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Repression of the Spanish Protest Movement - Mechanisms and Consequences

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Repression of the Spanish Protest Movement – Mechanisms and Consequences

Abstract: Based on longitudinal qualitative research, the paper analyses manifestations and mechanisms of the repression of activists of the Spanish protest movement 15M, and effects of this repression perceived by activists. To contextualize this, the background of the movement, its goals, and its achievements are described. The movement started in 2011, protesting the social crisis, the consequences of austerity policies, and corruption. It had viable effects on the framing of the current situation, in political attitudes and also, indirectly, on the political system. The Spanish government has responded to movement activities with repression and with new laws that interviewees characterize as a further restriction of the civil right to demonstrate and protest. Findings indicate that the combination of overt and covert repression have effects far beyond the manifest acts of the repression itself.

1 Introduction

The paper analyses the repression of the Spanish protest movement 15M. The movement started in May 2011 triggering a massive increase in civil society activism, along with the creation of new movement organizations and the strengthening of already existing ones. It also resulted in the emergence of new parties at the national and at the municipal level. Millions of Spanish people have been protesting austerity policies and their consequences. Both the movement and these new parties achieved viable successes. The Spanish government responded with repression and adopting new laws on public security that further restricted the civil rights to demonstrate and protest. This paper analyzes the following research questions: First, what were manifestations and mechanisms of the repression of movement activists? Second,

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what effects do activists perceive? Both questions will be analyzed based on qualitative research. The paper thus addresses a research gap, as current tendencies of repression of social movements are so far empirically underresearched.

Based on the typology of Earl (2003), who distinguishes amongst other factors, between observable and unobservable repression, the paper will argue that main effects of the form of repression investigated result from the deterrent effects of a combination of rather invisible strategies – Garcia called this "soft repression" (García 2013) – and repressive strategies with high visibility, and therefore had effects far beyond the manifest acts of the repression itself. The latter strategies were introduced in the phase of a declining movement cycle and pose a significant dilemma for activists.

The paper is organized as follows: First, it introduces the theoretical background, the social context and the emergence of the movement. Based on the description of the methodology, it gives an analysis of the achievements of the movement, presents evidence on repression and discusses the effects of the repression.

2 Theoretical Background

Western democracies tend toward pacification in dealing with movement activities (Della Porta 2006) like bargaining, collecting information, assimilation and other "softer" forms of dealing with protest. Nevertheless, wherever dissent occurs, some forms of coercive responses seem to take place, a phenomena that, in the light of very diverse effects of repression, Davenport and Loyle called the "puzzle of repressive persistence" (2012, 76). Bueno De Mesquita and Smith argue that autocrats regard citizen´s rights and consequent collaboration as a threat and thus tend to eliminate them (Bueno De Mesquita and Smith 2012, 97). Tilly suggested in 1978 that repression might hinder or even trigger mobilization (1978), and up to now, research has brought forth evidence for both effects (Earl 2003; Francisco 2005). Explaining these different effects, Della Porta highlighted movements' dependence on different democratic or authoritarian contexts (2015). Moreover, the situation in the movement cycle is seen as crucial for the mutual relationship of repression and mobilization (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012), and strong networks and micro-mobilization processes might endorse, overcompensate or neutralize repression (Opp and Roehl 1990, 540f). Davenport and Loyle argue that state coercion is effective, but functions in ways often not considered such as "the objective of state repression is not the reduction of overt

dissident behavior but rather the "pacification" of dissident claims-making and/ or the reduction of the various activities that dissidents engage in (...)" (2012, 80). Repression thus often aims at reducing the degree of radicalism. In a literature overview on state responses to mobilization, Combes and Fillieule identify only two consistent factors: " ... protest contributes to increasing repression, and past recourse to repression increases the chances that it will be used again." (2011, 2)

Based on the definition that repression is "any action by another group which raises the contender's cost of collective action" (Tilly 1978, 100), Earl identifies three theoretical dimensions of repression: (1) the identity of the repressive agent, (2) the character of the repressive action and (3) whether the repressive action is observable (2003, 47). She develops 12 combinations of these dimensions, like, for example, observable (or, as another type: unobservable) channeling by state agents tightly connected with national political elites; or observable, coercive repression by state agents loosely (or: tightly) connected with national political elites. Thus, amongst others, she refers to the distinction between covert and overt repression, "overt, coercive repression is intended to be obvious to both protesters and wider publics." (Earl 2003, 48) The typology is related to the question of the threat that movements pose on political elites. Some scholars suggest that the larger the threat to political elites, the greater the amount of repression (McAdam 1982); others rather argue that a weakness of the movement encourages repression (Gamson 1990). Earl shows that specifically in situations where the movement is a threat to political elites, observable and tightly connected coercion can be found (see also examples in Della Porta 1996; Earl 2003).

The paper will use the distinction of observable and unobservable repression to analyze the effects of the repression on activists of 15M. With regard to this movement, Garcia argues that the Spanish state combined "(...) the use of truncheons with other more subtle coercive measures, such as municipal by-laws, and administrative sanctions, (...). The silent nature of such repressive tactics means that not only are they virtually invisible to pubic opinion, but also their existence is rarely discussed in the specialised literature, which tends to focus on violent acts committed by public authorities." (García 2013, 304) The author stresses the importance of invisibility of the repressive acts. Since then, the situation has changed and there is evidence that besides the maintenance of these invisible aspects, it is specifically the visibility of potential repressive acts, that seems to have an influence on mobilization. The results presented in the remainder of this paper suggest that the combination of observable and unobservable factors are decisive in this specific context.

3 The Social Context and the Spanish Protest Movement

The Spanish movement emerged as a reaction to political corruption and severe economic problems following the financial crisis in 2007. The pressure of austerity-politics induced a general downsizing of the public sector with cuts in the social, the welfare and the education systems. This policy has led to a social and political crisis, affecting individual citizens, political accountability, and the stability of society (Feenstra and Keane 2014).

The unemployment rate rose up to 26.38%[1] in 2013, youth unemployment reached a peak of 55.5 % in 2013 (Eurostat 2016) and was thus second-highest in Europe.[2] Since 2012, more than a million of young people have had to emigrate. "We do not go voluntarily, they throw us out," is their slogan. Those who have a job often face precarious working conditions which do not allow them to secure a livelihood. In 2011, almost 70 % of the 18 to 34-year-olds were living with their parents or grandparents (Rodríguez San Julián 2012). About 25 % of Spanish people live at or below the poverty line, and 37 % of families with children live in precarious situations with even hunger or malnutrition (González-Bueno and Bello 2014). In 2012, soup kitchens and food banks supplied 1.5 million people with food, and every 15 minutes a family is being evicted (Romanos 2017). According to Spanish law, bank repossession is not considered a discharge of the secured debt. Thus, due to the decline in real estate prices, most evicted people are still not debt-free (Hughes 2011).

In 2011, dissatisfaction with the economic and political status quo led to an outburst of the protest movement, called 15M (Antentas and Vivas 2011; Hughes 2011; Perugorría and Tejerina 2013; Taibo 2011). After large city square occupations, the movement decentralized into various forms of civil society activism like regional protest-groups, popular assemblies, self-help groups, soup kitchens, legislative initiatives, and social centers. A massive increase in nonviolent civil society protests, activism, and voluntary self-organization took place. Civil disobedience and non-violent resistance, such as occupying empty houses or blocking evictions, were important means (Feenstra 2015; Romanos 2013). Many people became politicized for the first time in their lives (Taibo 2013). Goals of

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1 2013, http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/17327/umfrage/arbeitslosenquote-in-spanien/

2 July 2014, http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/74795/umfrage/jugendarbeitslosigkeit-in-europa/); https://www.google.at/?gws_rd=ssl#q=unemployment+rates+Spain

the movement were a change of the economic system, political participation, inclusion and solidarity.

In subsequent years, protest activities almost doubled (García 2013, 303) and a further differentiation of activities took place, with specialized groups and civil society organizations, ranging from the nation-wide platform against evictions, to smaller groups like youth without future, the protest grandparents, women´s initiatives or lawyer initiatives.

Many patterns of 15M are typical for current movements, like the heterogeneous socio-economic features of activists, and the self-organization in open assemblies (Benski et al. 2013; Romanos 2016). Its organizations, which are conceptualized to prefiguratively reflect movement goals in daily organizing practices, are based on a long tradition in other movements like the alternative globalization movement or the feminist movement (Flesher Fominaya 2014; Gámez Fuentes 2015; Simsa and Totter 2017). Specific for the Spanish situation were historic roots from the civil war, the resistance against the dictatorship of Franco, a strong Anarchist tradition, and broad experience with self-organized cooperatives (Hughes 2011; Taibo 2013). Also, there is a long tradition in experience with repression. Activists of all ages often referred to these roots and one of the most important slogans of initial manifestations was: "We are not afraid".

As of 2014, movement activities started to decline. There were fewer protests, and less people involved. While in 2014, many interviewees still described a very dynamic civil society, in 2015, many people stated that the streets were comparatively empty, and they noticed a dramatic demobilization. A core of activists remained highly connected and active, and movement organizations continued their activities, often in more specialized and elaborated ways.

4 Methodology

The paper is based on field research in Spain. Altogether, 106 Interviews with activists, representatives of social movement organizations and university scholars have been conducted between November 2014 and June 2017 in Madrid, Sevilla and Valencia. The selection of interview partners followed a snow-ball system and the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Interviews were both open and semi-structured, lasted between 45 minutes and almost three hours, and were recorded. 36 interviews were transcribed and analyzed via MAXQDA software. 15 of these interviews, which have specific relevance for the topic, were selected for a more thourough analysis of this paper. Partners of four of these interviews had been interviewed twice or three

times. Partners of these interviews were two lawyers who are also movement activists, five university scholars (three of them also being active in the movement), and eight movement activists. The latter work in different initiatives, like neighborhood-groups, soup-kitchens, or a time bank, or they mainly had been active in demonstrations. Interviews with scholars have been integrated to to get a more reflected view. Initially, interview questions were very general, directed to the movement, its strategies, and its effects. In a next stage of the research, from 2015 onwards, interviews were more focused on repression. Apart from this focus, the interviews were performed very openly, following the topics of the interview partners. In the following, quotes from individual interviewees identified by number wil be used. These quotes are not intended to prove the general conclusions but to illustrate them.

5 Achievements of the Movement

The most evident effect was the emergence of new parties, which are not part of but closely connected to the movement and achieved success in regional, national and European elections. In 2014, the national party Podemos ('We Can') gained 7.98 % at the elections for the European parliament. In 2015, various citizen's platforms and parties won regional elections so that in five of the biggest Spanish cities, including Madrid and Barcelona, they now hold the position of the mayor. The ruling conservatives saw the weakest results since 1991 (Wandler 2015). Although the new parties fell short of expectations at the national elections of 2015, attaining 21 % of votes, the two-party system, which had been in place since the end of the dictatorship in 1978, was broken. The elections did not result in clear majorities, and had to be repeated in 2016. Currently, the conservatives are leading a minority government.

Activists express ambivalent feelings towards the success of these new parties. On the one hand, they argue that sustainability needs institutionalization, and that participation in national and local governments implies a greater potential for changing the status quo. On the other hand, they criticize that people now delegate their problems. The quite pointed wording "Podemos has emptied the streets" (I76) is shared by many interviewees: "Many people who were in the movement, are now in the institutions. I can't judge if this is good or bad. But before, the pressure was in the streets, the combat was in the streets, and this muscle now has gone to the institutions." (I94). Some activists also express disappointment that the Podemos party had watered down principles of egalitarianism and self-organization. While some activists evaluate the politics

of the new national party as "old wine in new bottles" (I71), others see the development more positively: "You can´t expect them to change everything at the same time. The system is too powerful." (I118).

The movement clearly affected the political culture. Before, it used to be the widely-accepted norm not to become involved in politics or to talk about political problems. This was called sociological Franquismo (Simsa 2016): Even people who were too young to have experienced the dictatorship acted as if they had been socialized by it. This has changed significantly. Interest in politics and the readiness to become involved in politics have increased. As one interviewee put it: "Before, you couldn´t even imagine talking about corrupt politicians. Not even in families. You just didn't do it. And now, you turn on the television and you see a report of a trial or a new accusation. This is incredible." (I30). As another activist put it, "In the long run, it might be that we won't succeed. But what has really changed is the way we think about politics. We have started to talk about politics and we will not go back to being quiet again" (I57).

A widely-acknowledged effect of the movement refers to the framing of the social situation. Before, poverty and financial difficulties were mostly seen as individual failures. Actors of the movement quite successfully framed them as systemic problems of the economic and political system. Instead of feeling ashamed or afraid, people now reacted with feelings of anger and solidarity, and this in turn led to a further surge of political protest. One woman, for example, told the story of how she passed by an occupied space, listened to discussions, and felt attracted: "People stood up, told their story one after another, and I realized that others were in the same position as me. […] This was very moving. You felt, that you are not alone and that it is not your fault. So, I stayed and became an activist myself." (I50). Several interviewees spoke about similar experiences. By sharing their stories, people realized communalities, and changed the narrative regarding their situation and accompanying feelings.

Further, the movement led to increased community-building. During many hours of occupations and work in diverse initiatives, people got to know each other. The strengthening of civil society through horizontal personal links between individuals in similar conditions was an initial approach and a strategy (Castañeda 2012). As one activist puts it: "We want to create spaces of communality" (I55). Many interviewees reported now feeling more responsible for others, and having built larger and more stable networks of social support: "Now I know whom to ask, when I have problems" (I75). One facet of this community building is the reclaiming of the commons; public space is politicized as a central issue of highly symbolic significance: "Life is not about work and returning home, but about getting to the streets and seeing what is going on" (I68).

6 Findings: Repression and its Effects

6.1 Repression of Activists

While the movement undoubtedly had a high impact, contrary dynamics also unfolded, which led to a decline of activism. Apart from usual dynamics of the movement cycle and effects of the political institutionalization, the decline of movement activities was ascribed by interview partners to repression.

6.1.1 General Repression

From 2011 onwards, repression of activists has been observed (García 2013), with a rise in financial penalties, the misuse of existing laws and police violence. The interior ministry increased public spending on anti-riot equipment.[3] While Spain was called to order several times for police torture before the rise of social activism by the European Union,[4] police brutality now rose. In 2013, it was denounced by the Council of Europe.[5] Amnesty International has documented incidents of police violence against protesters, including the use of clubs and rubber bullets (2012).

Nevertheless, the government reacted to ongoing movement activities, and probably also to their effects on the political system, with even more rigorous legislation. New laws on public security and terrorism, and the reform of the criminal code, ratified in July 2015, impose restrictions on civil society activists and reduced the right of freedom of assembly and the right of freedom of expression.

Interviewees gave many examples for repression. All initiatives investigated had experiences with police violence, restrictions of the right to demonstrate, and with financial fines. For example, a photographer reported that he was hit with a rubber club from behind, while he was taking a picture of a woman being knocked down by three policemen at a non-violent manifestation. Some weeks later, the police came to his home, and kept him without naming reasons for one day at a police station. He was not allowed to call a lawyer or his family: "I am

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3 http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/10/30/economia/1351613307.html http://www.eldiario.es/politica/Interior-dispara-gasto-antidisturbios_0_136136671.html

4 See http://www.prevenciontortura.org/documentos/ http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/04/29/actualidad/1367264744_739709.html

5 https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2389885&SecMode=1&DocId=2077824&Usage=2 http://www.publico.es/politica/denuncias-torturas-policiales-terminan-condena.html

only taking pictures and they act as if I were a conductor of violence. I just go and take pictures. (...) ". (I73). Other activists also told about incidents of people being kept in prison without the possibility to communicate. One person showed a long scar that he got after being hit by a rubber club and told about the recurrent use of rubber bullets: "Usually, they aim at the eyes of activists. "(I75). A lawyer told: "There are manifold ways of what you can call soft torture; detaining people from sensory impressions in jail by keeping the light on at night and turning it off during the day, don´t allow them to go to the toilet, let them stand for a long time without even leaning at the wall (...)." (I113) Another activist tells: "In Spain, torture exists. (...) There are many forms of torture, not only physical ones, also psychological torture. This type of torture likes to scare you, to humiliate you, etc." (I82)

These incidents of police violence apparently took place in non-violent manifestations. Apart from assertions of interviewees, this is indicated by the fact that most accusations against activists have not withstood examination by courts. A representative of the civil society group "Legal Sol", which was founded by lawyers to defend activists' rights by offering them pro bono legal aid, said that in the two years prior to 2015, the group supported 493 activists in trials. Only 6 % of them were found guilty." (I94)

6.1.2 The New Laws on Public Security, the Criminal Code and Antiterrorism

In July 2015, new laws were ratified. Now, the reform of the criminal code allows much higher penalties, the antiterrorist law formulates a very wide and open definition of terrorism, and the law on public security curtails the rights to protest and demonstrate. The criminal law reform stipulates high financial penalties for so-called disobedience. Further, disobedience to authority, previously considered a criminal offence, is now considered a misdemeanor (Simsa and Berraquero-Díaz 2015). This leads to a reversal of the burden of proof, which, according to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe constitutes a violation of civil rights (CommDH 2013, 18). A representative of the initiative "Legal Sol" explained: "They were not successful in court, because judges demand clear evidence. Now police can impose fines without further proof. Accused persons can appeal at court, but they must pay the fine first and appeal at their own risk." (I94).

The new law on public security limits protests by laying out strict guidelines on when, where and how protests can take place and by penalizing offenders with steep fines. It allows e. g. for fines of up to € 30,000 for disseminating photographs of police officers being violent against citizens, for attempting to prevent evictions,

or for protests without previous communication. Using Twitter, Facebook or Instagram to call on people to demonstrations also might be fined. Further, the mere threat of an turmoil is defined as an offence.

Under the reformed antiterrorist law, people can be punished for being potentially dangerous. Based on a broad definition of terrorism, the reform amplifies police rights to detain people preventively, thus not only penalizing actual acts but also potential threats. The tendency to associate social protest with terrorism has been reinforced in recent years.[6] Under the new law, this thus far symbolic criminalization may also incur formal punishment.

6.2 Effects – Fines, Trials and the Policeman in your Head

Based on data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the first seven months of the new laws, 40,000 sanctions were imposed,[7] most of them for "lack of respect to the police". "Disobedience (…) without any doubt, this is the accusation used most. From all aspects of the gag law, what they use most is disobedience to civil servants, which gives these civil servants a lot of power." (I113) The fines are imposed very selectively: "They are much more selective in giving fines. But these fines are much higher than before. Before at a demonstration, they issued 300 fines, each for about 300 Euro. Now they issue only about 10 fines, but each one 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 Euro." (I94)

Also, there was an increase in accusations for "apology of terrorism". Recently, some of these accusations have been made in fields of humor and culture, like in widely discussed cases of a performance of puppeteers, of a poet or a musician. The case of a 21-year-old student got a lot of publicity: She was sentenced to a year in prison and disqualified from public functions for seven years, after making a joke on Twitter that was interpreted as glorifying terrorism. The joke was tasteless, but it was a popular and common joke, which had been used before many times. One activist talked about ideological records "They can argue that you are suspect of being a terrorist (…). Then it is legal to keep these files, as prevention. (…) This is a very subtle form of repression. They file information about your life only because you think differently, even if you never have committed any crime. (…) Do you remember 1984 by George Orwell? The thought police? Here we are today." (I82)

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6 http://www.eldiario.es/escolar/ETA_6_58854139.html http://www.publico.es/politica/incre ibles-miembros-eta.html

7 https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/carlos-esca-o-h-l-ne-michou/united-against-spain-s-gag-laws-change-bottom-up

Many activists state that the laws were designed to address the strategies of specific civil society initiatives. Initiatives like the Platform for Mortgage Victims, for example, hinder evictions by trying to keep the police from entering the flats with nonviolent occupations of the space, basically sitting in front of the doors. Hindering evictions was now explicitly framed as disobedience and made subject to high penalties: "They have stopped thousands of evictions all over the state. And what has happened? The gag law established fines, very grave, enormous fines, for those who disobey an official in doing his duty (...). A judge orders to evict a family, the police comes, and with the old laws, they would have sanctioned you with some fine. The effect of the gag law is that they can fine you with up to 30,000 Euro, or even up to 300,000 Euro." (I94)

Spanish civil society groups are challenging both the use of existing law and the reforms. An important player is the protest platform "We are not crime", which encompasses more than 100 organizations and groups (NSD; No Somos Delito, 2013). They criticize that due to the new laws, there had been more accusations, trials and fines. Nevertheless, all interviewees active in dealing with legislative aspects assess that self-censorship and fear have been much graver than justified by manifest punishments.

A representative of the platform NSD said, "The numbers of fines are symbolic. Also, its economic effects, with some exceptions." A lawyer confirms this: "Before, repression was worse. (...)They are practically not applying the laws." (I113) Yet, the laws have severe effects: "The most important effect of the new laws is the dissuasion. (...) People don´t make use of their rights." (I115) This opinion is shared widely: "The most worrying consequence of the gag laws is the population´s fear of exercising their freedoms, in particular, freedom of expression and information."[8]

6.2.1 Why Do the Laws Have Effects that Go so Far beyond Their Manifest Implications?

First, the law is very well known: "You will not find a single person who does not know these laws." (I62) Thus, people are afraid of the consequences, a situation to which the intensive advocacy against these laws contributed. Also, the government contributed to the high publicity. The laws were introduced two years before they were ratified: "The government played with this. It was not important for the government to ratify the laws soon. (...) it was important to announce it. (I115)

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8 https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/carlos-esca-o-h-l-ne-michou/united-against-spain-s-gag-laws-change-bottom-up

Second, there is much insecurity regarding details, the new laws leave much scope for interpretation and are applied very selectively. Therefore, the mere fear of being punished, has effects, the punishments do not need to be realized on a larger scale. Third, many activists live under precarious conditions and can´t afford to risk high fines. "This is a demobilizing factor. The existential necessities." (I82) An elder activist told me that during the regime of Franco they often had been in prison for a short time, but that now, financial fines are much graver because they might mean hunger for the whole family. Fourth, many feel fear, caused by their personal history in the movement, but also by the history of the country. "It is also this fear of the repressive apparatus of Spain. I think it has a lot of influence that the people have been protesting for four years now, that they have experienced many beatings. This is deep in the brains of the people. (...) Also before the new laws, the police were brutal." (I82)

The selectivity and the ambiguity of the new laws, combined with their high visibility create a climate of fear, which seems to be the main goal. Thus, it is not so much the goal to prevent specific activities but to curtail mobilization in general. An example is the abovementioned case of the young woman who was fined for making a tasteless joke on Twitter. To protest against her punishment, more than hundred people made the same joke – without consequences. "The law is only applied when the government wants to apply it. (...) It is a political law." (I115)

The general repression and the very observable nature of these new laws pose two severe dilemmas for activists. On the one hand, activists felt that they had to oppose the new laws, criticize them and inform the public. On the other hand, in retrospect, this contributed to the massive deterring effects of these laws. "If you are confronted with laws like these, you have to criticize them. But we have done that intensively, and it produced fear. (...) They have very severe implications, especially regarding their philosophy, their essence. But the practical application was not that grave." (I115)

Now discursive strategies have been changed. They are directed at clarifying and at interpreting the laws. "Before the law was ratified, we had a very denouncing attitude: this law is very bad, it limits our rights, blablabla. Once it was ratified, we changed our discourse radically. What we do now is to work more on details. (...) Yes, we have this law. But is it prohibited to take pictures of policemen? No, it only says that you must not endanger his integrity. Does it endanger his integrity if you take a photo at an eviction? No, we understand that it does not." (...) We have become aware of the auto-censorship that has emerged. So, we have changed this discourse." (I94)

The second dilemma results from the necessity to support victims of repression, to make repression public, and to fight against its manifold expressions. Yet, this ties up a lot of energy, distracts activists from initial movement goals

and implies the danger of becoming self-referential. "As the social movements change their goal, instead of fighting for social goals (...) we have become more defensive. We have dedicated a great part of our strength to fight these laws. (...) What is worse, we have not only become defensive, but auto-defensive (...) and then the movement loses its sense." (I115)

Also, coping strategies are developed. All initiatives investigated have some modes of sharing financial fines or supporting detained friends. New forms of activism have been implemented. A "virtual demonstration" used projected holograms of protesters; it reached an audience of 800 million people and generated a worldwide online debate over civil liberties.[9] Instead of demonstrating in banks, some groups that fight against evictions use other forms to block bank procedures: "They come with a large amount of coins of one or two cents, and donate them separately to many different NGO. So, they are not persons who protest, but simple clients of the bank." I82

Nevertheless, the repression had severe effects and it works in a subtle manner. Many interviewees talk about self-censorship: "This is what we call the police in our heads. They have put a policeman in our heads." (I94) "The real effect was the auto-censorship."

7 Summary and Conclusion

Mobilization has declined substantially, although most problems initially addressed are still pressing. It is difficult to judge how far this is an effect of repression, of the movement cycle or of the institutionalization in the form of new parties.

Yet, according to interviewees, repression had severe effects. The attempts criticized to "gag" the public (Amnesty_International 2014) have consequences. It is evident that auto-censorship, the "policemen in the heads" has implications that are described as going far beyond the actual realization of state power. In recent years, activists had already faced repression, and the new laws aggravated this. They were ratified at a moment, when the movement became weaker in the streets and stronger in the institutions, and their demobilizing effects mainly resulted from a combination of selective, severe, individualized and sometimes unseen punishments and a high visibility and publicity.

The new laws raised a lot of protest, both nationally and internationally. They are not applied systematically but were announced an unusually long time before their actual ratification and were widely discussed. It seems that their main effects

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9 https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/carlos-esca-o-h-l-ne-michou/united-against-spain-s-gag-laws-change-bottom-up

virtually resulted from this observability. Media discussions, large numbers of policemen with helmets and weapons even at rather small demonstrations, and singular, arbitrary, high and widely-discussed incidents of repression of individuals create a climate of fear, and deter citizens from exercising their rights.

For activists, this poses severe dilemmas: By fighting against repression, they contribute to its observability and thus to its main form of effectiveness, the more they advocate against repressive laws, the more fear they create. Furthermore, fighting repression takes a lot of energy from the initial goals and the movement becomes to some degree auto defensive. While many activists develop new and creative strategies to deal with these dilemmas, few are becoming more radical, many others are either busy dealing with the consequences of repression, or reducing their activism due to fear. Generally, the "pacification" of dissident claims-making and the reduction of their activities (Davenport and Loyle 2012, 80) is something clearly seen in Spain.

This paper mainly focused on manifestations of repression and experiences of activists, a currently underresearched topic. Yet, this focus poses limitations. Activists criticize unjust adaptations of the laws, but once in force, laws must be respected. Further research might thus focus on aspects of legal philosophy and also include views of government representatives. Further, empirical evidence of other countries and movements would complete the picture by allowing to further elaborate the knowledge on mechanisms and effects of repression. In general, the exploratory research presented in this paper would require both further empirical verification and the exploration of alternative explanations. Specifically, it remains open, if the combination of covert and overt repression and the consequent deterring effects on mobilization are to be found in other countries too.

The topic is of a broader concern. Spain is not the only country restricting the right of free assembly and expression. Violations of human rights and the repression of non-violent movements can be found in many states (Human_Rights_Watch 2014). This bears risks for civil societies and thus also for trust, participation and the development of society.

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