Introduction: A Decade of Indignation

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On Sunday, May 15, 2011, thousands of people across Spain heeded the call by more than two hundred grassroots citizens' platforms to occupy their city plaza. Just months earlier, protests had cascaded across the Mediterranean and the Middle East, successfully toppling authoritarian regimes and revitalizing political culture. In Spain, the upcoming local elections on May 22 provided a useful pretext for a new wave of protests. But the 15M, as it is known in Spain, did not respond to specific government actions, it did not take aim at a particular political party, and its goal was not to topple the current administration. Its orientation was much broader, its timing, more generational, its insight, much more damning. "We're not a commodity for politicians or bankers," read the subtitle of the banner at the helm of the march in Madrid, which led protesters from the Plaza de Cibeles to the Puerta del Sol. The title read: "Real Democracy Now!" (Garijo et al 2011).

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The call to protest particularly galvanized people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, who, at the time, were enduring an unemployment rate of 45 percent and rising (Trading Economics, n.d. ["Spain Youth"]). But they were not the only ones to take to the streets. As overall unemployment ticked above 21 percent (Trading Economics, n.d. ["Spain Unemployment"]), retirees, middle-aged workers, unemployed workers, students, activists, and people of all walks of life partook in the occupations. "In the 15M *acampadas* [occupations] . . . everyone was invited to participate," Luis Moreno-Caballud, one of the contributors to this issue, has argued elsewhere, "but not through the media, technocratic, or intellectual platforms that tend to produce a monopoly on knowledge. Rather, the invitation came from within the unique 'space of anyone' the movement was attempting to maintain, and which created its own conditions for participation" (Moreno-Caballud 2015: 226). Hence the participation of someone like Ana Betteschen. As the newspaper *El País* reported, "Ana Betteschen was one of those who came out to protest, and she did so with her little daughter by the hand. 'Since nothing is accomplished by staying at home . . .' Betteschen said" (Garijo and Barroso 2011: 1).

Betteschen's nothing-to-lose view of the situation would be an attitude shared by the millions of people who decided to permanently occupy the plazas. "What happened during the following months," Óscar Pereira-Zazo and Steven Torres have written, "could well be described as the discovery of participatory democracy by a significant swath of the Spanish population" (2019: 2). By August, outlets reported that between 6 and 8.5 million people, or nearly one of every five Spanish residents, claimed to have participated in the occupations. Upwards of three-fourths of the more than 30 million people who knew of the protests supported them (RTVE 2011). By September, thousands of protesters began occupying another square, across the Atlantic, known as Zuccotti Park in what would come to be known as the Occupy Wall Street movement.

If the 15M responded to anything in particular, it most immediately denounced the causes and effects of what in Spain is simply called *la crisis*. The term is widely used today to encompass the global financial crisis of 2008 as well as its austerity- and unemployment-ridden aftermath in Spain (Labrador Méndez 2012; Korcheck 2015). By the time of the economic collapse, developers in Spain were building nearly a million houses a year (Martínez Guirao 2016: 139). Spain had become the country with the fifth-largest highway system in the world, behind the United States, China, Russia, and Canada; the country with the second-largest highspeed rail system

in the world, following China; and the country with the most commercial airports in all of Europe (Road Traffic Technology 2014; Railway Technology 2018; Govan 2011). After 2008, the Spanish landscape became an empty infrastructural jungle of half-built apartment buildings, unoccupied chalets, aborted roads, and redundant roundabouts.

The Spanish elite reacted forcefully to the protests. More than a dozen protesters were detained on that night in May. Only eight years later was their case settled, most with fines of 380 euros instead of the six years of jail time sought by prosecutors (*El Salto* 2019). But the most significant acts of force on behalf of the Spanish State took place in the legal and economic arenas. On August 23, 2011, Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and conservative opposition leader Mariano Rajoy announced that they had reached a deal to an express reform of the Spanish Constitution. The reform, which responded to public demands by Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy issued a week earlier, "put a permanent corset on public spending" (Gutiérrez Calvo 2011) by placing a constitutional cap on budget deficits. Several months later, Zapatero's Socialist Party would lose in a landslide to Rajoy's conservatives in the general elections, suffering the worst electoral defeat since the country's transition to democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Though the 15M occupations tapped into a widespread and sharply felt discontent with the handling of the crisis, the worst days of the recession were still to come. Over the next three years, Spain's official unemployment rate would peak at nearly 27 percent, its youth unemployment rate would reach nearly 56 percent, and, during one quarter in 2012, more than five hundred people were being evicted every day (Trading Economics, n.d. ["Spain Unemployment," "Spain Youth Unemployment"]; *La Vanguardia* 2012). Like in the United States, Spain's economic crisis began with a mortgage crisis. But unlike in the United States, the economic crisis in Spain created a generalized view whereby people came to see economic issues as inextricably linked to other social, political, and legal problems involving everything from the Spanish Constitution to feminism, from refugee rights to the political corruption of the two-party system. It has now been over a decade since the global financial crisis, and government responses to it, took its toll on societies and economies across the North Atlantic. While many countries, from Iceland to Portugal, have emerged from the crisis scarred but relatively intact, Spain has arguably not yet done so.

The present issue, "Legacies of the Spanish Crisis," covers the decade-long aftermath of *la crisis*. It brings together established and

emerging scholars of contemporary Spain in order to take stock of how the financial crisis has transformed Spanish society and culture since it began. The essays examine these shifts across a number of facets of Spanish political culture. The volume begins with two experimental pieces: a short story about the crisis from Luis Moreno-Caballud and, from Palmar Álvarez-Blanco, an essay that draws from and co-constructs perhaps the most extensive open-access archive of social movements in contemporary Spain.[1] The essays then proceed in several clusters: Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones on Spanish Gramscianism, David Becerra Mayor on organic intellectuals, L. Elena Delgado on Spanish feminism, Vicente Rubio-Pueyo on Podemos, Katryn Evinson on presentism, Ignasi Gozalo-Salellas on unavowable communities, and Sarah Thomas on Spanish crisis cinema. The essays included examine in detail many of the moments in Spain that have gained international recognition, from the emergence of the left-wing political party Podemos to the Catalan independence movement and the *indignados*, or 15M, movement. The essays in this issue are oriented by several questions of critical concern: What have artists and writers, intellectuals and activists, filmmakers and everyday citizens unearthed about the Spanish crisis that statistics, like those listed above, have not? What standard narratives about the crisis does the work of these citizens compel us to call into question? And what theoretical and material practices have emerged from the Spanish crisis that might connect to situations elsewhere, from Latin America to Africa, from North America to the Middle East? Ultimately, the ambition of this issue is to serve a dual purpose for *boundary 2* readers: as both a primer on contemporary Spain for scholars not familiar with the region but also as a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Spain after the Great Recession.

1. The open-access archive, Constellation of the Commons, is available in both Spanish and English at https://constelaciondeloscomunes.org/en/home/. It also includes an open-access volume that draws from the archive, where documentation and collection is ongoing. See Álvarez-Blanco 2019.

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