

***Bringing Industrial Conflict Back into Social Movement Studies:
A Mixed Methods Study on Contentious Politics in the Aftermath of the Great Recession in Spain***

Mobilizations such as the “Indignados” or “Occupy Wall Street,” which accompanied the recent economic crisis, gave new impetus to the debate about the origins and patterns of social conflict. In social movement studies, these occurrences have resulted in a seemingly contradictory trend: while the economic crisis and its negative consequences on the middle and lower classes led many leading social movement scholars to attach greater importance to capitalism and its transformations, unions and industrial conflict remain widely neglected objects of scientific study. By disregarding workers—one of the groups most affected by the economic crisis—this research runs the risk of conveying an erroneous picture.

The aim of my research about Spain is to fill this gap and to bring industrial conflict back into social movement studies. More precisely, my Ph.D. will examine to what extent concepts from social movement studies can be applied to unions and industrial conflict. Two questions will be tackled: 1) do these concepts contribute to a better understanding of industrial conflict between the outbreak of the Great Recession in 2008 and 2016? To not isolate unions and workers from other social movement organizations and instead to examine their relationships, I will ask 2) how and why did coalitions between unions and other social movement organizations evolve during this period. For both questions, the objective is not only to depict general trends but to relate them to precise micro-dynamics and processes.

For this purpose, I opt for a mixed methods and a multi-scale research design. Mixed methods relate macroscopic trends, obtained through analysis of aggregate data, with micro processes observed through a qualitative and ethnographic study. The multi-scale approach takes into account the specific logics that operate on different scales. Regarding continuities and changes in industrial conflict since the Great Recession in Spain, I combine official data on work-related contentious tactics, aggregated at both the national and regional levels, with an ethnographic study of workers and unions at Madrid Underground. Regarding coalitions between unions and other social movement organizations during this period, I combine a network analysis of a database on street protests in Madrid with insights from a case study of a platform, which brings unions and social movement organizations together to defend public transport services in Madrid.