the lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual movement (e.g., Calvo Borobia, 2017; Evans, 2003; Freeman, 2000). Indeed,

lack of unity within feminist movements is not a new phenomenon. The notion of a consolidated and coherent feminist past where women were united under universal aims, is at best romanticized, and at worst, a tool used to undermine contemporary feminism or to silence women who speak out against a majority view and imply that they are damaging the movement. (Rivers, 2017, p. 2)

One of these critical sources that might hamper feminist unity are age differences.

The relationship between age and activism is complex. As Celia Valiente (2015) states, "feminist activists are usually portrayed by mass media and academic publications as young women who participate in flamboyant street protests" (p. 473). Alternatively, some scholars have suggested the direction of the effect might be the

opposite: as women grow older, they become more aware of daily discriminations and injustices of the patriarchal system and accumulate resources for mobilization (e.g., money, time, reputation, etc.), becoming more willing to engage in action in order to pursue political and social change (Rupp, 2001). As age is likely to influence mobilization dynamics and features, ascertaining the relationship between age and feminist activism is important (Valiente, 2015). Going beyond biographical age itself, scholars have found critical the features of the moment and the context when a person joins a social movement to explain mobilization trajectories. There are some remarkable exceptions, such as Whittier (1995, 1997) and Galdón (2016, 2017, 2018), whose contributions were a major source of inspiration throughout. However, studies of political generations in general—and especially multiple cohorts within the same movement—are still scarce (Whittier, 2013), a gap this study aims to contribute to fill.

As different age groups enter sociopolitical life in youth, they form distinct perspectives and build identities that are shaped by the events of their era and are sensitive to the shared transformative experiences they live (Mannheim, 1952; Whittier, 1995, 1997). Members of a generation share distinct social and political styles, commitments, aspirations, and worldviews that endure over the life course, greatly influencing public issues (Braungart, 1974; Feuer, 1969; Mannheim, 1952; Whittier, 1995). Yet a shared worldview comes from the concrete, lived experience of organizing a challenge together; in other words, “hallmarks of generational difference . . . are interwoven into everyday life and the ways that individuals interact with each other and structure organizations.” (Whittier, 1995, pp. 16-17).

Conflict might emerge as “two or more generations appear within the same organization we may consequently anticipate social conflict” (Gusfield, 1957, p. 323). Social scientists have long reckoned that voluntary and social movement—not only but also feminist—organizations face a dilemma, as they must constantly recruit new personnel to survive (Mannheim, 1952). At the intra-organizational level, the recruitment and access of new personnel to key posts might lead to a clash with—or at least, push toward a change in—the value positions of the incumbents (Gusfield, 1957). Focusing on the feminist movement, Nancy Whittier (1995) observed,

Because women who became feminists at different times saw themselves and their movement differently, divisions among micro-cohorts or between political generations often led to conflicts and changes in the women’s movement . . . intergenerational and inter-cohort strife has been painful for all involved, in large part because it challenges what individuals take for granted, how they understand their own experiences, and even their sense of self. (p. 18)

Indeed, cohort and generational differences produce various perspectives within long-lasting social movements that shape internal and longitudinal conflict and change (Whittier, 1997). Whittier (1995) further singles out three ways in which political generations matter for social movement continuity. First, collective identities that forged—and are forged by—a political generation remain stable over time, as, for example, those of activists who joined the feminist movement in the 1970s. Second, activists’ feminist militancy influences institutions and shapes other instances

of mobilizations, which might foster further engagement. Third, a movement is constantly changing due to continuous inflow of micro-cohorts at regular intervals. There are particular points in the movements' histories of heightened social conflict, where they change rapidly as several micro-cohorts (that construct different collective identities shaped by their respective contexts) converge, crystallizing into a political generation (Whittier, 1995).

This work has a twofold aspiration. First, it singles out along which dimensions generational conflicts become structured in the movement; and second, it tries to understand how unity of action within the contemporary Spanish feminist movement was possible (at least for a time and for certain endeavors), notwithstanding generational differences.

On the one hand, the coexistence of cohorts or generations within a movement does not automatically lead to conflict, as the way these differences are managed depends on a number of factors, including the movements' internal features and their cultural and political opportunities (Whittier, 2013). Divergent generational understandings and approaches can, however, breed tensions and conflicts over the movement's priorities, tactics, and even collective identities (Whittier, 2013). Building on the 15M/*Indignados*' legacies—a source of politicization for many activists—a new generation of feminists draws on different theoretical approaches (embracing the queer/sexualities' turn), has different (more grassroots, less institutional-oriented) strategies, becomes organized in different ways (less formal organizations proliferate, and they tend to make use of digital tools and incorporate horizontal, consensual and assembly-based mechanisms). Finally, this new generation introduces other innovations in terms of repertoires (e.g., performances) and approaches to activism (e.g., intersectionality, ethics of care).

On the other hand, the 2011 eventful 15M campaign represents the most remarkable turning point in the country's sociopolitical mobilization arena in recent years, transforming subsequent instances of mobilization (Portos, 2017). Transformative events refer to “turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action but by no means abolished” (McAdam & Sewell, 2001, as cited in della Porta, 2008, p. 30). These events can transform social structures by shaping and unloosening different mechanisms and processes (della Porta, 2008; Portos, 2017). Conversely, as these events intensify social interaction in action, changing available resources and forging solidarities, they may influence social relations (della Porta, 2008). Following the 15M occupations, as the scale of protests shifted downward from the national to the local level, feminists forged and engaged in spaces of exchange and debate such as the *Marea Violeta* (“Violet tide”) or the *Plataforma Decidir nos hace libres*, and also different local assemblies, social centers, and collectives (many of them with a longstanding record of activism in the feminist milieu, including the *Eskalera Karakola* or the *Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela* in Madrid). These spaces and the 2007-2015 cycle of protest against austerity and the political status in Spain were necessary to foster exchanges to make further feminist alliances, campaigns, and instances of mobilization succeed. The capacity of middle-aged activists was also

important in connecting “sectors of a movement who hold different stances and world views” (i.e., acting as brokers; Diani 2003, p. 14), particularly by bridging the youngest and the most veteran generations of feminists. Finally, commitment to generational replacement (“from mothers to daughters”) is embedded in the feminist movement, which helps overcome generational differences.

In sum, I will trace the evolution of feminist mobilizations in Spain since the transition until its recent upsurge. All the aforementioned sources of tension notwithstanding, I shall contend that generational bridging processes unfolded, allowing for the feminist movement to become a mass phenomenon in the country. Before that, in the next section, I delve deeper into the sources of tension that come between veteran and new feminist activists in Spain.

Young and Veteran Feminist Generations: Sources of Tension

The antagonistic relationships between different generations of feminists, or across heuristic ideas of feminist “waves,” is neither new nor unique to the Spanish context (McRobbie, 2009; Rivers, 2017). Both firsthand insights and personal interviews carried out confirm the differences in terms of worldviews (“cosmovisions,” in the words of Galdón Corbella, 2016, 2018) between different generations of activists: that is, younger cohorts heavily politicized under the 15M momentum in contradistinction to long-term activists with a longer trajectory, who have been active for decades in most cases. Differences stand out along a number of dimensions.

First, a major difference between younger and older activists lies in their training, their education and theoretical references. They draw on different feminist theories. While the veterans’ sources of inspiration tend to link feminist identities to citizenship, the younger cohorts tend to embrace queer/sexualities-oriented feminist contributions. As a middle-aged feminist scholar puts it,

above all, the theoretical approach is different . . . [among the younger activists, there is an] inclination towards Anglo-Saxon gender studies and queer feminism . . . there is a re-readership and re-appropriation of queer feminism and adoration of [Judith] Butler . . . they feel comfortable with labels such as transfeminism or post-feminism . . . the older generations endorse an enlightened vision of feminism, that is of women’s rights oriented towards citizenship. They consider the queer turn has allied with the patriarchy emphasizing body and sexuality, and linked it to the identity. However, they [the veteran activists] link identity to citizenship. They see taking the right to sexuality as identity in a highly disruptive way . . . for them it is a patriarchal drift of the sexual liberation in the 1960s. (Int.ES.F1)

Indeed, many veteran activists advocate for leaving aside the focus on body and performance, and heteronormative oppressions. They understand subjectivities as distorting the ultimate feminist aspiration, which should seek to knock down patriarchy, understood as systemic inequality and discrimination. As reflected by the following testimony of a long-term activist,

I often wonder, and it is something I especially ask to young people, how is it compatible to be anticapitalist and develop a Marxist analysis of the economic situation, and then sometimes defend terrible postulates such as prostitution and surrogate motherhood . . . it is embracing the discourse of the most extreme neoliberalism. My point of criticism is that by embracing the queer agenda, they have left out the feminist agenda that contends systemic discrimination and inequalities for the sake of privileging subjectivities and sexualities. . . . I wish the agenda based on substantive rights comes back to play a central role among the feminist claims . . . at the end of the day, women's rights are international: right to life, right to abortion, right to get a job with the same conditions [as men], make care-work compatible . . . (Int.ES.F5)

From this testimony, we can also see a second major difference between veteran and young feminists' strategies, which tend to be state-oriented and seek to appeal to and engage with formal political institutions. In contrast, the younger cohorts' strategies are grassroots, deliberately avoiding interactions with institutional actors. In the words of a veteran activist,

As they [the younger generations] have precarious jobs, they have little expectations regarding the rights we got, such as pensions . . . they don't want to have anything to do with institutions because they have failed them, institutions have left them behind . . . [however] political parties only consider and call the organized feminist movement. (Int. ES.F5)

Political parties in general, especially the social–democratic PSOE, have a strong network in the feminist movement. Many organizations operate under the party's influence and milieu. Although these organizations have a limited mobilization capacity inside the movement, they have a lot of media exposure and impact in the society at large. This has created a lot of tension within the movement between those strands who more readily embrace institutional routes and those sectors who stick to extrainstitutional participation. Younger cohorts tend to see the institutionalized sectors of the feminist movement with much skepticism, emphasizing the movement's autonomous aspirations. As a feminist scholar and activist summarizes,

There is huge part of younger activists that escape from everything that is institutional. PSOE . . . unions . . . they have institutionalized too much, they have dumped the feminist aspirations . . . so they have escaped not only from PSOE but from everything that is institutional . . . (Int.ES.F1)

One veteran activist recognizes the relationship with and strategies toward institutional actors are major points of friction within the movement, and the major misunderstanding across generations of activists,

When it comes to the relationship with parties and institutions, in the autonomous social movements we tend to be very protective. Still, if we have a problem and try to contact a party, they will listen to me. . . . Well, not parties in general but two big parties: Podemos and PSOE. . . . But it creates internal tensions. For instance, in a feminist march, women

are at the forefront, they lead it. Then, parties and unions are sent to the back end of the walkout . . . [However] we had some experiences in the past where parties eclipsed women. (Int.ES.F5)

The tension between institutional and grassroots strategies are mirrored in the organizational settings. For most young activists, there is no organizational membership, there is not a collective of reference. In contradistinction to the formal organizational structures of veteran activists, younger generations opt for a more diffuse organization, which makes use both of internal and digital resources and tries to prefigure democratic-inclusive ideals. In the words of a veteran activist,

In the autonomous social movements of the 1960s-70s-80s, militancy was articulated in the organizations (with president, vice-president, etc.) . . . there was a commitment of militancy . . . in the postmodernity, whether we like it or not, the younger movement is not articulated in organizations. I am part of the 8M platform.⁴ For each meeting we have about 200 women attend to organize the march and the strike. In a meeting, 40% introduced themselves in a personal way: “I come on my behalf.” These women have a big commitment. . . . There is a need in the young feminist movement to break up not only with parties, unions, the political structure but to conceive themselves as being outside any organization . . . (Int.ES.F5)

However, this diffuse organizational nature is to be qualified. The fact younger cohorts do not engage in activism following the *modus operandi* of traditional organizations does not mean they are not organized. As one middle-aged activist recalls,

The Bloque Feminista Estudiantil, platforms such as 7N, etc., are not constituted formally, these are very heterogeneous spaces, with people who come from formal organizations, NGOs, individuals. . . . It is curious that activists are not militant in organizations but at the same time informal spaces become kind of organizations themselves . . . for instance, every decision in the Bloque Feminista Estudiantil has to go through the assembly, which is in itself a kind of organized way of working. (Int.ES.F3)

Grassroots mobilization was key not only to implement new forms of organization in the movement, including meeting minutes, communication through the Internet and social networks and organization in task forces (Fórum de Política Feminista, 2016). Specifically, the Internet has been a major platform to reach a whole new generation, not necessarily politicized, which has step-by-step found resonating some feminist claims and narratives. In the words of an engaged feminist scholar,

A small part of female youth has awakened and . . . organized through social networks without parties . . . there’s a lot of people who have approached feminism from social networks. (Int.ES.F1)

Importantly, assembly dynamics are inalienable from the deliberative conceptions of democracy younger activists tend to put forward. Very much influenced by the 15M

campaign, the Global Justice Movement, neighborhood initiatives, and so on, the assemblies are key for debate and exchange of opinions. Moreover, decision making is secondary and prefigurative practices prevail, oftentimes even at the risk of being less efficient. Decisions are not taken on the basis of a majority's will, as it will exclude a minority from the process, going against the principle of inclusivity. According to a young student activist,

Consensus is crucial to take decisions and to gain cohesion . . . every single opinion is important. The process to forge consensus transforms everyone involved . . . our discourse of democracy, of bringing assembly logics into the feminist movement wouldn't have been possible without the 15M and Feminismos Sol . . . (Int.ES.F2)

In fact, young activists have brought energy and have broadened the feminist movement, "*más calle y menos despachos*" (more in the streets and less in the offices), organizing in task forces to share the workload among assemblies and the explicit, democratic, and rotatory election of spokespersons and representatives, especially when engaging with political parties and institutions (Fórum de Política Feminista, 2016, p. 29). As a veteran activist concedes,

For the emerging movement representativeness is not an important factor. You are worth insofar as you work, insofar as you get committed and contribute. But not for the fact you represent an organization, or an X number of women. . . . There are tensions between veteran and young activists . . . we have to try to minimize them and solve conflicts. You have to win your space in order to get recognition . . . you just cannot be far off from the small daily battles, you ought to be down to earth. (Int.ES.F5)

Another distinctive feature of younger feminists is that they place emphasis on broadening, encompassing, and being sensitive to the type of inequalities and discriminations they seek to redress. In order not to reproduce patriarchal dynamics, they seek to expand the core of the movement and the voices, which are often ignored, playing particular attention to overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage, including race, ethnic origin, class, disability, and so on. Many activists who are very embedded within the feminist movement have a migrant background.

Individuals are often deeply embedded in the activist networks to which they are very dedicated. Indeed, activism is demanding; it entails commitment with the ensuing consequences in terms of determination, personal and emotional investment, time, resources, and so on. Heavily influenced both by the kind of education they have received and the politicization experiences they have gone through, young activists tend to strive to detach the person from the activist. Taking care is placed above all, and this implies taking breaks when needed, and (respectful) codes of conduct and behavior in assemblies, and so forth. It applies both at the individual and intergroup levels, which in turn reinforces collective identities and facilitates cohesion and unity. This approach marks a stark contrast with previous

generations' understanding of activism and commitment. According to Galdón Corbella (2018):

[For most veteran activists . . .] engagement implies that the personal dimension dissolves in a commitment to militancy, becoming hard to set limits. According to their own words: “the commitment, that rigid super ego, I can't fail, I should attend to every meeting . . . ” [67 years old activist]. A super ego that leads them to some frustrations, as they get burnt in an endless fight where they don't get credit. They are far from the care and self-care approach that feminists take coming from the 15M . . . horizontality understood as “we are all important but nobody is indispensable.”

With regard to tactics, young activists tend to deploy mixed tactics, often embracing performance as a form of action. Their understanding of activism is more sensorial, more experience-based, as the following quote from an interview with a feminist scholar illustrates,

[Young activists' repertoire is] more performance-based in contradistinction with the classic activist and its stock in trade I-go-to-a-demo. They do a lot of meetings, communal living, camps . . . with quite a celebratory character. We find a space in the neighborhood, abandoned . . . we live together, we share, we understand one another. It is a kind of feminism very based on the experience . . . it takes up all the time and life facets. (Int. ES.F1)

Both young and veteran activists tend to display mixed repertoires of action. Strategies are in part confrontational, involving mostly protest activities and including gatherings and walkouts, but also occasionally activities such as women symbolically putting on trial the government because of its attitude toward femicide. Importantly, veteran activists tend to combine extrainstitutional actions with awareness-raising activities (workshops, documentaries, drafting of manifestos and reports, research, etc.) and engage with institutional actors (contacting politicians, and including participation as experts in some endeavors, e.g., in the Comisión contra las Violencias Machistas [Commission against Sexist Violence] that pursued an state agreement on this matter). In the words of a middle-aged (but long-term) activist:

As the feminist movement is so diverse, we can cover all spaces. We can have the part of political influence, events in the Congress, meetings with political parties where you take them a manifesto with your demands. Then we have the movement in the streets, particularly mobilized through protests. . . . Despite all the diversity and all the differences, you make a team. . . . By keeping on the move . . . it is much stronger what gets us united than what tears us apart. (Int.ES.F4)

Notwithstanding all the sources of tension between young and veteran feminists that have been explored in this part, in the next section, we will track the recent evolution of the feminist movement in Spain after the 15M, making sense of the generational bridging processes.

Fast and Furious? The Feminist Movement's Trajectory in Spain After the 15M

The right-wing authoritarian Francoist regime not only held a right-wing ideology that overrode the rights and will of minorities (defined in terms of ideology, language, territorial preferences, religious, sexual orientation, etc.). Francoism also deployed an overtly antifeminist agenda, limiting the organization of women's rights activism (Valiente, 1994). Although feminist activists confronted an inhospitable social and political environment, socialist-leaning organizations such as the *Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres* ("Women's Democratic Movement") and the *Frente de Liberación de la Mujer* ("Women's Liberation Front") were decisive in fostering mass engagement, resistance against late Francoism, and the fulfilment of some of the movement's pressing aspirations in the early stages of democracy (Pintos, Miranda, & Mato, 2013). Similar to other cases, early Spanish feminists used submerged, temporary, and informal networks to organize collective action (Mueller, 1994). In fact, the 1970s Spanish feminists shared the main features of the international third-wave feminists that began in the mid-sixties, focusing on the issues that would have a leading role in the feminist debates over the past few decades, such as de facto inequalities, sexuality, family, work conditions, and abortion rights (Freeman, 2000; Rivers, 2017). One particularity of most Spanish activists in the early years of democracy lies in their double militancy. As María J. Gámez Fuentes (2015) reckons, "the priority of reconstructing Spanish democracy marked the path to be followed: women had to fight, along with other fellow citizens, to recover fundamental rights suppressed during Francoism" (p. 361).

The social-democratic PSOE victory in 1982 marked a turning point for the feminist movement, opening up a window of opportunity. In fact, legal achievements that met long-standing feminist claims took place during the 1980s, including the divorce law and decriminalization of abortion. Also, the *Instituto de la Mujer*, which is—still today—the most relevant state institution aimed at defending women's rights and equality, was created and consolidated (Valiente, 1994).⁵ The institutionalization of feminism contributed to produce "gender mainstreamed policies, and women's research institutes and gender consultancy organisations flourished" (Gámez Fuentes, 2015, p. 361). As a side effect, however, the 1980s saw the gap between radical milieus and more institutional feminists active in (left-wing) political parties and unions widening.

After the conservative backlash and the ensuing closing down of political opportunities under the right-wing *Partido Popular* governments (1996-2004), feminist activism was revitalized in Spain in the 2000s. First, the Global Justice Movement grew and queer studies spread (Gámez Fuentes, 2015). Second, the (unexpected) 2004 victory of socialist Rodríguez Zapatero launched a whole revamped agenda that touched on the welfare and rights entitlements of women (Calvo Borobia & Martín, 2009). As Calvo Borobia and Martín (2009, p. 488) put it, "what sets Zapatero's policies apart is the fact that these are mostly rights policies: they activate the citizenship status of women to a degree, resonance and political saliency never achieved before," including

the 2004 new policy on gender violence, the 2006 so-called dependency law, the 2006 education law and, ultimately, the 2007 equality law. Some of these changes were met with street contestation on the side of reactionary forces and the growth in initiatives led by, and membership of, right-wing organizations, such as Hazte Oír and Foro Español de la Familia (Aguilar Fernández 2010).

Following a demonstration and some encounters with the police on May 15, 2011, a crowd of around 130,000 people occupied Plaza Puerta del Sol in Madrid, in light of coming—local and regional—elections the week after. Under the slogans “they (politicians) do not represent us!” and “they call it democracy, but it isn’t,” thousands protested against policy making in an austerity-ridden scenario and demanded “real democracy now!” (Portos & Masullo, 2017). Given the mainstream media’s initial lack of coverage and following the *modus operandi* in the Arab Spring countries, information quickly diffused through social media and digital tools, the initial sit-in quickly escalated into mass encampments replicated in over 130 cities across the country and 60 abroad during the following weeks (Monterde, Calleja-López, Aguilera, Barandiaran, & Postill, 2015). In one way or another, 6 to 8 million people got involved in 15M activities, making these the most crowded contentious performances outside the umbrella of traditional unions and political parties in the country’s recent democratic history (Monterde et al., 2015).

After some assemblies took place, some activists agreed on the need to transversalize the movement, forging a proper feminist space. This way, “the Comisión de Feminismos Sol emerged . . . almost by force of habit. We, feminists, are used to get all together and take care of our own representation” (Bilbao, 2011, p. 120). However, the relationship between activists in the 15M and power is complex, as activists concede (Bilbao, 2011). According to Gámez Fuentes (2015, p. 360), within the 15M occupations,

different committees had to deal with manifestations of structural violence in the form of lack of representation in committees and assemblies, patronizing behavior [when setting out their arguments] and sexist stereotyping [mainly having to do with women’s demands being considered not universal, or “personal caprices” . . .]. Also, they suffered acts of violent sexism, and the undermining of women’s demands. . . . For example, during the camp in May 2011 in the Plaza de Sol in Madrid, two events occurred that were symptomatic of the frictions between the Feminist Committee and the rest of the movement. The first episode occurred on 20 May 2011, when a banner bearing the slogan “The revolution will be feminist or no revolution at all” was torn down by a man in front of the enthusiastic clapping of the rest of the people witnessing it. The second event was a reading by the Feminist Committee, in the General Assembly, of a statement announcing that the Committee would no longer spend the night in the camp after having suffered and been informed of sexual, sexist and homophobic aggression.

These episodes challenged feminists’ dream of inclusivity and acted as a reality check: “Sol is not an island in the middle of nowhere” (Comisión de Feminismos Sol, 2011, p. 5). As one veteran activist puts it,

[May 20, 2011] was very painful . . . that day was heart-breaking. It was as if they soaked us with a jar full of cold water. . . . But this made us rethink: where are we? What are people understanding? It pushed us to take a stance . . . it made us realise we were one among the many collectives over there, as a collective that stood with a space on its own, that event made us reconsider many things thereafter. (Galdón Corbella, 2017, p. 225)

Yet feminists decided not to leave. They stayed and forged internal and autonomous spaces that prioritized feminist aspirations and permeated the whole 15M, sharing arenas with people they would not have reached otherwise (Galdón Corbella, 2016, 2018). Starting as a general campaign that aimed at changing the socioeconomic and political systems, the 15M abandoned the visible occupation of central squares: it decentralized through neighborhood assemblies and compartmentalized by addressing specific issues, such as housing, the health and public education systems (Portos, 2017). According to Galdón Corbella (2018, p. 5): “feminism is going to stay there [in the collective intelligence], in the streets, in the assemblies, taking part of everything, permeating,” leading the way to a period of major contestation within the movement. For instance, the founding manifesto of the Marea Violeta (“Violet Tide”) launched from Málaga in early 2012, which gathered support from more than 400 organizations, called for mobilization against the “aggression towards progress made during the democracy in terms of women’s rights” (González, 2012, p. 778). Importantly, a number of organizations and initiatives joined together in light of the regressive reform of the abortion law launched by the Minister of Justice Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón since 2012. More than 100 women and public health-related organizations created the *Plataforma Estatal en Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos* “*Decidir nos hace libres*”—State Platform in Defense of the Sexual and Reproductive Rights “Deciding makes us free”—to denounce the “cutbacks in rights and liberties of women in the area of reproduction” (González, 2012, p. 779). This was followed by the *Tren de la Libertad* (“Train of Freedom”), a broad campaign that stood for women’s sexual and reproductive rights: “the first mass mobilization was the Train of Freedom, and that encouraged us to think that a massive march on gender violence in Madrid was possible” (Int.ES.F4). The level of popular contestation, including the mass demonstration on February 1, 2014, was key to force PM Mariano Rajoy’s withdrawal of the law reform a few months later, and the subsequent dismissal of Ruiz-Gallardón.

Besides the conservative governments’ regressive policies (2011-2018), a second major issue marked—and, conversely, was marked by—the feminist agenda. In recent years, dramatic numbers of femicides, violence, and abuse against women occurred, including cases that gathered much media attention and convulsed Spanish society, such as the José Bretón case, who murdered and buried his two young children in 2011 in an act of vengeance against his former wife after she filed for divorce (https://elpais.com/elpais/2013/07/22/inenglish/1374497071_160243.html). More recently, another salient case that triggered major popular unrest was that of Juana Rivas, a mother of two who disappeared in the summer of 2017 after refusing to send her two children back to Italy with her former partner, who had been convicted in the past for domestic abuse. There was a major solidarity campaign with this

mother and her refusal as police authorities tried to search for her for days on the grounds of “kidnap”; in fact, the *#JuanaEstáEnMiCasa* hashtag became trending topic in Twitter.⁶ She became a symbol of the feminist movement, as her case reflects the patriarchal character of a legal system that is not sensitive to violence against women. Protests quickly spread across the country. Finally, *La Manada*, a case of sexual violence that happened in Pamplona in July 2016 during San Fermín celebrations, decisively contributed to the feminists’ unity of action. A group of five men sexually abused an 18-year-old girl in a building hallway. The victim accused them of rape.⁷ The judgment was announced in April 2018 with the court clearing the accused of rape, finding them guilty of sexual abuse instead (despite accepting there was penetration without the victim’s consent)—one of the three magistrates did not agree with his two colleagues and voted for their acquittal. These decisions caused major social outrage and triggered mobilizations under the slogan “it is not abuse, it is rape” across the country. In Pamplona alone (a city with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants), 32,000 people marched along the streets in late April, plus many thousands in many cities.⁸ In only 6 hours, more than 300,000 signed a petition to disqualify the judges who delivered the judgement.⁹ *La Manada* case does not only represent the close association between feminist mobilization and legal frameworks (and court rulings) but also the movement’s reactive and diffuse organization as well as its unpredictable success.

The shifting fortunes of feminist mobilizations notwithstanding, the *Marcha Estatal Contra las Violencias Machistas* had already illustrated in November 2015 the movement’s growing mobilization capacity. Also known as 7N, the call (and the organizing platform) brought together more than 300 feminist organizations, and was supported by more than 200 institutions (parties, unions . . .) and 135 municipalities. Feminist networks are usually created to bring together different milieus for a specific campaign or endeavor, and then dissolve after that. The 7N marked an exception: after the successful march (with at least 200,000 participants, according to the organisers),¹⁰ the organizing platform did not vanish into thin air. In order to keep promoting the founding manifesto’s aspirations, a number of activists behind the 7N decided to keep working in the newly constituted 7N *Plataforma Feminista Contra las Violencias Machistas* (“Feminist Platform against Sexist Violence”), whose narratives increasingly resonated in the media and the public debate.¹¹ Also, the 7N gave rise to different organizational endeavors in different arenas, including many university assemblies that formed the *Bloque Feminista Estudiantil*.¹²

Another major protest performance took place on March 8, 2018. Coordinated by an umbrella group, the 8M Commission, a feminist strike was held to mark the International Women’s Day, in order to point out sexual discrimination, domestic violence and the wage gap (Campillo, 2019). Under the slogan “if we stop, the world stops,” more than 5 million women joined the strike in the country.¹³ Calling for an end to Spain’s enduring *machista* culture, the action sought to transform the idea of a strike: it did not merely focus on socioeconomic and labor rights and conditions, but the strike included also care, housework and the whole domestic environment (Campillo, 2019). Although the 8M Commission eventually managed to encompass

people from very different feminist milieus, it did not prioritize the inclusion of intermediary institutions of representation, such as the main unions. According to the daily *El País*,

last year the turnout was good, but this year it was overwhelming, with hundreds of protests taking place across the country, a general 24-hour strike [the only one in the world], partial walkouts by five million workers, and massive demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people. Its success placed Spain at the cusp of a global movement. Women and men of all political persuasions, nationalities and sexual orientation moved as one and made more noise than anywhere else in the world.¹⁴

A number of networks emerged to encompass different approaches, traditions, and lines of work. There were several state-oriented platforms, such as the Plataforma Estatal de Organizaciones de Mujeres por la Abolición de la Prostitución (*State Platform of Women Organizations for the Abolition of Prostitution*) and the Plataforma Impacto de Género Ya! (*Gender Impact Now! Platform*) In fact, one of the recurrent distinctive traits that first emerges in the interviews is the heterogeneity and transversal character of the mobilization, with a lack of centralized organization, and the presence instead of polycephalous networks of the feminist movement(s) in Spain.

The level of mobilization and unity of action among different cultures and traditions of feminism could not have developed without the spaces for dissent that were created since 2011 in terms of both organizational endeavors and mass performances (e.g., Marea Violeta, 7N, 8M). Importantly, for these (arguably occasional) joint endeavors to take place, a number of middle-aged activists acted as brokers, a nexus that allowed for the convergence between the most veteran and younger activists' approaches and strategies. In the words of a feminist engaged scholar,

We're reaching now a time of convergence and collaboration [in the feminist movement] . . . we share spaces, the academia has opened up. For instance, at the Unit of Equality [at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos] we have one of the persons from 7N; we have congresses, workshops . . . we invite over people from [the social center with an important feminist collective] La Ingobernable, 7N, etc., . . . they come and there is an interaction. But it's always the middle-aged generations who are the nexus between the older activists who put in motion the Instituto de la Mujer that came from PSOE and the new movements, associated with the 15M and Feminismos Sol, younger cohorts, which are very grassroots, linked to social centers, neighborhoods, etc. Without that intermediate generation there will be very little dialogue . . . you can go to the social media and see the "beautiful things" [ironic] they tell one another, but I believe it's mostly because they don't know each other. I believe that without that intermediate generation there would have been very little dialogue. (Int.ES.F1)

Additionally, there is a sense of continuity among feminists. In order for the movement and the fight to continue, there is a perceived need for generational replacement: individuals must give way for the sake of continuity and collective interest. Feminists are aware they need to regenerate in order not to fall into power hierarchies; many

veteran activists concede they cannot be on the front row anymore but in a secondary, supportive role (see interviews in Galdón Corbella, 2016, p. 207). This idea is deeply rooted in the movement's mind-set, as two interviewees reckon in the following excerpts,

It was very costly for the old activists to get us here. Despite all the fights [between generations], the old activists are very aware that if they don't pass the baton the movement will be back in the void . . . despite they have a rebel daughter, they want her to stick to the fight but this is a long-term battle. . . . There is a component of sorority . . . "The sense of community, 'I can't on my own,' the idea of community is embedded in the old activists . . . the movement and fight has to be led by women because there is no alternative . . . we want it to become a fight for everyone, but emphasize the matrilineal component because we are not nearly there yet." (Int.ES.F1)

We, senior feminists, are very happy about the generational replacement. . . . It's about their time [speaking of the younger generations]. They have risen with a lot of power, and I love it . . . traditionally, we the veterans complained about the lack of commitment and consciousness [among the youth], but this discourse has changed. In every event we attend, you always hear: "what a bunch of young people, so wonderful!" We can take a step backwards, we can retire . . . many women of my generation, I think we did it very clearly in the 7N without having talked about it, without rendering it explicit . . . we gave way to the younger generations, they were clearly on the lead. They were on the media, we had a lower profile. It's their time. They are entitled to make mistakes. . . . Symbolically, we're the mothers and they're the daughters. (Int.ES.F5)

In sum, in order to keep levels of popular mobilization high, feminists needed to bring together different generations of activists. Despite multiple sources of tension stemming from different generational approaches and experience, cross-generational compromise between feminists was possible thanks to (a) their ability to forge and share spaces for dissent in an austerity-ridden scenario, (b) the role as brokers of middle-aged feminists, and (c) the deeply rooted idea of generational replacement at the core of feminist identity.

Conclusion

Following the 15M events and the broader cycle of protest against austerity and the status quo that unfolded in 2007-2015, Spanish feminists delivered mass mobilizations in Spain to contend with the conservative PP government's regressive policies (e.g., on abortion), and systematic violence and abuse against women. As Emanuela Lombardo (2017) puts it,

the austerity policies that the EU and the Spanish government have enacted in response to the economic crisis are changing the Spanish gender regime in neoliberal and conservative directions . . . the feminist struggles against austerity and anti-equality policies, and women's resistance towards "going back home," have so far blocked the redomestication of women. (pp. 20-21)

In this article, we argue that sources of tensions can be traced along different dimensions. Younger activists politicized under the 15M tend to show different theoretical approaches (embracing the queer/sexualities' turn),¹⁵ have different (more grassroots, less institution-oriented) strategies, organizational structures (less formal, Internet-based and consensual–horizontal mechanisms), and incorporate a number of innovations (e.g., performances, intersectionality, ethics of care). These issues notwithstanding, different generations of activists converged in these mobilizations. They were able to reach (arguably occasional and unstable) compromise by (a) creating spaces of encounter where synergies could be built in light of the preceding cycle of mobilization, (b) having middle-aged activists who played brokerage and contributed to bring younger and more veteran cohorts together, and (c) thanks to the idea of generational replacement being embedded within the feminist consciousness and milieu.

This article has illustrated how an eventful mobilization campaign such as the 15M can influence a set of micro-cohorts, and how some of these features perpetuate when they enter into a further instance of mobilization (e.g., the feminist field). Amid manifold clashes and tensions with activists that show a long record of activism in the field, Spanish feminists managed to overcome them and succeeded at appealing to broad sectors of society. More empirical research is necessary to unravel how the interaction between the younger generations of activists and institutions occurs, especially in a context where new movement-related forces are on the rise. Additionally, the transitions of new cohorts of activists from the 15M to other movement areas deserves closer attention, in order to address how these activists adapt and the mid-long-term consequences it entails for these arenas.

Appendix

List of Interviewees

- Int.ES.F1: So. (38). Gender studies scholar, activist, Unit of Equality URJC. Madrid, 01/24/2018.
- Int.ES.F2: Sa. (22). Bloque Feminista Estudiantil, Comisión 8 de Marzo del Movimiento Feminista. 02/18/2018 (via Skype).
- Int.ES.F3: L. (41). Plataforma 7N Contra las Violencias Machistas, former activist in the student movement and militant of IU. Madrid, 01/23/2018.
- Int.ES.F4: A. (27). Plataforma 7N Contra las Violencias Machistas, feminist lawyer. Madrid, 01/23/2018.
- Int.ES.F5: H. (66). Agrupación Fórum Feminista de Madrid, Comisión 8 de Marzo del Movimiento Feminista, retired nurse. Madrid, 01/18/2018.
- Int.ES.F6: Ir. (33). Cooperativa Feminista Pandora Mirabilia. Madrid, 01/22/2018.
- Int.ES.F7: T. (39). Feministes per la Independència, Ca la Dona, scholar. Barcelona, 12/18/2017.

Int.ES.F8: C. (30s). Activist in the community radios, Tabacalera, 15M, feminist, ecologist (Madrid Agroecológico). Florence, 05/25/2018.

Int.ES.F9: J. (63). Founder of the Coordinadora estatal de organizaciones feministas, the Asamblea feminista de Madrid, and the Plataforma de Mujeres ante el Congreso. Madrid, 01/24/2018.

Int.ES.F10: N. (19). Racialized feminist, Afroféminas. 02/12/2018 (via Skype).

Int.ES.F11: In. (36). Feminist artist, member of Podemos's Círculo de Feminismos. Barcelona: 12/18/2017. Madrid, 01/19/2018.

Int.ES.F12: A. (56). Feminist activist, member of the UGT union. 01/29/2018 (via phone call).

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Notes

1. We make a distinction between feminist and women's movements. Siding with Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller (2004), the women's movement refers to mobilizations based on appeals to women as a *constituency* and thus as an organizational strategy . . . regardless of their particular goals, they bring women into political activities, empower women to challenge limitations on their roles and lives, and create networks among women that enhance women's ability to recognize existing gender relations as oppressive and in need of change (p. 577). In contrast, the feminist movement has the "goal of challenging and changing women's subordination to men. Feminist mobilizations are informed by feminist theory, beliefs, and practices, and also often encourage women to adopt other social change goals. Autonomous forms of feminist mobilization are based on organizations and campaigns directed by and to women, and thus take the specific form of feminist women's movements" (Marx Ferree & McClurg Mueller, 2004, p. 577).
2. See <http://www.feministas.org/madrid/> and <http://www.feministas.org/>
3. The empirical fieldwork was conducted as part of a research project held at COSMOS, Scuola Normale Superiore. The project is devoted to explore youth participation and attitudes, how they engaged in different political domains, mapping collective experiences by young people pursuing a just and sustainable European society (http://cosmos.sns.it/projects/critical-young-europeans-cry_out/).
4. The 8M Commission is an umbrella platform that coordinated the feminist strike held on March 8, 2018 (see section 4).
5. See <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/elInstituto/conocenos/home.htm>
6. See <https://twitter.com/hashtag/juanaestaenmicasa?lang=es>
7. Video recordings of the events and commentaries on social networks facilitated strong media coverage. La Manada stands for "wolfpack," as the perpetrators labelled themselves

- in an infamous WhatsApp group, where they communicated and took pride in their actions.
8. See <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-43940999> and https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2018/04/26/actualidad/1524762106_702951.html
 9. See <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/04/26/5ae1f7c422601dd71c8b4618.html>
 10. See https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/feminismo-exigir-violencia-machista-cuestion_0_449705164.html
 11. See <https://plataforma7n.wordpress.com/> and https://www.eldiario.es/juanlusanchez/pancarta-arrancada-victoria-politica_6_748635145.html
 12. See <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2018/08/24/5b7ef719e2704e27848b461b.html>
 13. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/08/spanish-women-give-up-work-for-a-day-in-first-feminist-strike>
 14. See https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/03/21/inenglish/1521624982_050188.html
 15. This turn might have an impact on the traditionally complex and problematic relationship between the lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual and feminist movements, which deserves further attention from a longitudinal approach (see Calvo Borobia, 2017).

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