Birgit Glorius,
Josefina Domínguez-Mujica (eds.)

European Mobility in Times of Crisis

The New Context of European
South-North Migration

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11. The new emigration issue in the public and political debate in Spain

Official discourses and new forms of mobilization

ANA LÓPEZ-SALA

ABSTRACT

Spanish emigration has become the subject of intense debate in the national press, leading to a large number of academic studies and reports that have sought to characterize this new emigration in terms of labor and migration expectations. Despite the heated social and media debate, the current government has not considered containing this outflow a priority or an issue to be included in the Spanish political agenda. On the contrary, the attitude of the current government has oscillated between indifference and denial. Faced with the government's inaction, which can be referred to as a policy of 'disengagement', different profiles of emigrants, all of whom can be identified as economic exiles, have united to fight for what they refer to as their 'right to return' by developing new forms of mobilization and protest against austerity measures and the erosion of their economic, social and political rights. This has created a new kind of external citizenry that is highly critical of the current government. Known collectively as the *Maroon Wave*, this movement is just one facet of a broader reconfiguration of Spanish society and political life brought about by the economic crisis. The *Maroon Wave* is in part a reaction to the inaction and indifference of the Spanish government to the plight of economic exiles, but also an aspect of the general detachment from and lack of trust in Spanish institutions and traditional political parties observed in many sectors of Spanish society. However, for many economic exiles their mistrust has not increased their feeling of detachment from Spanish society, but rather had the opposite effect: it has activated a desire to influence the political and social dynamics in the society of origin, with the objec-

tive of bringing about structural changes that will allow them to return. Their protest actions and message have struck a resonant chord with the complaints of other sectors of Spanish society and with the emerging political parties, becoming key issues in the recent general election held in December 2015.

Keywords: Economic crisis and mobilization, External Spanish Citizenry, *Maaroon Wave*, Social Movements, Spain, Spanish emigration

INTRODUCTION

Starting in 2012 the growing number of Spanish nationals moving abroad as a consequence of the economic and employment crisis has been given a great deal of attention by the media, public opinion, and academics in Spain. After more than a decade of intense immigration, the emigration of Spanish nationals, especially significant among the young, has come to symbolize a particularly painful dimension of the profound economic, social and institutional crisis that Spain has suffered over the past five years, as it is reminiscent of the Spain's still recent past of scarce prosperity and general poverty. Although Spain's economic crisis began in 2008, the emigration of nationals did not emerge in public debate until the start of 2012, coinciding with the publication of the first statistics revealing not only that Spanish emigration had been increasing since 2010, but also that the return of Spanish nationals living abroad was slowing down. Statistics reveal the inversion of the migration cycle, with Great Britain, France, the United States and Germany being the main destinations of these new and previously unexpected flows from Spain (Domingo/Sabater 2013; Domingo/Blanes 2015; Domínguez-Mujica et al. 2016; López-Sala/Oso 2015).

Spanish emigration has become the subject of intense debate in the national press and has led to a large number of academic studies and reports whose objective has been to characterize this new emigration in terms of labor and migration expectations¹ (Alba/Fernández-Asperilla 2015; IOM 2014; Navarrete 2014; Pumares 2015). The national media's interest in this issue has spread to the European press and international experts, who have reported on the large numbers of young people leaving Spain and other European countries due to the crisis (Papademetriou 2015; Glorius 2016; Glynn et al. 2015; Glynn 2015; Cavounidis 2015; Triandafyllidou/Gropas 2014).

1 For a complete review of the studies carried out on Spanish emigration over the past several years, cp. Díaz-Hernández et al. 2015.

To a certain extent, the new Spanish emigration has eclipsed immigration as the major concern of public opinion. In 2013 various important analysts of the phenomenon highlighted that the “media have made the emigration of young Spanish nationals a media star whose brilliance blots out all other aspects of the migration issue” (Aja et al. 2013: 13). This was coupled with the results of the Sociological Research Centre (CIS) barometer published in February 2012² indicating that in 2011, 17 per cent of the people surveyed had thought about living abroad and that 48 per cent were very willing or somewhat willing to live outside of Spain, with Germany, Great Britain, France and the United States viewed as the most desirable destinations.³

Recent studies have provided more detail regarding the volume of this outflow and have characterized it with greater precision, revealing a much more heterogeneous profile among the emigrants than the stereotypical image provided by the media suggests⁴ (Domingo/Ortega-Rivera 2015). However, there is no doubt that the impact of this phenomenon on the media is due to the fact that it is perceived as a symptom of the failure of the Spanish economic and social model, the lack of opportunities affecting broad social sectors and the general lack of trust in public institutions that has devastated the country since 2011.

However, this broad social and media debate on the new Spanish emigration has not had a significant impact on the position of the current conservative Spanish government, which has not included this emerging phenomenon in its agenda during the current legislature (2012-2015). On the contrary, the Spanish government has maintained positions on this issue ranging from indifference to denial, a position that has been broadly condemned not only by public opinion and part of the political class, but also by the increasingly organized Spanish community living abroad. The government’s attitude toward the emigration issue has starkly contrasted with the importance it has acquired in political and public debate over the past few years, which led to it becoming a key issue during the general election campaign at the end of 2015.

2 These Barometers are carried out on a monthly basis – except in August – and their main objective is to measure Spanish public opinion at that time. They involve interviews with around 2,500 randomly-chosen people from all over the country (cp. www.cis.es).

3 Cp. Glorius in this volume.

4 This outbound flow includes other profiles, such as former immigrants who had acquired Spanish nationality, as well as descendants of immigrants born in Spain. For more on these distinctions, cp. Domingo et al. 2014.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the social and political debate that has been generated by the emigration issue over the past several years in Spain. The analysis reveals the discrepancies between the response of the current Spanish government and the concerns of Spanish society, and more specifically, with the new community of Spanish nationals residing abroad. Faced with the inaction of government institutions, the new Spanish diaspora has created an effective political movement, known as the *Maroon Wave*, that has reshaped and infused the emigrant community with new significance and resilience, despite the erosion of their social and political rights.

The analysis presented in this chapter draws on various official and public statements made by representatives of the Spanish government, official documents and reports, the database of speeches given in parliamentary debates, the press, websites and secondary literature. Press material displayed on their websites and Facebook and Twitter accounts was used to characterize the *Maroon Wave* social movement.

STATE-DIASPORA RELATIONS IN THE CASE OF SPAIN

Spain has a long tradition of protecting Spanish communities residing abroad that dates back to the start of the 20th century (Sánchez-Alonso 2011). Although the Spanish Civil War and the two decades of international isolation imposed on the Francoist regime limited the implementation of measures directed at the Spanish community abroad for more than 30 years, the end of the 1950s marked the start of what could be considered a Spanish emigration policy. At that time the regime's new political elites began to consider emigration as "an important advantage for the triumph of Spain's economic development and modernization" (Fernández-Vicente 2009: 279). This vision underlies the optimism around the link between migration and development, something that has been repeatedly indicated by migration theory (Delano/Gamlen 2014). At the institutional and legislative level, this policy was articulated through the creation of the Spanish Emigration Institute and various Emigration laws (in 1960 and 1971) that over the following decades consolidated the State's very active intervention in regulating Spanish migration flows and the social protection of emigrants and their families (Calvo-Salgado et al. 2009; Fernández-Vicente 2005).

With the return of democracy, the objectives of this policy were broadened, focusing on guaranteeing the social, economic and political rights of nationals residing abroad, all of which were acknowledged in the 1978 Spanish Constitu-

tion.⁵ However, although these rights were formally guaranteed, their practical implementation left much to be desired, due to the limited resources available and also because they were partial or limited in their orientation. By the 1990s the focus was on providing assistance for emigrants who had returned to Spain, improving the external election census and promoting cultural and linguistic initiatives. It is important to point out that over the past few decades the orientation of this policy was shaped by three aspects: the advanced age of the Spanish diaspora; its demographic importance in the electoral census in some regions, such as Galicia, where it represented close to 15 per cent of the voting population; and finally, by the desire of successive Spanish governments to use the community residing abroad to disseminate the Spanish language and improve its cultural influence in Europe and Latin America.

However, it was not until 2006, during the first Socialist government of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, that the Spanish Citizenry Abroad Statute was enacted.⁶ This is the first integral regulation of Spanish nationals residing abroad, guaranteeing them the same rights as those living in Spain. It focused on strengthening the ties between Spain and its diaspora, increasing the concession and practical implementation of their social and healthcare rights, improving their participation in all initiatives that could affect them through the creation of the General Council of Spanish Citizenry Abroad, and promoting cultural and educational policies (Goig 2010).

The promises offered by this new statute have been partially undermined by changes in the economic and social policies provoked by the onset of the economic crisis in 2009. In addition to this, as a consequence of the recent Spanish emigration, the profile of the Spanish community living abroad has undergone a profound change in terms of demographic characteristics, class structure, political culture, welfare prospects and migration projects. We should remember that the social and generational reconfiguration of this community could be particularly significant in determining the links that are created between it and the Spanish State over the next few years.

5 Art. 42 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 states that “the State will especially protect the economic and social rights of Spanish workers abroad”. The right to vote is acknowledged by art. 68.

6 Law 40/2006 on Spanish External Citizenry.

BETWEEN INDIFFERENCE AND DENIAL: THE POSITION OF THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT ON THE EMERGING PHENOMENON OF EMIGRATION (2012-2015)

Despite the intense social and media debate surrounding the new Spanish emigration, the position of the current Spanish government has oscillated between indifference and denial. The austerity measures and structural reforms implemented by the Spanish government since the end of 2011, which included a dramatic reduction in social spending and a labor reform that has provoked even more severe forms of precarious and short-term employment, provoked this new outflow. The economic situation in Spain has reduced the possibilities and expectations of entering the labor market and finding stable employment for large segments of Spanish society, especially for the youngest generations⁷ (Dolado et al. 2013; Villar 2014), which have the highest level of education and training in Spanish history. In this scenario, emigration has quickly and unexpectedly become one of the few alternatives to find not only employment, but stable, quality employment, and to improve the social and employment expectations of a population that had undergone an extraordinary improvement in its education level over the past three decades.⁸ This has led to a new culture of emigration, especially among sectors of Spanish society that have the highest levels of educational and social capital, in a country that has produced little emigration since the end of the 1970s.

This new generation of youths and young adults, many of whom are from the urban middle class and raised in the years of Spain's greatest economic abundance, have witnessed and in many cases actively participated in the social mobilization provoked by the austerity measures of the conservative Spanish government and whose most well-known expression was perhaps the anti-austerity

7 Accordingly to Eurostat in April 2015, the youth unemployment rate was 20.7% in the EU28 and 22.3% in the Euro area. The lowest rates were observed in Germany (7.2%), Austria and Denmark (both 10.1%), and the highest in Greece (50.1%), Spain (49.6%), Croatia (45.5%) and Italy (40.9%). The mismatch of young workers' skills with jobs and over-qualification are a widespread phenomenon in Spain.

8 In Spain in 2014, according to the data provided by the Spanish Statistical Office (INE), 36.8% of men and 47.8% of women between 30 and 34 had higher education studies. The European Union 28 percentages were lower than Spain's, both for women (42.3%) and men (33.6%).

movement known as the *Indignants* or *15-M Movement*⁹ (Perugorría/Tejerina 2013; Cameron 2014; Sampedro/Lobera 2014; Flesher-Fominaya 2015; Campos Lima/Artiles 2013; Moreno-Caballud 2015).

During 2011 the Spanish government remained silent on this issue. However at the end of 2012 the first public statements were made, generating a very strong reaction, even an uproar, in public opinion. First of all, because the position of the Spanish government has been to deny a link between emigration and its austerity policies, as well as to minimize its magnitude and importance. More specifically, the official discourse has maintained that emigration is fundamentally the result of economic globalization, the demand for highly-skilled workers and the freedom of movement of European Union workers.¹⁰ This discourse highlights external variables as the explanation, while denying that internal variables (such as the high rate of youth unemployment, overqualification and the high rates of job instability) stimulate migration.¹¹

For example, along these lines we find statements made in 2012 by the former Spanish Minister of Education, Jose Ignacio Wert, indicating that the emigration of Spanish youth was not a negative phenomenon or a brain drain (*El País*, February 23, 2012), but rather the result of the globalization of high skilled jobs in Europe; or those of Esperanza Aguirre, former president of the Community of Madrid (and one of the most noteworthy figures of the governing conservative Popular Party), who stated that youth emigration was “a reason to be proud and optimistic, because it demonstrated the excellent training of Spanish youth” (*El País*, April 27, 2013). One of the most important leaders of the Popular Party (PP) and currently a MEP, Esteban González Pons (*El Diario*, June 2,

9 The *Indignants* movement is an autonomous social movement that demands a radical change in Spanish politics. They protest against economic and political disempowerment and arose in the form of concerted and sustained manifestations of mass indignation. They view their struggles as a means to a better future, not solely for themselves but also for their peers. It is also a movement of ordinary citizens rather than activists.

10 Cp. for example, the official position on this issue in Boletín Oficial Congreso (BOCG), October 18, 2012.

11 As Santos points out, the position of the Spanish government reflects “the hegemonic and neoliberal discourse on the international mobility of talent insistently recommended by the business world” (Santos 2013: 126) who avoids mentioning the negative consequences of that mobility on workers (cp., for instance, Sennet 1998).

2013), stated in 2013 that working in the European Union was like working at home.¹²

At the end of 2012 yet another controversial declaration was heavily criticized by Spanish society, becoming the object of ridicule by the press and on different internet platforms. The Secretary of Immigration, Marina del Corral, claimed in an interview that Spanish youth also emigrated because of their “adventurous spirit” (*El País*, November 30, 2012). After the indignant response of the general public, the Spanish government (among them the Minister of Labor and Immigration Fátima Bañez [*El Mundo*, 17 April 2013], or Rubén Urosa [*Europapress*, August 5, 2014], the director of the Spanish Youth Institute, INJUVE) has sought to avoid making declarations on this subject at all costs, despite the insistence of the press, and has avoided using the term emigration in its official discourse, substituting it with the euphemism external mobility.

The position of the Spanish government can be interpreted by various motives. First of all, it has to be highlighted that the fundamental goal of the policies developed by the government during this legislature (2011-2015) has been to reduce public spending. This very short-term vision does not take into consideration the loss of human resources caused by job instability and the lack of employment and promotion opportunities. Second, because the new Spanish migrants residing abroad (including young researchers and highly skilled professionals) have been one of the sectors most critical of government austerity in regards to its labor, economic and R&D policy.

In a recent study two important historians of Spanish emigration interpreted that the position of the current Spanish government was a “return to the positive vision of emigration inherited from the Francoist technocracy” (Gil/Fernández-Vicente 2015: 16); reviving the idea that emigration was a way to return to equilibrium, like an escape valve for social discontent.

The Spanish government’s “disengagement” position (Gamlen 2006) has activated responses and forms of resistance among the new emigrants that have coalesced into a politically conscious movement. This transnational “voice”

12 This position starkly contrasts with the attitude of politicians in Italy. In 2013 then Prime Minister Enrico Letta publically apologized to all young Italians who had been forced to leave the country, declaring that the emigration of educated youth was an unforgivable failure of Italian policy (*La Stampa*, June 2, 2013) (cp. Montanari/Stanscia in this volume). In 2014, Italy’s new Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, promised to make unemployed youth one of his main priorities by offering incentives to companies that hire young people and helping university graduates find jobs and internships through the Youth Guarantee Program.

(Hirschman 1970) shows how strongly these new emigrants are politically engaged in domestic issues, producing new aspects of external Spanish citizenship and revitalizing old ones.

ADDRESSING THE EMIGRATION PROBLEM? MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Since the end of 2013 representatives from the rest of the political parties, echoing the social unrest, have denounced the government's lack of action to contain emigration and promote the return of young Spaniards. They have proposed urgent action plans, including a new R&D policy that could reduce the emigration of highly skilled workers and researchers from Spain.¹³ Additionally, Spanish unions have incorporated protecting the labor rights of Spanish workers living abroad into their agenda. To achieve this they have recently started to develop initiatives to coordinate with union organizations in the countries of destination.¹⁴

The changes in the Spanish political panorama since 2014, with the emergence of new parties, such as *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*, and the renewal of the leadership of other parties, like the *Socialist Party* (PSOE) and *United Left* (IU), have revitalized proposals in this area.¹⁵ The development of specific plans, not so much to contain emigration but to promote returns, have been mentioned in official statements by almost all parties on the political spectrum. For example, the main opposition party, *PSOE*, has defended since the end of 2014, the establishment of a Plan to Return Scientific and Professional Talent, in collaboration with universities and businesses, designed to promote the return of young Span-

13 Since 2009 Spain has lost around 11,000 researchers. The main Spanish research agency, the CSIC, lost around 15% of its research staff between 2011 and 2014 due to the lack of contract renewals for young researchers.

14 For example, one of the major Spanish Trade Unions (Comisiones Obreras, CCOO) has carried out various coordination actions with the DGB (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, Confederation of German Trade Unions) aimed at providing information, guidance and support for Spanish workers (cp. Meinardus in this volume).

15 In August, 2014, The Spanish Youth Council initiated a campaign for government policies to contain the outflow of young people abroad and to promote their return. The Spanish Youth Council is a forum for coordination, communication, training and cooperation of organizations that comprise the youth association movement.

ish citizens living abroad.¹⁶ Various political representatives have affirmed that the government has used its parliamentary majority to block any non-law proposition or specific action in this area.¹⁷ However, these initiatives have not resulted in actual measures being taken, even on the regional level, in autonomous communities governed by opposition parties, such as Andalusia or Catalonia.

The results of the municipal elections of May, 2015, which revealed growing support for the new political parties, signaled a change in course and consolidation of the emigration issue in party platforms. The inclusion of emigration in the political agenda, which over the past few months has centered on reforming the law regulating absentee ballots from abroad, was activated, however, by the mobilization and protests of the Spanish emigrant community, especially through the *Maroon Wave* social movement, which has very effectively channeled the powerful voice of the new Spanish emigrant community.

FROM MOBILITY TO MOBILIZATION: THE CASE OF THE MAROON WAVE

The *Maroon Wave* is a transnational social movement made up of Spanish emigrants. It arose in 2013 with the goal of providing visibility to Spanish citizens who have been forced to leave Spain as a consequence of the economic crisis. This movement, that is not affiliated with any political party, is largely a response to the position of the current Spanish government, which has tried to downplay the volume of Spanish emigration and given little importance to its causes. In this sense its goal is to fight, from outside the country, against the causes that have led to the economic and social crisis that has forced thousands to emigrate.

The *Maroon Wave* was born in the heat of other social movements that have appeared in Spain in recent years.¹⁸ Its origins are found in large part in the *Indignants* movement, more specifically in one of its subsidiary social movements, called *Youth Without Future* (Santos/Martín 2012). The *Youth Without Future* movement demands reforms that would allow young people to join the labor

16 At the end of 2013, the government even publically declared that it was working on a young entrepreneurs plan that could contain emigration and promote self-employment. However, nothing concrete has come of it in the following years.

17 Cp. for example, the non-law proposal presented by the Socialist parliamentary group in the 10th legislature (BOCG, 261; May 7, 2013).

18 Cp. <http://mareagranate.org/>.

market and lead a dignified life in Spain.¹⁹ In April 2013 *Youth Without Future* organized the “You are not going to get rid of us”-campaign, which was the starting point for the *Maroon Wave*.²⁰

The *Maroon Wave* has adopted the form and denomination of what are known within this protest movement as *Citizen Waves*. *Citizen Waves* are ongoing protests that have arisen in response to the cuts to social spending and austerity policies implemented by the Spanish government since 2011.²¹ Among the most significant examples are the *White Wave* (made up of healthcare professionals against cuts to public healthcare) or the *Green Wave* (of teachers against cuts to education) (Ferrer 2014). The color of this wave is maroon like the color of the Spanish national passport. This is the first wave that is acting outside of Spanish borders, and it has become a symbol of what they understand as forced migration.

Members of the *Maroon Wave* are quite diverse and fall into three kinds of migrant profiles: a) highly skilled young workers who as a result of the economic crisis have seen their prospects of joining the Spanish labor market dwindle to such a degree that they have been forced to emigrate to further their professional careers (either because they are unemployed or because they had precarious working conditions that were not in line with their qualifications); b) young adult workers who left Spain, either individually or with their families, simply to find any kind of job that allowed them to live independently and c) a third profile of young people who emigrated temporarily before the crisis (either to receive education or training, or to work), with the idea of spending time outside of Spain

19 *Youth Without Future* highlights the awareness of young Spaniards that they are part of a social class trapped in the lowest socio-labor rungs through its motto “No home, no job, no pension, no fear”. The members of *Youth Without Future* denounce the disconnect between education, employment and housing that make it difficult for young people to emancipate themselves and the absence of public intervention which could be a bulwark against these difficulties” (Santos/Martín 2012: 108). (Cp. www.juventudsinfuturo.net and <http://www.nonosvamosnosechan.net/>)

20 To commemorate its third anniversary, in June 2016 the *Maroon Wave* posted a video on the social networks describing the movement’s ongoing struggle and demands. This Spanish language video was widely covered by the digital press. It was directed at both Spanish expats and Spanish society. The motto of the campaign is “Feliz Lucha [...], desde todas partes” (Happy Struggle, from Everywhere). (Cp. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVF0PXClyBU>)

21 Since 2011 spending per capita on education and healthcare in Spain has been reduced by 21%. (Pérez-García et al. 2015)

and later returning home, who have found that the current employment situation in Spain made a homecoming impossible.

The element that unites members of the *Maroon Wave* is that they all see themselves as economic exiles who were forced into emigration and they all demand what they call their right to return. That is, they feel that although they might want to live temporarily abroad to improve their work experience or skills, the economic crisis has frustrated their desire to live in Spain permanently. In addition, they feel that the migration experience is very difficult, even for those who have good jobs, because it involves leaving behind family and friends and this difficulty is even more acute when the economic conditions in Spain limit or impede their return.

Another aspect that unites members of the *Maroon Wave* is a deep mistrust of Spain's institutions and political class, who they feel are responsible for their country's political system becoming what they refer to as a low intensity democracy, suffering from increasing inequality and discrimination and plagued by high levels of corruption, which has been incapable of responding to the country's main social and economic issues (Torcal 2014; Campos-Lima/Artiles 2013).²² Because members of the wave feel that the State and its institutions have turned their backs on them they have assumed the responsibility of organizing themselves to denounce and expose the situation and to initiate actions that improve the conditions and rights of Spanish citizens living abroad.

The *Maroon Wave* has established itself as a horizontal movement, with regular face to face and virtual meetings at the local and global level. This approach is fostering new forms of participation, self-organization and demands for rights beyond borders. In this sense members of this social movement are voting with their feet and fighting with their voice. With this goal it has established a network of international assemblies (called nodes) capable of coordinating joint, simultaneous actions around the world directed at denouncing the policies and actions of the current Spanish government that have led to the economic and social problems that have forced them to emigrate. Currently and since its creation in 2013, the *Maroon Wave* is made up of different nodes in America, Europe, Asia and Oceania.

22 This lack of trust is widespread in Spanish society. According to data provided by the latest Sociological Research Centre (CIS) barometer, from December 2015, the Spanish felt that the main problem in the country was unemployment, followed by corruption. European studies carried out in other Southern European countries coincide with this lack of faith in institutions as a determining factor in emigration. (cp. Triandafyllidou/Gropas 2014)

In addition to providing visibility to the emigrant community through information campaigns and by maintaining close contact with various media outlets, the *Maroon Wave* has also directed its actions at strengthening the external citizenry, which they feel has been increasingly weakened over the past few years.

First of all, the wave seeks to support and assist other new Spanish emigrants by creating offices in different countries (called *Oficinas Precarias*) that offer mainly labor assistance and practical information for new arrivals about their labor rights, how to find work, rent a flat or where to take language courses. Currently these offices exist in London, Berlin, Paris, Prague, Edinburgh and Vienna. Along these lines they have created somewhat formal support networks for new arrivals, in response to the Spanish government's lack of action to protect new migrants residing abroad. Emigrants with greater experience offer support and information in increasingly formalized ways to newer arrivals through weekly meetings and internet-based support services. This is a direct response to one of the most common complaints made by its members, not only is there a lack of attention provided by Spanish authorities, but there is also lack of information provided by the poorly run Spanish consulates.²³

The second important element on the *Maroon Wave*'s agenda has been to fight for the healthcare rights of Spanish emigrants in Spain through the creation of a specific work and action group known as *Maroon Wave Healthcare*. At the end of 2013 a legal reform was passed that made significant changes to healthcare services, including denying Spanish citizens who reside abroad for more than three months a year access to healthcare services in Spain. Although it is true that this right can be recovered once the individual returns to Spain, it involves an administrative procedure that can take some time to resolve. A second element introduced by this reform indicates that the European Health Card will only be issued to Spanish workers with permanent contracts in Spain. All others will receive a provisional certificate valid for 90 days. For this reason, many Spanish citizens living abroad for more than three months do not have access to the healthcare coverage provided by the European Health Card, despite having jobs (the European card requires the Spanish healthcare system to cover the healthcare costs of Spanish citizens abroad). In April, 2015 the wave launched a campaign called "*They won't take away our healthcare*" with the goal of not only condemning this situation, but also creating a registry of complaints regarding healthcare exclusion (denominated REDES) for Spanish citizens residing abroad

23 This aspect has even been included in reports by the Defensor del Pueblo (Spanish Ombudsman), due to the increased number of complaints by the Spanish community living abroad.

by compiling individual cases. Currently the organization is creating a series of guides to provide information on how to recover healthcare rights after returning to Spain, as well as national guides to help its members navigate the healthcare systems in the different countries in which they reside.

Thirdly, the members of the wave believe it is necessary that migrants maintain a voice in Spanish political and social life. Therefore, a large part of the initiatives over the past two years have focused on providing information about the external vote and denouncing the growing difficulties involved in participating in elections from abroad. This has been one of the questions that has had the greatest impact on public opinion, creating a bitter controversy that forced political parties to confront this issue during their election campaigns in December, 2015.

It should be noted that in 2011 the General Electoral Regime Law was modified to introduce two major changes (García-Mahamut 2012). First of all the right of Spanish citizens residing abroad to vote in local elections was eliminated. Second, it introduced a formal request to vote that is referred to as the *voto rogado*. This is a procedure through which Spanish citizens living abroad must request to vote through a formal application in the electoral census offices in Spain or in a Spanish consulate, during a period that is usually very short. Once the request is made the electoral census offices send the citizens their ballots so they can vote either in the consulates or by mail. This is a major change, because until 2011 ballots were sent to all Spanish citizens registered in a consulate by default, with no application necessary. As mentioned, the time periods during which these formal applications must be made are very limited and often even after submitting an application within the ordained period the ballots do not arrive in time to vote, due to enormous bureaucratic problems.

In fact, one of the most respected experts in this area has analyzed this situation and come to the conclusion that these procedural obstacles have made the external vote ineffective and undermined the system of guarantees of the right to vote (García-Mahamut 2012). Although this legal reform was heavily criticized and even led to protests among emigrant communities, it did not become a political issue in 2014, not due to an election period, but rather due to the complaints of the *Maroon Wave*.

The data on the effects of this reform on the external vote are compelling. According to the Spanish Statistics Office (INE), only 5 per cent of the Spanish citizens registered in the Electoral Census of Absent-Residents (CERA in Spanish) voted in the 2011 general elections, while in the 2008 general elections more than 32 per cent of the voters registered in this census had voted. In the European Elections of 2014 this percentage dropped again to below 2 per cent, while in

the general election in December, 2015, the percentage increased to 4.7 per cent. For this reason, it seems clear that this reform is producing an increase in induced abstention.²⁴

To combat this, in the second half of 2014 and during 2015 the *Maroon Wave's Right to Vote* work group carried out an extensive information campaign leading up to the regional and national elections in 2015, providing information on how to formally request the right to vote, on how to register in the consulates and also started a campaign to repeal the *voto rogado*.²⁵ Their mobilization was so effective that this reform became an issue in the party platforms during the election campaign in December 2015, with the exception of the governing party (*PP*), which proposed maintaining the procedure, but making it more efficient. *PSOE* included the elimination of the *voto rogado* and a reform of the legislation regulating the healthcare rights of Spanish emigrants in its platform; *Ciudadanos* claimed it would repeal the law and implement an on-line voting system for those living abroad; *United Left (IU)* wanted to repeal the 2011 reform, eliminating the *voto rogado* and allowing emigrants to once again vote in local elections; and the *Podemos* party platform included repealing the *voto rogado*, reforming the CERA registration system and increasing the periods to exercise the right to vote from abroad.

One of the most paradigmatic campaigns of this mobilization was the "Rescue my Vote"-campaign²⁶ launched at the end of November, 2015 whose objective was to put people living in Spain who were abstention volunteers willing to vote in someone else's name in contact with emigrants who could not vote. According to data published by the *Maroon Wave*, this initiative, using their termi-

24 The complaints by the emigrant community have centered not only the difficulties to apply for a *voto rogado*, but also on the delays in receiving the ballots needed to vote by mail, which have made it extremely difficult to exercise the vote, even among those who had applied for the vote. According to the publication *España Exterior*, only 60% of citizens who applied for the *voto rogado* could vote in the general election of December, 2015. Regarding the election results, the party most voted by those living abroad was *Podemos* (27%), which also became the third most voted party on the whole, after the two traditional parties, *PP* and *PSOE* (*España Exterior* 868). (Cp. http://www.espanaexterior.com/upload/eimpresa/4541-portada_868.pdf)

25 In the second half of 2015 the *DosMillonesdeVotos* platform was also created, a platform of lawyers that arose with the objective of providing legal and technical aid to Spanish citizens residing abroad so that they could exercise their right to vote. (Cp. <http://www.dosmillonesdevotos.org>)

26 <http://mareagranate.org/rescatamivoto/rescatamivoto.php>.

nology, “rescued” more than 3,000 votes in the national elections of December 2015. Again, this campaign was a response to the lack of assistance provided by Spanish consulates in the voting process, because they lack both the means and the political will to do more. The campaign sought to promote the reformation of the election law with the collaboration and involvement of Spanish citizens, an objective that has become central to its demands. The campaign was launched through the *Maroon Wave*’s website (*Vote work group*) and efficiently distributed through the social networks, receiving a great deal of coverage by the media, especially the digital press. The campaign increased public awareness about this civic demand, understood as an exercise in real democracy,²⁷ and further sparked the public debate in Spain regarding the difficulty of exercising the right to vote from abroad. The nature of this social movement, which is a citizen platform created around the common objective of improving the political and social rights of the new Spanish diaspora, explains the logic behind its actions and strategies, which include seeking alliances with other citizen-based social movements and using social networks as the primary means of disseminating its message and making a political impact. In this sense the wave has moved away from more classic forms of political action in which alliances are formed between the social fabric, political parties and trade unions.

The wave’s mobilization has consolidated voting from abroad as a priority of the Spanish political agenda. In February 2016, the movement sent an open letter to all the political parties demanding that they undertake a series of legislative, operational and instrumental initiatives that will eliminate all the current obstacles to exercising the right to vote from abroad and the establishment of a single overseas electoral district. That same month the main opposition party, the *Socialist Party*, proposed a reform of the electoral law in the Spanish Parliament, which led to the approval of a research commission in April 2016 to study the difficulties that Spanish citizens living abroad have in exercising their political rights. In practice this reform has encountered many difficulties due to the inability of the political parties to reach an agreement to form a government during the first months of 2016, leading to a call for new general elections in June 2016.

27 *Democracia Real YA* (Real Democracy NOW) was another motto of the *15-M* movement.

CONCLUSIONS

The new Spanish emigration resulting from the deep economic, social and institutional crisis that Spain has been suffering during the past five years has had a significant impact on the country's social and political environment and generated serious controversies in the media and parliament. Throughout the last legislature (2011-2015) the current conservative government turned its back on this bitter issue, at first maintaining a posture of indifference regarding the outflow of young, and not so young, Spanish citizens, which later turned into denial. This approach, however, failed to cover up an issue that has deeply affected national pride. On the contrary, the government's attitude, which highlights its disconnection from Spain's social reality, has had the undesired effect of provoking new forms of mobilization, resistance and visibility at the heart of an emerging and increasingly organized Spanish community abroad. Moreover, the rest of Spanish society and the emergent political parties have also thrown their support behind the issues fought for by this community. In response to what we can refer to as the government's disengagement diaspora policy, the last few years have revealed the Spanish emigrant community's growing political engagement in domestic issues, which has very effectively increased its external, transnational voice; solidifying and reshaping the external citizenry in reaction to the erosion of its political, social and economic rights.

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