Squatting Everywhere Kollective (SqEK) Ed.

Fighting for spaces, fighting for our lives: Squatting movements today

edition assemblage

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Fighting for spaces, fighting for our lives: Squatting movements today

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SI EMOCIONA PENSARLO
IMAGÍNATE HACERLO
ACCIÓN
POETICA
ENSENADA

This book needs no real introduction, the various interventions speak for themselves, often with the voices of activists directly embedded in local struggles.

All over the globe people are using squatting as a tactic and this DIY production gathers some of these stories together.

It has been a long time in the making.

Thanks to all the many people who helped with proofreading, correcting, revising, tips or providing emotional support.

A big hand to all of you.

SqEK
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begleiterscheinungen@riseup.net

▶ Oliver Feldhaus
Umbruch Bildarchiv

Voices of resistance: About the Refugee Movement in Kreuzberg, Berlin

by Napuli Paul Langa

Based on the experiences of a longstanding involvement, the article describes the emergence of the refugee protest march and bus tour to Berlin as well as the occupation of the Oranienplatz and a school building in Berlin-Kreuzberg (Ohlauer Strasse 12). With demonstrations, direct actions and hunger strikes, the visibility of refugee struggles was thereby linked to interventions in public and political discourses. The article stresses the importance of self-organised protest, solidarity networks and non-hierarchical structures and it discusses also the tensions within the struggle. Furthermore, it connects current refugee struggles to histories and structures of colonialism, racism, capitalism and imperialism.

Falling into a trap and beginning to struggle

This is Napuli Paul Langa. I am from Sudan and I would not like to mention which part of Sudan I came from, South or North, all of this is just politics. I would like to share with you my entry into and my experience of the refugee movement at Oranienplatz, Berlin. When I came from Sudan, traumatized from being tortured for 4 days because of my activism there, I had escaped from the intelligence services and I left everything behind: My work as a human rights activist in the Sudanese organization for Nonviolence and Development (SONAD) and my studies at Ahfad University for Women in Khartoum. I left to save my life from the government and it took long to come to Germany. So when I arrived in Germany and applied for asylum in Braunschweig – that is exactly when I fell into a trap. I realized that I lost my rights and dignity when I sought asylum – it is better not to seek asylum in Germany, although you have had problems before.

I saw that people were going crazy in the lager (camp), which is located in the middle of nowhere, so I decided that I will not end this way. I was asking several questions that no one among us in the lager could answer. Then I suggested “let us all come together to discuss and find answers to these questions”, in order to put an end to all the problems we have, for example the obligation of residency,

privacy, food and so on. That is why I came to join the Refugees' Bus Tour which started one month after having made my application for asylum in September 2012. This motivated me a lot to fight from my heart, to see change happen.

So from different lagers in Germany we came together through our local discussions or actions that were thinking about how to end the isolation system that is a product of capitalism. We declared that we intend to fight the laws and policies that violate our freedom and dignity. Responding to the suicide of the Iranian asylum seeker Mohammed, refugees had built the first protest camp in Würzburg in early 2012 where he had died. Then other camps followed in other cities and after that the movement started to move from Würzburg to Berlin, by foot and by bus. I myself joined the bus tour which visited dozens of lagers throughout Germany in order to inform other refugees about the movement. We were able to expose the isolation of refugees, and we invited them to leave their lagers or camps to join our bus tour and the march to Kreuzberg in Berlin. The refugees covered a distance of 600 km in 28 days. In Potsdam the bus tour group met with the group that had walked and went together from there to Berlin. The march reached Berlin on October 6 2012. From that time I became much more communicative also because of the bus tour group. They recommended that I should make speeches or talk to people, and since then I often gave speeches.

Oranienplatz Resistance

From there we continued our resistance with our tents at Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg, Berlin. It is well known that Oranienplatz is regarded as the political symbol of the struggle in the street, also to be visible. Anyhow, after thirteen days of the movement, the group started to have different opinions on political strategies.

The group who organized the hunger strike went back to München (Munich), South Germany, where the group called themselves Non-Citizens. The other part remained in Oranienplatz, committed to keep Oranienplatz as a politically vocal point. Although the group split, both groups are strongly connected to each other.

The success of Oranienplatz visibilized our struggle, especially in the public, and gave us the power to negotiate with the government officially, which before then

was not possible. We stood up to be visible and it happened. We stood for our rights and we opened the tents to everyone.

We organised many actions: we occupied a vacant school, we occupied Brandenburg Gate, we went on demonstrations and hunger strikes, we occupied the tree at Oranienplatz, we occupied the roof of the school at Ohlauerstrasse, we occupied the parliament in the district of Kreuzberg, we occupied the federal office of the Green party, we occupied the church, we occupied the UN office, we occupied embassies. We also distributed flyers on a daily basis, and our story occupied the media during these actions. We became subject to police brutality and many people were arrested and we responded by organizing spontaneous demonstrations at the prisons in which our friends had been arrested, for example after the action at the Nigerian embassy.
Underlying all these actions were three demands: Abolition of the lagers, abolition of the obligation of residence ("Residenzpflicht" in German language), which forbids us to leave the city where we are accommodated so that refugees are to move only 40 kilometers and not more, and the cessation of deportations. We had great impact on German Parliament and the Committee on Internal Affairs were forced to meet with us because of our hunger-strike. During the meeting, the two major right wing parties spoke out against our demands.

However, there were also some members of parliament supporting human rights and our demands. From 2013 to 2014, the obligation of residence was loosened in some federal states, whereby for example those who seek asylum in Berlin can now travel in Brandenburg, too.

The Occupied School in Ohlauer Strasse

We used the occupied school at Ohlauerstrasse and Oranienplatz for the recognition of the refugee movement as a political institution. We worked to bring more refugees to join our struggle and to expand it. Right here there are things that are important, but not urgent and then there are important things that are urgent: our struggle is both, important and urgent.

We have managed to enlarge our solidarity network. We received a lot of support from the German society in terms of food, clothes, financial and legal support. For example, there are students giving free German classes to refugees at the occupied school in Kreuzberg, and there are doctors and lawyers.

When we occupied the empty school in Ohlauer Strasse (in December 2012), it was six o'clock in the morning. The former mayor of the district Kreuzberg, Berlin came and he stopped the interference of the police and gave us 3 days. After 3 days our stay was extended to 2 months and he came up with a plan that we should cooperate with several organizations for this project.

We said no, if they are in solidarity with us they should not think to come to the school. The purpose of the occupation was the very cold weather and we had families and sick people who needed to be in a warm place.

So we organized the school as a place for sleeping, and everything concerning our political activities should take place at Oranienplatz. A few weeks later we had the problems with the police mainly due to violations of the residence obligation which we broke by ignoring it. We thought "let them write to us hundreds of letters". Some of us were deeply threatened to be deported. Although there was this threat, the movement had no fear of it, some had already been deported to where they had first landed because of the Dublin III regulation.

Lampedusa in Berlin and the Eviction of Oranienplatz

Around March 2013 a group from Lampedusa arrived in Berlin. Lampedusa is an island in Italy where the peoples who are escaping from Libya are put before given the permission to stay in Italy, that's why we called them "Lampedusa".

Lampedusa is a synonym for Europe's borders, for the immigration rules and regulations of the European Union, for the European policy on asylum, for the colonial heritage which established a global, geopolitical and social divide that becomes obvious there. The immediate consequences of this historical development are the boats from the African continent that arrive almost every day.

Lampedusa is also a synonym for the borders which continue within the European Union. Each country has its own national policy on asylum, whose laws and restrictions restrain the rights of refugees. Lampedusa is not only a synonym but also a concrete place where the life-threatening consequences of European policy on asylum become very obvious. But the Lampedusa activists do not accept this treacherous situation.

▶ Andrea Linss
Umbruch Bildarchiv

The clearing of Oranienplatz tents that took place on April 8 2014 was not done as voluntarily as claimed by politicians or the Senate, that is obvious. The Kreuzberg district mayor, Monika Herrmann, and the Senator of Integration of the State of Berlin, Dilek Kolat, had affirmed that the Oranienplatz refugees had agreed to the voluntary evacuation – but this does not correspond to the facts, the refugees argue the opposite.

On April 18, the refugee camp was evicted from the Oranienplatz in Berlin-Kreuzberg. According to an agreement between the Senator Dilek Kolat with a part of the refugees, mainly the group of Lampedusa who had already moved from Oranienplatz to a Caritas house in Wedding.

▶ Andrea Linss
Umbruch Bildarchiv

They were cheated to believe and sign the agreement with Dilek Kolat, hoping that they would have everything which was written in the agreement as she had told them. She said that if you remove the tents in Oranienplatz then I will apply what is written in the agreement. So there were clashes with us, the refugees who were staying in Oranienplatz and wanted to stay.

On that day, at around 2 pm, I could deny the clearance by occupying a tree for five days. The police and security services prevented me from all attempts to contact or to be supplied with food. They prevented hunger strikers also from sleeping during the night. I demanded a conversation with the integration Senator, Dilek Kolat, from the SPD to point to the promises. The promises were, for example, the toleration of the Lampedusa group, the transitional housing to Berlin, and the stopping of deportations, which were the reasons for refugees to accept the offer of the Senate. We also demanded to bring back our meeting place and the info point to Oranienplatz which they told me was impossible. After all I succeeded to bring the meeting place back.

▶ Oliver Feldhaus
Umbruch Bildarchiv

Until May 18, 2014, the group of activists believed that if a small group can do it, we can do it all together as well. So we went on a six-week march over more than 500 km. Our March for Freedom started in Strasbourg and while we were crossing the borders of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium, we examined the key institutions of the EU asylum policy on-site.

The march quickly formed a band, every day marching through at least two villages, and for a while we were accompanied by two ponies.

Even if people did not always know at the beginning what we wanted, they soon understood it without words that our goals were their goals. We come from war zones bringing no problems. In the villages of Alsace-Lorraine, Saarland, Luxembourg, and Wallonia we met friendly people who made their public

spaces, community centers and halls available to us. About thirty times we changed the cities with tents, kitchen and luggage. The convoy consisted of six or seven vans. We left every place cleaner behind than we had found it.

The march was a traveling conference. We moved from town to town on a daily basis and sometimes we marched together with the local people from the villages. In our camps we held information events, we showed documentaries and we danced or practiced how to survive police raids unharmed.

Besides some harmless flirting with Members of the European Parliament, it came to police attacks, arrests, and detention. After attempting to attend a conference of EU Interior Ministers in Luxembourg, we spent an entire day providing relief to victims of pepper spray attacks and dog bites and trying to free arrested activists.

In Brussels we held a sit-in outside the police station, after several protesters were arrested in front of the German embassy. We want the freedom for work, to go everywhere without permission.

For example in Brussels there was this family from Romania that paid a truck-driver 1000 euros in order to be smuggled into Belgium - even though they may actually travel freely as EU members. But because they are homeless, their government gave them no IDs. Belgium may at any time arrest them indefinitely.

Colonialism and Imperialism

All these problems above have to do with colonialism, capitalism, racism, and imperialism, as well as the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 which formalized Europe's claim of Africa. European powers arbitrarily divided up Africa between themselves and started administrating their new colonies. Seventy years later they bequeathed to native Africans countries that looked remarkably different from how they looked in 1880. These countries are the poorest in the world today.

To judge the impact of colonialism on development in Africa simply by looking at outcomes during the colonial period is a conceptual mistake. Post-independence Africa looked nothing like it would have done in the absence of colonialism. Indeed, in most cases post-independence economic decline

in Africa can be explicitly attributed to colonialism because the types of mechanisms that led to this decline were creations of colonial society. In Africa we had three types of colonies:

Those with a centralised state at the time of the scramble for Africa, such as Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Rwanda, and Swaziland. Those of white settlements, such as Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and probably Angola and Mozambique as well as colonies which did not experience significant white settlement and where there was either no significant pre-colonial state formation (like Somalia or South Sudan) or where there was a mixture of centralised and un-centralised societies (such as Congo-Brazzaville, Nigeria, Uganda and Sierra Leone).

In the former, the assumption that the patterns of pre-colonial development could have continued, if there would not have been colonialism, is sufficient to argue that these countries would be more developed today without the European colonialism. Colonialism not only blocked further political development, but indirect rule made local elites less accountable to their citizens. After independence, even if these states had a coherence others lacked, they had far more predatory rulers. These polities also suffered from the uniform colonial legacies of racism, stereotypes and misconceptions.

Self-Organised Protest

Right now we achieved a lot with regards to our three demands but our struggle will never stop until we are satisfied. Oranienplatz and the school are one thing. The occupation of Oranienplatz was forced to end, the school (Ohlauer Strasse) was evicted in a way and the promise from the Berlin Senate was a lie. They lied to silence us, but on the other hand they pushed our movement to be known more, so now it is in the media itself.

In the refugees movement we do work through certain structures. For example, we do not have power over one another or so-called leaders. It depends on, for example, the refugee group meetings that made the decisions; open meetings in which everybody shares whatever ideas they have; supporter group meetings; financial groups; media groups; infrastructure groups; action groups; legal groups; kitchen groups and so on. This principle of voluntary participation makes it easy for everyone to choose in which group she/he fits in.

We had difficulties as well in our movement due to clashes of different interests, either strategically or tactically, as well as different demands, from several sides: between refugees and refugees, between refugees and supporters, and between supporters and supporters. These clashes gave the government the chance to try to divide us. For example, with the Lampedusa group at Oranienplatz it became clear that the asylum seekers in Germany face different situations. The politicians used this for their divide-and-rule strategy at Oranienplatz, just like politicians did it in the colonies in Africa, as I mentioned above. In particular, even though the Green party has been talking the good things and against police actions, in terms of the refugee struggle at Oranienplatz they did not walk their talk at all. At the end, they ordered the police to evict Oranienplatz.

Of course, problems among us in the movement have been solved through meetings, discussions, resolution groups or with close friends if possible. Even though we did not solve all the problems above, the mentioned methods have been very helpful. In general, the refugees and the supporters are like sisters and brothers in my point of view. In understanding that together we have to fight against the system, we take each other's hands and walk hand in hand.

For example, refugees are aware of what the EU does, including Germany. Ask for the reasons why people flee! Clearly it has a connection to imperialism and capitalism. The asylum laws are racist and colonial. Fight these laws. And not only in Germany, fight Europe wide, fight together also with the working classes and social movements and so on.

We learn a lot from the past. Right now we try to communicate strongly to unite all refugees together, refugees in different places or lagers: Collect phone-numbers, emails, use internet pages together, exchange and empower one another and build up infrastructure, focus on the political fight, organize conferences, workshops and so on. The struggle for human rights has to be based on the development of social relations.

Look at animals that were displaced during the first civil war and the second civil war in south Sudan. Animals ran to the neighboring countries automatically. What about human beings then?

Sudan is an example. The colonizers brought to Sudan selfishness, hatred, fight

and divisions, which pushed people to go into exile. You can see now, we are refugees. But we fight this to the end.

From my experience there is always a possibility, nothing is impossible. Gandhi said: “be the change you want to see in the world”. So for you right now and right here do not be part of the problem.

Rather, oppose!

I call upon us, my sisters and brothers: Let us fight together for every one of us to have the right to live, not just to survive.

My name is Napuli Paul Langa. I am a Sudanese. I studied Art & Development Studies and I have worked as a facilitator of nonviolence, alternatives to violence, gender issues and human rights. I stood up for the rights of refugees at Oranienplatz and I am the head of Blacks and Whites Together for Human Rights in Berlin.

2016

▶Demonstration in Berlin Kreuzberg/Görlitzer Bahnhof
Oliver Feldhaus, Umbruch Bildarchiv

“You Can’t Evict a Movement!” From the Rise of the Refugee Movement in Germany to the Practice of Squatting

by Colectivo Hinundzurück,
Germany, Berlin-Kreuzberg

The struggle of refugees in Germany over the last years since 2012 has increased rapidly, with highly visible mobilizations and activities that have vehemently catapulted into the living rooms and tv-screens of every German household their political demands against deportations and racist laws and for migrant legalization. Furthermore, some of the struggles have involved the occupation of public squares and buildings. In June 2014, 50 refugees occupied a former school and resisted an eviction for nine days under heavy police siege, planned and ordered by the Green Party. Some significant refugee-struggles over the last 2 years reveal the development of a rising movement against racism and mark the importance and meaning of an ongoing conflict.

In mid 2012, the protest suicide of the Iranian refugee Mohammad Rahsepar in January 2012, who hung himself in a Heim (refugee housing)[1] in Würzburg, southern Germany, initiated an increasing round of protests. In March 2012, 10 refugees from Iran began a hunger strike in downtown Würzburg, accompanied by a permanent protest camp, where Occupy movement participants joined. After some of the hunger strikers had to be transferred to the hospital, negotiations took place that led, once the first hunger strike ended, to political asylum for some of those refugees for humanitarian reasons. Nevertheless, the protest camp remained and various activities and demonstrations against German asylum policies were carried out in the following months in Bavaria, wheresome refugees wore white strips of cloth in

1 A home for refugees, often isolated, with under-served by public transportation, and located in scantily populated areas of Germany.

memory of the death of Mohammad Rahsepar.

The protests grew and expanded to other cities and regions of Germany, including protest camps in public squares. In some locales, so called Refugee Tent Actions[2] were established, including Aub, Bamberg, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt/Main, München, Osnabrück, Passau, Nürnberg, Regensburg, Stuttgart, and Schwäbisch Gmünd, among others. Finally, 'The Coordination Committee of Striking Asylum-Seekers in Germany' organized the Refugee Protest March to Berlin, marching some 600 kilometers from the Bavarian city of Würzburg to Berlin.[3]

The Refugee Protest March to Berlin began on September 8th, and took place along two routes, one on foot and one by bus, and arrived after 28 days on October 6th, 2012. On the day of their arrival in Berlin, the refugees and activists squatted a public square in the district of Kreuzberg, at Oranienplatz, and called it the Refugee Protest Camp. They lived and organized in tents and wooden huts as a protest against racist German laws regarding inmigration and asylum. The camp drew wide public and media attention to issues such as racism, Fortress Europe, the situation in Lampedusa (Italy) and the continuity of colonial policies, which, for example, are manifested in the German law of Residenzpflicht (mandatory residence).[4]

The square was later evicted in April 2014 when one portion of the group of refugees agreed to move to other facilities provided by the authorities. This agreement however created an internal conflict amongst the refugees about the proper way to combine their struggle against racist laws with the need for housing and legal status, a tension that was used shrewdly by the authorities to split and weaken the anti-racist movement. Even so, one refugee-activist occupied a tree and remained there 4 days longer.

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2 http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?lang=en

3 http://www.refugeetentaction.net/index.php?lang=en

4 Residenzpflicht (mandatory residence) is a legal requirement affecting specifically applicants for refugee status or those who have been given a temporary stay of deportation. Those affected are required to live within certain boundaries defined by the applicants' local foreigners' office. Residenzpflicht is particular to Germany relative to the European Union and several migrant and refugee advocacy organisations oppose the Residenzpflicht as a violation of fundamental human rights.

▶ International Women Space
Umbruch Bildarchiv

On October 13th 2012, the biggest demonstration in recent years in Germany took place in Berlin, with 6000 participants protesting for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Two days later, refugees and activists occupied the Nigerian Embassy in Berlin to protest against the embassy hearings in which refugees, who could not be identified, were interrogated within the embassy by Nigerian officials aiming at detecting the dialects and languages spoken by those refugees. This practice helped the German authorities in issuing deportations back to the countries of their supposed origin.

In December 2012, a group of refugees and activists occupied a school, which was vacant save for some offices on the groundfloor, in Ohlauer Straße 12, Berlin, and named it Refugee Strike House. These refugees-squatters had been occupying the public square in Kreuzberg (Oranienplatz) since October 2012. One floor of the occupied school was converted into a woman-only refugee space called the International Women‘s Space[5].

The rise of these refugee-movements led to greater self-organizing with significant outcomes, including several congresses and conferences organized by refugees throughout 2012-2014: The “Refugee Struggle Congress“ in

5 http://asylstrikeberlin.wordpress.com/refugee-women/

München in March 2013 with 300 participants; the first “Refugee-Women’s-Conference” in Hamburg in April 2013[6]; and the “Refugee Tribunal Against Germany“ in Berlin in June 2013, organized by activists of the “Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants”; and “The Voice Refugee Forum Germany“. Meanwhile, 500 refugees from all over Germany and roughly another 100 people attended the “International Tribunal Against Germany”.[7] Furthermore, activities and protests continued from February 26th to March 20th 2013, when refugees organized the “Refugees Revolution Bus Tour“, which travelled through 22 cities in Germany to visit refugees in their Lagers (refugee camps) and to carry out protest actions.

▶ Demonstration of pupils against racism and deportation in Berlin, Umbruch Bildarchiv

In May 2013, 300 refugees in Hamburg demanded permanent residence through the “Lampedusa in Hamburg”[8] campaign. Over time, many more people, churches, artists, football fans, and many Leftist groups joined the campaign

6 http://thecaravan.org/files/caravan/Refugee_Women_Conference_2013_call.pdf
7 http://www.refugeetribunal.org/
8 http://www.lampedusa-in-hamburg.org/

and demonstrated their solidarity with the refugees and their demands. On November 2nd, one month after the catastrophe at Lampedusa left 390 refugees dead[9], 10-15,000 persons demonstrated in Hamburg for the rights of refugeees. The following August, the Refugee Struggle for Freedom March[10] took place for two weeks throughout Bavaria, filled with many demonstrations. After the final demonstration on September 3rd in München, the DGB[11] office was occupied by 50 refugees and activists, who left after two weeks of negotiations. In July 2014, approximately 70 refugees ocupied the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in Nürnberg, the same month that the highest building in Germany, the Berlin TV-Tower (365 meters), was squatted by 47 refugees, in the heart of the city. Unfortunately, both places were evicted the same day by police.

The refugee protests gained international attention when from May to the end of June 2014, hundreds gathered for the Refugee March for Freedom[12] from Berlin through France, Luxembourg, and finally reaching the European Parliament in Brussels (Belgium). For 7 weeks, starting from July 14th 2014, the Refugee women action tour[13] went on a Germany-wide boat trip along rivers and canals, from Nürnberg to Berlin. The tour was meant to bring the problems of refugee women into the open; the motto was “from personal problem to political demand”. They visited different Lagers, talked to women and documented pressing issues faced by refugee women. In addition, several refugee hunger strikes were carried out throughout Germany, stressing their political demands and engagement.

On October 24th, 2012, 25 refugees began a hunger strike at Brandenburger Tor (Berlin) for 9 days, which was followed one month later by a second in the same place and lasted until December. In June 2013, 95 refugees from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran engaged in a hunger strike in München-Rindermarkt, during which 50 of the hunger-strikers also refused any liquids. The hunger-strikers camp was subsequently evicted by police at the end of June and 44 strikers were transported to different hospitals. Two had to be revived.

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9 On October 3, 2013, a boat, coming from Libya to Italy with migrants from Eritrea, Somalia, Ghana, among other countries, sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa.

10 http://no-racism.net/article/4516/

11 Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (The Confederation of German Trade Unions).

12 http://freedomnotfrontex.noblogs.org/

13 http://www.refugee-women-tour.net/

There were also hunger strikes within the deportation prison in Eisenhüttenstadt in June after the suicide of a refugee from Chad, another hunger strike in Stuttgart in July by 15 refugees, and another in August in the protest camp Bitterfeld.

In October, 23 refugees from the group non-citizens[14], began another hunger strike at Brandenburg Gate (Berlin) that also included abstention from drinking. Again, many had to be transferred to hospitals before the strike ended on October 19th. And in November, 6 refugees from Senegal went on a hunger strike in München for 8 days. Finally, in June 2014, 29 refugees in Hannover refused food and drink for 48 hours after one refugee was deported. But possibly the most significant struggle was during the summer 2014, when some 50 refugees on the roof and inside the building of the squatted Refugee Strike House (the former school Gerhardt-Hauptmann), resisted a siege and eviction attempt by police who had deployed daily some 500 officers for nine days. The situation finally ended with an agreement between the refugees and the district council of Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain.[15]

On June 24th, 2014 at 10 am, some 900 police officers attacked the squatted school, blocked various neighbourhood streets and prevented public access to the adjoining streets of the refugee strike house. The police were joined by members of the district council, which is governed by the Greens (Die Grünen)[16], who were intent on evicting and completely vacating the building. The district had always spoken about a “voluntary move/relocation” of the school squatters, who would be transferred to refugee housing outside of the city. This is because an order of eviction did not officially exist. Due to the high pressure and the threat of eviction, 208 inhabitants agreed to the move, but around 50 refugees and some activists remained on the building roof, resisting eviction and demanding permanent residency permits for themselves and for all refugees in Germany. They demanded to be allowed to stay in the occupied school and to maintain it as an autonomous, self-managed place. They also requested permission to work, refused accomodation in any Heim or Lager, and demanded the abolition of the Rezidenzpflicht and an end to the deportation policy.

14 http://refugeestruggle.org/en/about-us

15 ohlauerinfopoint.wordpress.com

16 Officially, the „Alliance ‘90/The Greens“, formed in 1993 as a merger of the West German Green Party, founded in 1980, and the East-German Alliance 90, founded in 1989-1990.

Some refugees threatened publicly to jump from the roof if the police tried to enter the school or to evict them. This is when the police siege started and lasted nine days. Meanwhile, inside the area cordonned off by police, thousands of inhabitants were living in the streets. Whenever leaving or returning home, they had to identify themselves to officers stationed at road blocks. Local shops, bars and bakeries were forced to close since access was impeded. Kindergartens were closed as well on the fifth day of the siege because parents did not want to have their children subjected to such a situation. On the other side of the police cordon, activists in solidarity with the refugees established an information center with music, an open microphone, a people's kitchen, and an open-air cinema with footage of the refugee protests. Day and night, for a total of 242 hours, thousands of people passed by offering a diverse and daily display of solidarity.

Among the solidarity actions were the temporary occupation of mayor Monika Hermann's office (of The Greens); a spontanous demonstration with barricades and the blocking of traffic; and a direct intervention in a public meeting of the home affairs committee of the Chamber of Deputies with banners, slogans, speeches and disruption, which resulted in 7 arrests and charges of trespassing. There was also an attempt to occupy the office of the senate of internal affairs, headed by Frank Henkel, from the party Christian Democratic Union (CDU). There was another bigger demonstration with some 5,000 in attendance, and a direct action arson attack on the local district court of Kreuzberg-Tempelhof. There was also an occupation of the German embassy in Brussels (Belgium) with 23 arrests, and a demonstration by 2000 students and many solidarity activities all over Germany, with demonstrations in front of and occupations of Green Party offices. Meanwhile, neighbors directly affected got together and organized two demonstrations within the cordoned off area, putting up banners out of their windows in favor of the refugee struggle. They started a petition against this kind of state of emergency that was signed by neighbors and shop-owners.

While the protests increased daily, dialogue and negotiations continued between the occupants and mediators, members of the parliament of Berlin and Germany. These included: Canan Bayram (chamber of deputies from Berlin, The Greens), Hakan Tas (chamber of deputies from Berlin, The Left) and Christian Ströbele (lower house of parliament, retired in 2017, The Greens). At the same time, under orders of the local district, the press was denied access to the

occupied school and were not allowed to talk directly to the refugees, who demanded free access of the press. Only after tremendous public pressure was food delivery allowed to the occupants through the police cordon, under the condition that it be brought by the church. The official spokesperson of the local district, Sascha Langenbach, justified the prohibition/ban of the press entering the school by absurdly alluding to the Gladbeck hostage crisis of 1988, in which two bankrobbers, after an armed bank raid, took several hostages, and were on the run for two days in Germany and Netherlands. The ordeal resulted in the deaths of three people. The whole episode had been much criticized as media circus at that time.[17]

On the fifth day, a resolution seemed possible. However, on the following day, the president of the Berlin police, Kandt, put forward an ultimatum to the local district, demanding a final decision the next day. Eviction or no eviction, it was stipulated that if no clear decision was made, the police would retreat completely from the school and the area. But the local district feared the re-occupation of the still partly vacant building. Subsequently Hans Panhoff (The Greens), the councillor responsible for construction (who in 1980 himself had squatted a house in which he still lives in Cuvrystraße 25, Kreuzberg) signed the eviction order with the support of the Green mayor Monika Hermann, handing the matter to the police.

The tension increased immediately. Mai from Sudan, one of the women, who was still in the occupied school, confirmed this:

“The days in the school were extremely difficult. There was total confusion. One day, the politicians said we would be evicted, the next day, they would say another thing. And all this took place under heavy pressure with this constant siege of police around you.”

Thousands of people arrived at the road blocks, causing the police to deploy more officers. Some of the refugees published in their blogs two videos in which they explained their flight to Europe and their intent of jumping from the roof in case of eviction.

17 It was the first incident in Germany with direct interference by representatives of the media. The media were severely criticized for their handling of the situation and for conducting interviews with hostages. As a result, the German Press Council banned any future interviews with hostage takers during a hostage situation.

Now everybody feared an eviction.

The Greens from the district as well as from the city of Berlin distanced themselves from the eviction order, while the senator of internal affairs from Berlin, Christian Democrat (CDU) Frank Henkel, supported the decision. On the same night, some 60 persons carried out an escrache[18] in front of the house of Hans Panhoff, setting two barricades on fire and creating graffiti criticizing the politician with the statement: "Panhoff kills refugees". According to the police, politicians Panhoff, Hermann and Henkel received death threats.

In the meantime, the refugee squatters from the school were terrorized constantly by the police. From the surrounding roofs, the police, using flashlights, shined light all night and made noise in order to keep the occupants sleepless. They also insulted the refugees in a racist manner and sneered at them holding up handcuffs and bananas. All this time the press was still not allowed to enter the school, although the refugees demanded the press be let inside to give interviews. It was not until the fourth day that three refugees were allowed to come out of the school and talk to the press for the first time. Outside the blockades, the police repression and violence continued. During a demonstration of 2000 students and pupils, three pupils were atacked with pepper spray and had to be taken to hospital where one of them had been on the edge of losing one eye. The whole police operation during the nine days cost up to 5 million Euros.

Finally, on July 2nd, after nine days, an agreement was reached: The refugees were able to remain in the school; received a temporary residence status for 6 months; received an identification card to enter and leave the school, secured by a private security service; with the understanding that the school would be, after renovation, transformed into a center for refugees, not self-managed, but instead conducted and administered by the district.

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18 Escrache ("unmaskings") is the name given to a type of demonstration and proptest action in which a group of activists go to the homes or workplaces of those whom they want to condemn and critize publicly. This term was born in Argentina in 1995, when the group HIJOS (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio, Children for Identity and Justice Against Forgetfulness and Silence) organized targeted demonstrations in front of the homes of people identified as perpetrators of repression and responsible for cases of torture and murder under the military dictatorship (1976–1983).

But the result was only a victory in some aspects. It is certainly the case that the eviction was pushed back and the refugees able to remain in the school. Additionally, the protests mobilized large numbers of people and exposed the racist asylum policy to the broader public But the main demand for a permanent residency for all, with all the rights implied in full legalization was not attained. The refugees can remain and stay in the school, but do not know if they can remain in Germany. Mai from Sudan states:

“Many refugees supported this agreement, because it is a matter of life and death. However, we have been under permanent pressure, almost close to going crazy. I do mistrust a lot, because we have seen what happened with the people from Oranienplatz.”

It should not be forgotten that almost all the refugees who had been participants in previous protests, like the occupation of the Oranienplatz (2012-2014), who had received the same deal and agreement after negotations with politicians, now have received notifications of deportation.This clearly shows the breach of contract and non-compliance on the side of the politicians. And some of the community of the Roma families (around 60 persons), which had been living in the school and participated in the “voluntary move ” under heavy police pressure, described the Lager of refugees they were transferred to:

“We feel like being in prison, and we are in the middle of a forest. We feel absolutely isolated and lost. What can we do, that our children can go to their schools in Kreuzberg ? ”

On August 26th, 2014, some refugees from the evicted Oranienplatz occupied the roof of their refugee-home in Gürtelstrasse 39 for 13 days, after having received the notification that their asylum cases had been rejected and leaving the facility they were provided by the authorities after the agreement of the evicted Oranienplatz. In their time on the roof, those refugees were denied sufficient water and food by the police, and the electricity and water supply was cut. One refugee almost died and had to be saved in the hospital. This inhumane treatment by the police was reported at a press conference by the refugees[19]. Weeks later, the doctor Peter Hauber pressed charges (failure to

19 http://www.livestream.com/undergroundreports/video?clipId=pla_bbf1e99b-52d3-4e60-b96f-3533437e6abb

lend assistance, bodily harm and compulsion) against the responsible senate of interior, Frank Henkel (CDU).[20]

Around 100 refugees and activists squatted on September 11th the St. Thomas Church in Berlin -Kreuzberg. Four days of successful occupation led to an accommodation for several months for at least 68 refugees.[21]

On September 27th, 2014, the group Refugee Struggle for Freedom squatted the office of DGB (German alliance of trade unions). One week later, October 2, the violent eviction took place .The refugees demanded political solidarity from the German unions. Independent of the concrete assessment of the action, it is a scandal that the leadership of the DGB Berlin had the refugees thrown out of the building by the police. It is not understandable why the DGB was not able to respond to the demands for commitment from the union membership, a meeting with the member unions, a meeting with responsible politicians and the organization of a manifestation. Even more unbelievable is the cynicism, when in a press release they said that the employees of the house have been "on the the limits of their physical and psychological capacity" – in order to justify the eviction of over 20 refugees who are threatened by homelessness and deportation.

On November 30th, 2014, the autonomous group "Autonome Zelle Umzug" (Autonomous Cell Move), visited the private apartment building of the Green mayor of the district Kreuzberg, Monika Hermann, and sprayed slogans, put up posters and fotos against racism, and dumped several empty removal crates in front of the door to remind her of her part in the evictions of the squatted Oranienplatz and especially the School in Ohlauer Strasse, when she called the eviction there cynically "a voluntary moving". The state executive committee of the Green party was not amused and compared this action nonsensically with the German Nazis from 1933-1945, when stating on Facebook „We thought, this kind of home-visits had stopped in 1945"[22] Actually it explains more about the way of thinking of the Green party then about the action itself.

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20 http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/wegen-polizeieinsatz-gegen-fluechtlinge-berliner-arzt-erstattet-anzeige-gegen-innensenator-henkel/10920236.html

21 http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/bezirke/kreuzberg-blog/berlin-kreuzberg-fluechtlinge-jetzt-in-sechs-ersatzquartieren/10698518.html

22 http://www.taz.de/!5026856/ vom 6.12. 2014

▶ Mimi from the occupied school in Ohlauer Strasse (Berlin)
Umbruch Bildarchiv

On December 10th, 2014, after 20 years of activism in Germany, Sista Mimi died. She was 36 years old. She lived and fought in the squatted Refugee School in Ohlauer Straße 12. Earlier the same year, she explained her personal participation in an interview as part of the project The House of the 28 Doors[23]:

(...) Then I heard about the squatted school.(...) I thought: Yeah, this is a chance for me to stay in my Kiez (neighbourhood). I'd been living in the Kiez for a long time.(...) I feel at home here. I have lots of friends here. That's why I decided to move into the school and to live there. Because I still feel like a refugee in Germany even though I've been living here for 17 years. I also decided to join the fight against gentrification and the expulsion of poor people from Kreuzberg. Kreuzberg is slowly becoming "Schickimicki" or "Heititeiti" (Posh). (...)

I don't get, why I should't be allowed to live here anymore. Ordinary people like

23 organized by the Berlin-Dresden artist group Bewegung Nurr. This excerpts are taken from the book "In our own words - Refugee Woman tells their stories" edited and published from the International Women Space in November 2015.

me can no longer afford the rents in Kreuzberg. Actually it's very sad. Because it was ordinary people who created the scene and the ambience of Kreuzberg. Now these other people are coming to Kreuzberg who want to change it. by doing so, they are destroying the society. It's splitting of society. (...) that's not right politically.

Every human beng has the right to live freely in this world. It's one planet, one world, one love. one blood, I do not see where is the difference? We have enough space. We could all live together. without classifying people into groups and classes and pigeonholes. This world is beautiful and living together works (...)

Therefore the school must remain as a place to live in and a place to come to. As a symbol for refugees from all over the world. The majority of refugees living in Kreuzberg are from Africa. We all know, that Germany is the number one exporter of arms. On the other hand, the resources still come from Africa. So society should not wonder why the refugees still stream into Europe, because on the other side is nothing! What would you do, if you had no opportunities or options ? Would you sit down and wait till your whole familiy starves to death, because they have nothing to eat ? Why do they not have anything to eat? Due to colonization it has come to that ! These refugees, especially those from Africa, are the result and proof of colonization. It's no wonder. It will go on and on for generations.

The question is: when will we find a way to solve our problems together? "

As long as she was alive, she refused to return to Kenya: But her last wish, to rest in peace in Kenya, was fulfilled. In January 2015 she was brought to Nairobi and Mimi's relatives were very moved that her community in Berlin made this possible and that a friend of Mimi accompanied her on her last journey and attended the funeral as a representative of that community.

"The Refugee movement is the movement of the 21st Century" (Angela Davis, May 2015)

"Can someone explain to me why can't I go inside the school?" asked Angela Davis on the 14th of May, 2015, during her meeting with activists in the

▶ Angela Davis in Berlin Kreuzberg in 2015
Oliver Feldhaus, Umbruch Bildarchiv

Werkstatt der Kulturen[24], while visiting Berlin. “Is it a school or a prison?” Ohlauer Strasse and were denied access by the District authorities, governed by the Green Party. In fact, access to the squatted school was denied to everyone. No one could enter - no friends, no doctors, not even lawyers. A cynical strategy to isolate the refugee squatters with a monthly paid security team day and night, who guard the entrance behind the gate. This surveillance and control system - unique for squats in Germany and implemented by a political party who emerged from the social movements 40 years ago, who still maintains a hypocritical dicourse regarding refugees, as when the Green Mayor Monika Hermann demands that “refugees need space and resources so that integration can succeed.”[25]

The day after, on the 15th of May, Angela Davis and Gina Dent met again with

24 Werkstatt der Kulturen (WDK) is a symbolic location for artistic exposure.

25 on the webpage of the Green Party: “Die Geflüchteten in unserem Bezirk brauchen Raum und Ressourcen, damit Integration auch gelingen kann” in: https://gruene-xhain.de/monika-herrmann/

refugees and migrants outside the squatted school, to listen, understand and discuss how the struggle for the rights of all people to move freely and have a dignified life is going in Germany.

Statement from Refugee Activists from Ohlauer School

We are here to fight for our human rights.

Here in the school the politicians try to isolate us – no visitors, not even lawyers, doctors, not even international activists like Angela Davis, not even our friends and supporters. Shame on them!

The politicians in Berlin try to kick us out and stop our struggle – but we continue to fight for our rights.

We are fighting as part of the refugee protest movement.

We had the march to Berlin, and the protest camp at Oranienplatz for 2 years.

We had the March for Freedom from Strasbourg to Brussels.

Some politically active refugees paid a high price for fighting for human rights and were in prison too – but we do believe that the struggle is worth it!

Some of us protested on the roof for nine days last summer when the politicians tried to throw us out of this former school, where we live and where we continue the struggle. Now they try again, but we do not give up!

We are fighting for freedom of movement, to be able to live and work and study here.

We are fighting against racism and against criminalisation.

We are fighting to be recognized as equal human beings.

▶ Umbruch Bildarchiv

We are fighting for a better, fairer refugee policy, in Germany, in Europe and in the world.

Here in the Gerhart Hauptmann Schule we are fighting specifically to make an International Refugee Centre, for all refugees.
To come together,
To share information about the struggle and about human rights,
To help refugees solve practical problems,
To empower ourselves to struggle for our human rights.

As black refugees here we don't feel welcome.
People say "refugees are welcome" but we do not feel it,
We do not see it in practical things,
We do not feel that most German people welcome us with their hearts.

We are here and we will fight
Freedom of movement is everybody's right.

The rise of these refugee-movements consequently lead to greater self-organizing with significant outputs: One of those outputs was an exhibition organized by the Revolutionary Refugee Movement to share their experiences, which took place at different spaces. The first exhibition with many different seminars and concerts was held in a big tent at Ostbahnhof, then at the public Kreuzberg Museum in the city-district of Kreuzberg. There a shocking controversy arose at the opening of exhibition, when the chief of the museum said that he did not want the piece which was put right at the entrance of the exhibition because it was criticizing the Green mayor of Kreuzberg. They did not want the critique about the mayor, who actively participated in the attacks against the spaces of resistance (the evicted tent-city in Oranienplatz or the squatted school in Ohlauer Strasse) and in the demobilisation operations towards the resistance, at the front side of museum. In the discussion with the chief of the museum among the audience no consensus could be reached. The refugees argued that there is a freedom of speech discourse in Europe and therefore asked the chief what freedom of speech would it be if the museum as an institution which is connected to the municipality could not tolerate the criticism towards the mayor. Finally the refugees suggested a referendum with the present audience and agreed to remove the piece if the majority of audience votes for it. But none of the people wanted to remove the piece;. On the contrary, they said they liked it.

While the refugees continue with their activities, racism in Germany manifests at every level. Turgay Ulu, one refugee-activist points out:

“Last week there was an attack against our archives and exhibits in Kreuzberg Museum and some of our stuff was destroyed. There is a significant increase in the attacks against refugees in all Germany and Europe. The buildings of refugees are set on fire. The physical attacks against the refugees and migrants are increasing. On the 25th of August (2015), some people were urinating on a migrant boy in the U-Bahn in Berlin. The people who did it left the train with the Nazi signs and the police released them.

The media, making a big noise against the Berlin Wall, is ignoring the wall rising all around Europe. The borders are built against the people who are fleeing from the wars waged with the weapons produced by imperialists. These borders are built not only by the law, but also with the walls and wire fences.

We continue our struggle to protect what we gained in our resistance spaces.

The tent was burned down in Oranienplatz, the wooden shelter we built afterwards, too. At the end the info-desk was stolen by the police. We have the right to set up a tent as an information and meeting point. Now we start a campaign to put a big boat in Oranienplatz. This boat symbolizes the people who lost their lives at the sea frontiers. At the Ohlauer school occupation there are still 25 refugees staying but visits are forbidden. The court procedure still continues.

Our experience in resistance tells this to people: to keep down ourselves [not to fight, not to resist][26] against the attacks towards refugees means to lose from the beginning. We can take our rights via resisting. We can reject the slavery imposed on us through resistance".[27]

Throughout the years the refugees have installed a significant number of projects, groups, initiatives and created their own infrastructure of their movement. Among the most active protest groups of (mostly) refugees in Berlin you can find: African Refugee Union, Corasol, Chad Youth in Germany, International Women Space, Lager Mobilisation Berlin, Lampedusa in Berlin, Ohlauer School, Women in Exile and friends or the Stop Deportation Group. One of the most important webpages is oplatz.net, a website, which was created as the voice of the Refugee Movement based at the protest camp at Oranienplatz ("Oplatz") in Berlin, set up in 2012 to protest against the disfranchisement of refugees by the German state. Since the eviction of the camp in 2014, the website as well as the structure of refugee protests have changed and developed. Various groups with different focuses have emerged, including the Oplatz Media Group, which is continuing to fill this website with news about protests of refugees in Berlin, throughout Germany and beyond. The Movement Magazine - A Heroes Magazine, with eight languages. was the first important book about their struggles and lifes, which was published by them.[28]

It also publishes the newspaper by and for refugees – Daily Resistance. The

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26 note from editors

27 from the article Devrimci Mülteci Harketi Deneyimlerini Aktariyor/ Revolutionary Refugee Movement Shares its Experiences, 25.08.2015, Turgay Ulu : https://oplatz.net/devrimci-multeci-harketi-deneyimlerini-aktariyor/

28 http://cargocollective.com/Movementmagazine/

Daily Resistance, aimed to reach people in refugee camps, so far has published and distributed four issues. In the last one, articles were written in English, Farsi, Arabic, German, Turkish, and Urdu. First published in 2017, the newspaper Stimme, a self organized magazine for and about refugee and migrant women, wants to provide a platform to make refugee and migrant women*'s experiences, problems and struggles visible and provide useful information for their living situation.

Since 2016 Wearebornfree! Empowerment Radio, a radio program organized by Refugees & Friends to empower each other, has been providing a platform for refugees and other marginalized people like women, children, LGBTIQ, Black people and People of Color and others. They are on air on reboot.fm on FM 88,4 MhZ in Berlin and FM 90.6 MhZ in Potsdam.

The International Women Space, a Berlin-based feminist political group of migrant and refugee women, and women without this experience, who are active in the fight against racism, sexism and other intersecting power structures, was born as a group inside the refugee occupation of the former school in Ohlauer Straße 12 in December of 2012. Not longer than a week after the occupation, the women activists of the movement announced that they were reserving a few rooms on the second floor only for women. During 17 months, many women passed through the Women Space, many lived there, others came to attend the meetings, the workshops, and the German classes amongst other activities regularly organised. When, in June 2014, parts of the school were evicted, the women of the International Women Space were evicted as well but continued as a group and maintained several activities such as running a webpage, publishing the book In Our Own Words, Refugee Women in Germany tell their stories and organizing the conference "When I came to Germany", with six panel discussions focusing on the experiences of women who came to West Germany as guest workers, to East Germany as contract workers, as migrants and refugees to the reunified Germany and of German women who are affected by racism (October 2017).

On 11th of January, 2018, the last remaining squatted floors of the school in Ohlauer Straße 12 were evicted by the Green party and their Green Mayor Monika Hermann. It was a long and intense morning with hundreds demonstrating on the streets of Kreuzberg to protest this eviction, and against German racist and neocolonial asylum and migration policies, Fortress Europe,

and deportations. Additionally, while there is no direct testiomony, it is important to consider the effects the eviction had on the Roma community. They lived in the school and were evicted on June 24th, 2014, and then distributed to remote places at the city's margins, far from their local environment. Their children lost their structures -- they could not attend their schools anymore -- which led to a far more complicated situation in terms of education and maintaining friendship ties. Almost all of the Roma people were driven into homelessness again; some of them now are dead.

After all negotiations with the Berlin Senate and the district authorities of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg failed, on January 10th, the remaining squatters of the school left the school building the evening before the set eviction date. After a first month in a camp in Schöneweide, they will live in a container camp in Kreuzberg. For some, their asylum cases will undergo revision on the basis of §23 Residence Law – yet, as the so-called "Oranienplatz Agreement" after the demolition of the Oplatz (Oranienplatz) camp perfectly illustrated, there is no guarantee that this re-evaluation will lead to any granted legal status.

The "Oranienplatz Agreement" was another attempt by the Berlin Senate and the district government to divide and conquer the refugee movement. After the attempted eviction of the entire building in June 2014, an agreement, concerning a Self-Organized International Refugee Center, was made. But this agreement was sabotaged and never taken seriously by the authorities.

This despite the fact that the refugees, independent organizations, several associations and the neighbourhood initiative had come up with a plan, which included counseling services, a café, and a cultural and political venue. In the end, it became more and more evident that the Green party was willing to undertake everything possible to prevent a self-organized - not state-controlled - concept and life in the squatted school. They were even willing to pay almost 5 Million Euros from 2014 to 2018 for the 24/7 security guards to obstruct the coming of more refugees to the school.

The refugee movement has shown that refugees fight for the status of political subjects. Their demands for visibility and equal rights – denied to them by the white-German majority society – have encouraged and politicized groups, initiatives and individuals. Courage, solidarity, and shared political struggle are more necessary than ever in the face of constant tightening of asylum laws, the

deterritorialization of Europe's borders, racist and capitalist exploitation, and the European shift to the right. All people must have the right to decide where and how they want to live, irrespective of their status and origin.

The political struggle, the local and global fights against repression, gentrification and every-day racism, continue against the backdrop of the capitalistic system. As was shown on the demo route of December 16th and January 11th, local fights in Kreuzberg against gentrification, daily evictions of individuals and projects, such as Friedel 54, or against Google Campus in Ohlauer Straße need to be more strongly addressed as linked to the fights of the lower classes, the poor, exploited and disenfranchised, the refugees, migrants and newcomers.

The very fact that the refugee movement has maintained itself through the committed fight of political activists, can be seen as a (small) success. However, their demands and political goals – abolishment of the lager system, an end to deportations, freedom of movement for everybody – have been ignored.[29]

But the struggle continues and as Angela Davis said:
"The refugee movement is the movement of the 21st Century."

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- Nine Days on the roof (Film): https://vimeo.com/110312571

29 text and most information taken from oplatz.net

►Patio Maravillas Madrid

Overflowing the walls. The squatting is on the paths.

by Elisabeth Lorenzi

This story is about the rise of the critical mass in Madrid related to the bike kitchens sited in squatted social centres, and how all this contributed to the increasing of cyclists in madrilenian paths. Currently in Madrid, the bikers are a strange animal of the city savannah. Now bikers are not so known, but it is building up very fast. In 2004 a few people started this Critical Mass, and a year after some of them or more other people offered a bike workshop in a social centre. Thereafter, another group related with this one opened another bike workshop in another social centre. And seven years after, another 15 bike workshops opened in different spaces in the city. Some of them are being evicted along with the social centres. But it is very interesting how the increasing of the bike, the increasing of the Critical Mass, and the increasing of the bike workshop have been related in Madrid.

Here we intend to observe the Squatting movement avoiding a sectorial definition of the Social Movement. In this sense, we take the squatted social centres as spaces of interaction among social movements and as social movement by itself. We observed the developing of the Critical Mass in Madrid and the influence of the Squatting movement on their cycling practice and vice versa. Our aim was to highlight how the social movement practice goes further than a sectorial classification of the struggles. We intend to locate this process on the practice and interaction of the people who use and shape the social centres.

Critical Mass is a worldwide urban movement which was born in San Francisco (USA) and it has developed and spread out along the last two decades for the promotion of the bicycle in almost 200 cities of four continents. Its most frequent public expression is through regular and public meetings of cyclists circulating together in such a manner that the motorized flow is interrupted.

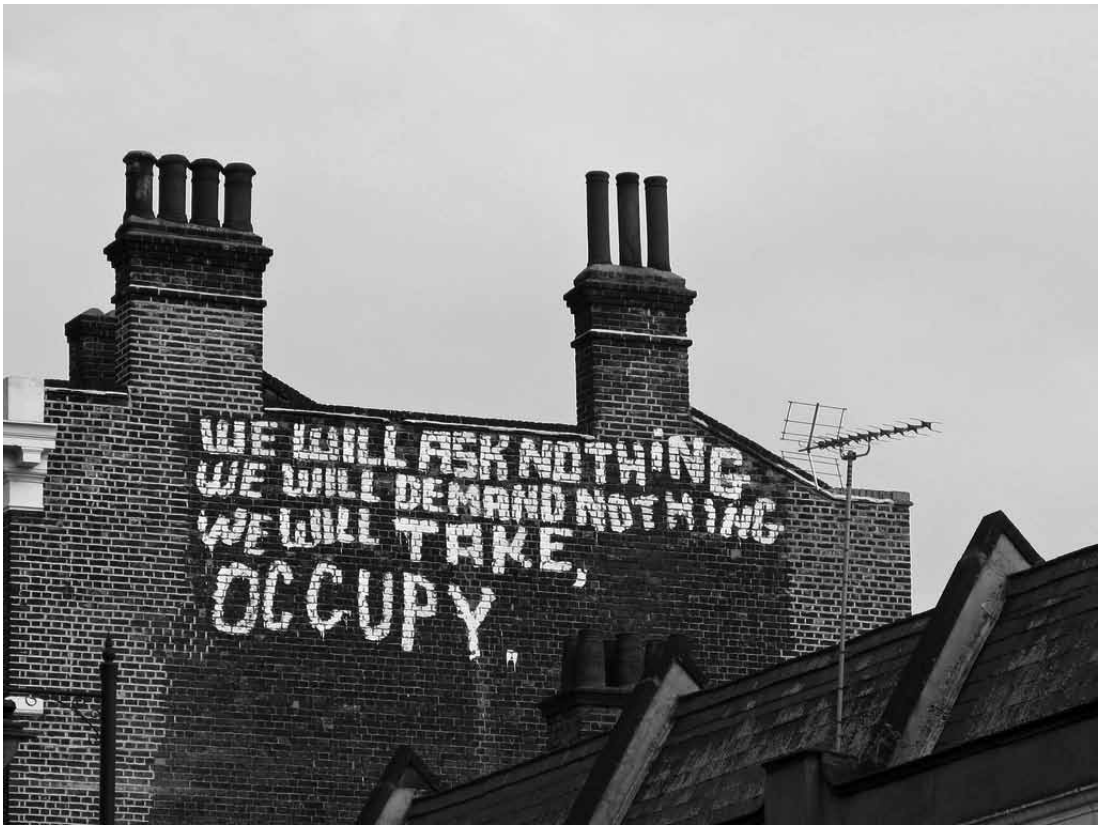
The critical Mass of Madrid has been for many years one of the most crowded of

Europe (average of 2.00 cyclists every summer monthly call during 2009- 2013). This crowded demonstration parade contrasts with the fact that Madrid is a city with one of the weakest urban equipments for biking and is a city where the percent of people that use daily the bike is one of the lowest of the European capital cities, although bicycle usage in Madrid has quadrupled in the last ten years.

The monthly encounter is articulated by an Internet network of fluent communication and also by a placed network of bike self managed "workshops" hosted in social centres. These are places of mutual aid, common learning about recycling and how to make bicycles work. In Madrid, as in many of European cities, the squatted social centres play a special role as collective resources for these meetings and further, the articulation of different initiatives, ordinary and extraordinary ones, surrounding the bike ones. As the quotidian expression we point to the bike workshops' activity (DIY "Do it yourself"). About extraordinary events, we observe their role linked to international Critical Mass events in different cities, hosting the visitors and initiatives.

Since I started my research process about social movement and mobility issues, I have been present in Europe in a large variety of international events which aim to occupy by cyclists the hosting city. The most crowded was "Ciemmona" in Rome, "Velorution Universelle" in Paris and "La Criticona" in Madrid. The growing of this movement in Madrid and the contact with other activists in international events boosted the local activist initiative for organizing an international bike event. In these occasions the squatted social centres were a crucial infrastructure in order to host the visiting cyclists, a place to share, a base operation from which to reach a party and protest on the square.

The squatted social centres shape the particularities of the Critical Mass events in Europe. When the "Critical Mass" activists call an international event at their capital cities, the "squatted social centres" become crucial in the basis of their practice and their interaction.


WE WILL ASK NOTHING
WE WILL DEMAND NOTHING
WE WILL TAKE,
OCCUPY.

Hidden Histories of Resistance - The Diverse Heritages of Squatting in England

by needle collective

This article reviews the background and contemporary context of squatting in England, beginning after the Second World War and comparing the movement as it was in 2014 to its counterparts on mainland Europe. It touches on many stories: migrants squatting to build a life safe from fascist attacks, activists who defined themselves as gay finding spaces in which to build their own scene, vibrant and insurgent squatted zones, single-issue campaigns occupying as a direct action tactic, and anticapitalist groups setting up social centres. We hope this text will help those in present-day struggles to locate themselves firmly in the diverse heritage of previous movements. It was previously published on the Crimethinc blog[1] and has been slightly amended.

Squatting as a Tool for Action as well as Housing

When squatting in residential buildings was criminalized in England and Wales in 2012, the debate raged primarily around the issue of homelessness. Right-wing politicians implausibly claimed there was no connection at all between squatters and the homeless, while supporters of squatting warned that putting people in prison for occupying derelict property was a retrograde step which would probably have tragic consequences. When a homeless man froze to death outside an empty bungalow after being told by the police not to enter it, the warnings were sadly proved correct.[2] Yet within this debate, which featured simplified and polarized views, the many positive aspects of squatting as a social movement were drowned out or ignored. Since the late 1960s, as in previous times, squatting has enabled diverse groups to house themselves. It has also supplied the opportunity structure for many different projects to come to life.

1 http://www.crimethinc.com/blog/2014/05/13/squatting-in-england-heritage-prospects/
2 http://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent_messenger/news/2013/february/28/frozen_man.aspx

▶The bungalow outside of which Daniel Gauntlett died.

This article describes only a few examples from this hidden history of resistance. There are many other stories that we do not have space to explore—the thriving rave scene that produces temporary autonomous zones on a weekly basis across the country, travellers finding freedom on the road, community-based activism such as free schools or Occupy and its precursors, squatted homeless shelters, and more. Still others remain unwritten and unrecorded. We hope to see more of these stories enter circulation.

Massive Occupations after World War II

When soldiers returned home after World War II, the English housing stock was in a complete shambles; no new houses had been built for six years and there were many bombed out wastelands. Just as the Government had promised "Homes for Heroes" in the 1920s, then failed to deliver them in sufficient numbers, the political rhetoric did not match the reality. In response, all over the UK people began to squat.

In Brighton, the Vigilantes cracked houses for families. Also known as the Secret Committee of Ex-Servicemen, they featured the redoubtable Harry Cowley, whose name lives on in the present day Cowley Club, an anarchist social centre.[3] The idea spread like wildfire to other cities. Without any central command, people were taking direct action to house themselves. Many army camps slated for demolition were repurposed into temporary housing; people lived in some of these well into the 1950s. These Nissen huts were hard to heat and not always in great condition, but over time they were adapted into homes to be proud of. At first, the government was critical of this independent enterprise (saying it could only lead to anarchy!)[4] but came to recognise that it was powerless in the face of such a large-scale movement, which by 1946 numbered 45,000 people in over a thousand locations.

►Harry Cowley.

Later, people organized the protest occupation of large buildings in central London such as the Ivanhoe Hotel.[5] After first condemning the squat actions

3 http://cowleyclub.org.uk/
4 http://www.britishpathe.com/video/home-front-squatters/
5 http://www.britishpathe.com/video/home-front-squatters/

and advising people to wait to be housed by the state, the Communist Party eventually became involved; the fact that a few party members were arrested for organizing the London actions sometimes misleads commentators into thinking that the Communist Party was itself behind the entire movement. While certain occupied camps benefited from the involvement of local communists, this should not be understood as a party political issue. There was widespread support for the squatters across the board, since they were taking action to house themselves in an extreme situation.

The right to housing is still far from being met today. The last thirty years have seen a sustained attack on social housing,[6] which the last coalition government continued, despite pre-election promises.[7]

Bangladeshi Immigrants House Themselves

In Tower Hamlets[8] in the 1970s, male Bangladeshi immigrants found it hard to get access to Council housing. They were caught in a catch-22 situation: single men were not given housing unless they had a family, but they could not bring their families to London unless they provided proof of accommodation. Yet there were derelict Council-owned properties everywhere, so squatting movements sprang up in the East End, through which hundreds of families were housed in areas such as Whitechapel and Bethnal Green. Terry Fitzpatrick, an anti-racist organiser,[9] set up the Tower Hamlets Squatters Union and worked alongside Race Today, a black radical group which published a monthly magazine and included the Black Panthers Darcus Howe and Linton Kwesi Johnson as members. In a 2006 interview, Fitzpatrick recalls that the Bengali Housing Action Group (BHAG) was formed in 1976 and Pelham House was squatted soon after.[10] There were 60 flats, with seven or eight remaining tenants. The owner, the Greater London Council (GLC), had marked it for demolition—but by the end

6 http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n01/james-meek/where-will-we-live

7 http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/how-the-conservatives-ruined-social-housing-8192726.html

8 Tower Hamlets is a London borough formed in 1965 from the amalgamation of Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar.

9 It is unfortunate to record that Fitzpatrick was convicted in 2011 of racially aggravated harassment against Lee Jasper. My mention of his work in the 1970s here does not condone in any way his actions some forty years later.

10 http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173&Itemid=205

of 1976 there were 300 Bangladeshis in occupation.

There were perhaps 1000 people altogether living in East End squats connected through BHAG. Fitzpatrick says “We never lost a single squat, between 1974 and 1979 or 1980, when it came to a sort of end.”[11] The end was a success rather than a defeat: the GLC caved in to the demands of the squatters and rehoused them locally, exactly where they asked to be placed. This was important not only because the squatters got what they wanted, but also since their activism was a response to the racist activities of the National Front, which regularly attacked immigrant families rehoused to areas further out in the borough, such as Poplar.

Sadly, even clustering together was not always enough. On May 4, 1978, Altab Ali was stabbed and murdered by three skinhead youths as he walked home past St. Mary’s Park in Whitechapel. The park was renamed in his memory. Fitzpatrick concludes that “It was 1974-80 that shaped the community the way

▶ Demonstration in memory of Altab Ali.

11 http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173&Itemid=205

it is today, without a shadow of a doubt. Had that [the squatting movement] not happened, I don't know what would have happened. Something would, but it might just have come later."[12] The area around Brick Lane, for example, would look and feel very different today. According to historian Sarah Glynn, "The housing struggle not only improved living conditions and left the Bengali community unique among ethnic minority groups in the proportion living in council housing; it also helped to involve a great many people in local activism and politics."[13] She also observes that the Jewish Communist Party had led a campaign in the late 1930s for a previous wave of immigrants in the same area where Bengali immigrants struggled for decent housing in the 1970s.

Glynn points out what could be taken as a central contradiction, namely that it was the white Fitzpatrick and the black activists of Race Today who were squatting on behalf of Bangladeshi families. Fitzpatrick was squatting alongside the families and learned to speak fluent Sylheti, but this remains a contentious issue. Whilst some participants in BHAG were critical of the reasons for Race Today to be involved, seeing the group as pushing its own agenda, others welcomed their help; over time, more Bengalis became directly involved in the actions.

Glynn politely calls this a "possible trap for those arguing for the self-organisation of others"[14] and touches upon a fundamental problem, namely how activists of whatever sort can avoid the pitfalls of parachuting into a situation and instead constructively engage with the people already enmeshed in it, the people who are expressly asking for assistance. When housing activists want to help diverse groups to house themselves, a great deal hinges on how the help is expressed. Similar issues had cropped up a few years earlier, when Ron Bailey, Tony Mahoney, and the other activists of the London Squatters Campaign kickstarted the modern squatters' movement through a careful reading of relevant laws and a series of tactical squatting actions that resulted in positive media coverage and councils being persuaded to house squatters.

As his 2005 obituary records, Mahoney himself was involved with BHAG in the struggle for decent housing in the East End, squatting in the Fieldgate area

12 http://www.swadhinata.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=173&Itemid=205

13 http://www.sarahglynn.net/The%20Battle%20for%20Housing.html

14 http://www.sarahglynn.net/The%20Battle%20for%20Housing.html

and running the Campaign to Clear Hostels and Slums from an office near Brick Lane.[15]

Creating Space for Difference

Mahoney was also one of the founders of the East London Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The first GLF group in London was formed in 1970; South London GLF members were part of the Brixton Gay Community, which consisted of a series of squats on Railton Road at numbers 153, 155, 159 and on the parallel-running Mayall Road at numbers 146, 148, 150, 152. The houses backed onto each other and the squatters created one huge communal garden. The place was "home for between fifty and sixty men for anything from a week to almost ten years"[16] and in fact, a version of the community still lives on today in the Brixton Housing Co-operative, formed between 1982 and 1984. The extended garden is still there, thanks to squatting.

There was also the South London Gay Centre at 78 Railton Road, which existed from 1974 until 1976. Two women's centres were squatted on the same road, along with the People's News Service, an anarchist bookshop, which had the Gay (telephone) Switchboard in an office above it.

Olive Morris had squatted with her partner Liz Obi at 121 Railton Road, in what is regarded as one of the first occupations of privately-owned property in Lambeth, as opposed to the occupation of council-owned buildings. They resisted several eviction attempts and eventually moved to another squat at 64 Railton Road. The 121 squat became Sabaar Bookshop, a black infoshop and advice centre which hosted meetings by the Brixton Black Panthers; Morris and Obi were both members, along with Race Today. In 1981, it appears that Sabaar got funding and moved to Coldharbour Lane. The building became an anarchist social centre known as the 121, which existed until 1999.

By the late 1990s, the 121 was running out of steam as Brixton began to gentrify around it.[17] Or so it seemed to us when we visited for meetings, although it did host the first Queeruption in 1998, and the monthly Dead by Dawn speedcore parties were great. In the 1980s, it had been extremely active

15 http://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/nov/19/guardianobituaries.gayrights
16 http://tcbh.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/11/12/tcbh.hwr053.abstract
17 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mA96DQLO78

as a café, bookshop, library, venue, and rehearsal space. It was used as a base by groups such as Brixton Squatters Aid, Brixton Hunt Saboteurs, Food not Bombs, Community Resistance Against the Poll Tax, Anarchist Black Cross, the Direct Action Movement, London Socialist Film Co-op, the Kate Sharpley Library, and the Troops Out Movement. There was a printing press in the basement which produced the feminist magazine *Bad Attitude*, the anarchist magazine *Black Flag*, and the squatters' newspaper *Crowbar*, among other publications.

▶ [Queeruption]in 1998 at the 121 Centre.

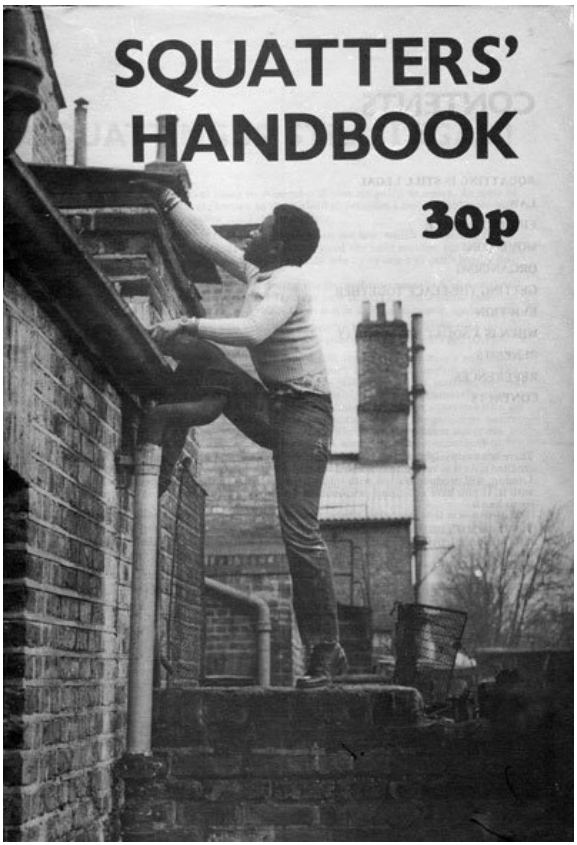
Olive Morris died tragically young, at the age of 27. The Remembering Olive Collective, which organized events and set up a blog[18] to commemorate the thirty year anniversary of her death, emphasized that in the already neglected history of the Brixton squatting scene, there are several references to the 121 Railton Road but very little mention is given to the use of the building first by black activists.

However, as the blog also notes, the Advisory Service for Squatters did pay their respects to Olive Morris by putting a photograph on the front cover of the 1979

18 http://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com/2007/09/28/121-railton-road/

version of the *Squatters Handbook* of her scaling the roof of 121 Railton Road after one of the eviction attempts. The same blogpost states that:

Despite living side by side and having cordial relations, Black and White squatters did not organise themselves together. Liz Obi remembers that when they squatted 121 Railton Road, some white squatters came to help them turn on the gas and the electricity. During evictions some women from the "White Women Centre" also came to show support, but that was as far as the relationship went. Black activists at the time were focused on the many specific issues affecting the Black community (police violence, discrimination in education and workplace, etc). The absence of joint activity might explain why in most accounts of the Brixton squatting movement written in later years, there are no references to the early Black squats of the 1970s.[19]



▶ Olive on the cover of the [Squatters Handbook]

19 http://rememberolivemorris.wordpress.com/2007/09/28/121-railton-road/

In the 1970s, some struggles for minority rights did develop along separatist lines, but it seems the tool of squatting was one way for different groups to show solidarity with each other. Veteran anarchist Albert Meltzer remarks in his autobiography *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels* that there was occasional antagonism between Rastafarians and the anarchists on the topics of religion and feminism, but presumably such problems melted away when they faced attacks from a common enemy such as the police or bailiffs.

The Brixton Riots

The Brixton riots broke out in April 1981, when people reacted against the refusal of police to allow medical treatment for a stabbed black youth. It is worth examining the uprising in some detail since it occurred in an area with a lot of squats, centred around Poet's Corner (comprised of Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser and Chaucer Roads), Railton Road, and Dexter Parade (now demolished). Known as the Frontline, the area was a sort of autonomous zone, featuring illegal drinking dens, reggae systems, and people hanging out on the streets.

It is hard to discover how the Frontline got its name. Was that the name of an off-licence or of a club, or the name residents used to describe the feeling of being there? Courtney Laws of the Brixton Neighbourhood Community Association described the Frontline as a place "where people from the Caribbean normally gather, meet, and talk, and very often start up socialising groups and functions. It is very peaceful and quiet." Chief Superintendent Plowman called it "the front line of confrontation between Black and White." The gulf between these definitions is huge.

In April, tempers were already running high in the midst of Operation Swamp. The Metropolitan Police had sent white undercover officers into central Brixton, a mainly Afro-Caribbean area, to stop and search over 1000 people in just five days. They had done this without any warning to the local community or indeed even to the local bobbies.

The Met were widely despised and feared. Some cops were National Front members. Blair Peach had been murdered by a cop at an anti-fascist demo in 1979, hit over the head with an iron bar. Despite fourteen witnesses who saw it happen, no cop was ever charged. Documents only recently released

in the inquiry into the police murder of Ian Tomlinson at the 2009 G20 protests indicated one officer was responsible, but his name was redacted.[20] The fascist arson attack which claimed 13 young lives in nearby Deptford in January 1981 had not been investigated by the police; many people, black and white alike, were outraged.[21] In March, 20,000 people had marched to Hyde Park in central London to demand justice.

Just as everyone agrees the 2011 London riots began in Tottenham with the police shooting Mark Duggan but then different narratives abound as to how the subsequent events unfolded, stories about what happened in 1981 vary widely. Some people thought the police had killed the stabbed youth; others were already at breaking point on account of continual police harassment. Early issues of *Crowbar* record that already, in 1978, the police had sealed off the Frontline for a day, and that in the months leading up to April 1981, various houses on Railton Road, Effra Parade, and Dexter Parade had been evicted and smashed up by bailiffs so as to render them uninhabitable before demolition. This was presumably part of a plan to drive out the dealers and the music, although they always popped back up again.

The riot kicked off on Friday, April 10. For the next few days, the area around Atlantic Road, Railton Road, and Poet's Corner was the scene of burning police cars and trashed buildings. Some shops were targeted for looting, others left untouched. The statistics indicate genuine disorder: two burned-out pubs, 140 seriously damaged buildings, 300 injured cops, 60 destroyed police vehicles, 80 arrests. In what seems to be another mainstream media scare story, it was widely reported to be the first time Molotov cocktails were used on English soil. In fact, there is evidence of Molotovs being used earlier, for example in the 1958 Notting Hill riots, when West Indian immigrants fought back against racism.[22]

Incredibly, the police were caught out with inadequate equipment. News footage clearly shows cops with no riot gear, only truncheons and shields that were not flame retardant. They also had no coherent containment strategy. Commanding officers can be seen on camera refusing to listen to the suggestion of community mediators that they should withdraw to defuse tensions; in an astounding error

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20 http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/apr/27/blair-peach-killed-police-met-report

21 http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/18/newsid_2530000/2530333.stm

22 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvhkOokRm-I

of judgement, Operation Swamp was allowed to continue. Officers dealing with the riot situation on Saturday waved a fire engine up Railton Road straight towards a rampaging mob without even a warning; unsurprisingly, it was attacked, leading to severe injuries for some of the crew.[23] In contrast, a black couple married on that very day were allowed to drive through the area without a scratch.[24] But this was not a race riot, as is sometimes claimed. Locals of all skin colors and races were rising up against the police. As one participant says, people were tired of being intimidated by police driving past them slowly and threatening them with arrest simply for standing on the street.[25] An eyewitness report of the mayhem described it as a "proletarian fairground."[26]

Unsurprisingly, right-wing commentators attempted to blame everything on the anarchists. Meltzer recounts that a pacifist called Jim was arrested, possibly because he shared the same name as a Rastafarian friendly with the 121 nicknamed "Jim the Anarchist."[27] Things may not have worked out very well for pacifist Jim had he not possessed a cast-iron alibi: on the night he was supposed to have been instigating violence in Brixton, he was playing the violin in a church concert some distance away.

The 121 Centre was not attacked during the riots. A nearby pub with a racist landlord was burnt to the ground, but the 121's colorful shopfront was left untouched. Ian Townson, a squatter in the Brixton Gay Community at the time, comments:

The riots were centred around Railton Road and when Brixton was burning we showed our solidarity with the oppressed by joining them on the streets. We even took tables and chairs out onto the street in front of the gay squats for a celebration party—some people in drag—getting a mixed reception from people on the street. Some hostile, others indifferent, some amused. Two of us were sent to prison for a couple of years for supplying petrol to the rioters.[28]

The scenes of disorder shocked the nation. A public investigation was launched,

23 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa9r25f1yWY
24 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa9r25f1yWY
25 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCjZEZt3QKc
26 http://www.urban75.org/brixton/history/riot.html
27 http://www.spunk.org/texts/writers/meltzer/sp001591/angels21.html
28 http://www.urban75.net/forums/threads/the-brixton-fairies-1970s-gay-squat.6280/page-2

the Scarman Report; it declared that the stop and search powers (the hated "sus" law) were indeed being used disproportionately and indiscriminately against black people.[29] It made recommendations intended to produce a new code of behavior, but in 1999 a report on the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence concluded that not all the recommendations had been adopted and that the Met was still institutionally racist.

Here we see disparate yet interconnected groups such as anarchists, gays, and West Indian immigrants squatting to create a space where they felt comfortable, and rising together against the police when they tried to regulate the autonomous zone of the Frontline. There were other riots to come in the 1980s, and the Frontline was not the only free space in the UK; but it was the only one to receive such brutal repression.

Free States versus Gentrification

The mid-1970s are said to be the time when the modern UK came closest to revolution. Following those turbulent times, small pockets of autonomy dotted across the country in the early 1980s. They might have grown into English Christianias or Ruigoords had they not been neutered through a mix of repression and assimilation. The generally accepted figure estimated there were 30,000 squatters in London and 50,000 squatters in England altogether. The majority lived in residential houses, alongside renters and home-owners, but others lived together in larger projects.

►Argyle Street

29 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNvxHStJlQ8

The Alternative Republic of Argyle Street in Norwich housed more than 200 people from 1979 until 1985, when it was evicted and demolished.[30] In Brighton, squatters took on and renovated properties under license in the derelict streets near the seafront. On one road in Bristol, there was a venue (the Demolition Ballroom), a café (the Demolition Diner), and the Full Marx bookshop. Around the same time, Manchester Council was slowly losing control of the huge concrete crescent blocks of Hulme. Punks, musicians, travelers, drop-outs, and artists moved in and provided the underground base for what would become the Madchester scene. Situated close to the legendary Hacienda (home of New Order and Factory Records), the squatters had their own club, the Kitchen, which was formed by smashing together three adjacent flats.[31] The entire complex was evicted and demolished in the mid-1990s.

Frestonia, a squatted area in West London, had declared its independence from the UK and was entering its fifth year.[32] The Clash recorded in a rehearsal space at the People's Hall; the Mutoid Waste Company put on shows in the gallery, and stamps were produced featuring a gorilla's head instead of the Queen. David Rappaport, later to find fame acting in films such as Time Bandits, was named Foreign Minister; the Minister of Education was a two-year-old girl, and Heathcote Williams was ambassador to the UK.

At Tolmers Village in Camden, just north of central London, squatters joined local residents in fighting to save a Georgian square. Eventually, it was demolished, but thanks to the campaign some social housing was built in its stead instead of just offices as first planned. Alex and Ciara Smith lived at Tolmers for a year without money, and then found two pound notes in the street, which they used to set up Alara Wholefoods. It began in a squatted dairy and is now a successful organic food company, almost forty years later.[33] In similar fashion, a law firm grew out of the legal aid centre. Meanwhile, in Huntley Street, more than a hundred squatters cracked flats and won tenancies from the Greater London Council.

All these free zones contained social spaces such as bakeries, cafés, and bars.

30 http://argylestreetsquat.blogspot.co.uk/
31 http://www.exhulme.co.uk/page3.php
32 http://tonysleep.co.uk/frestonia
33 http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/feb/22/alara-cereals-wholegrain-alex-smith-squat

They produced their own newsletters and organized street festivals. Back down in south London, the derelict Bonnington Square was resettled and revived by squatters, some of whom still live there.[34] Nearby St. Agnes Place was another thriving squatted street, which was finally evicted and demolished in 2005. In Brixton, there were squatted blocks of flats, squatted crèches, and whole food cooperatives.

Endgame for Alternative Culture?

Brixton today is a multicultural place which benefits from this rich history in many ways. One formerly squatted whole food cooperative is still going strong on Atlantic Road.[35] Yet the area is now undergoing a severe gentrification process. While some squats remain, it is hard to imagine what it must have been like on the Frontline in the early 1980s.

A few decades ago, Lambeth Council forgot that it owned certain properties; squatters ended up gaining ownership of them through adverse possession, living there for 12 years continuously without the permission of the owner. In 2002, a change in law made this much more difficult. Today, squatters are required to inform owners that they are making a claim for possession; now only incredibly incompetent owners will lose their unused properties. While the stories of squatters gaining houses are heart-warming compared to the heart-rending cases described below, this only occurred in a few cases.[36] The 121, for example, failed to do this.

Squats always come and go. But many long-term squats have been evicted recently, such as Rushcroft Road and Clifton Mansions. Clifton could boast members of the Pogues and the Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller as former occupants. The 22 three-bedroom flats have been renovated and are now for rent at the eye-watering figure of £2,100 per month.[37] To give an idea of how insane this is, the maximum housing benefit (Local Housing Allowance) a person would be able to get in Lambeth nowadays is £340 per week for a three

34 http://vimeo.com/36595608
35 http://www.brixtonblog.com/brixton-people-a-journey-through-thyme-with-tony-benest-of-brixton-wholefoods-2/16185
36 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-53579/Squatter-owner-100-000-flat.html
37 http://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2013/06/formerly-squatted-properties-at-clifton-mansions-brixton-on-the-market-for-2100-per-month/

bedroom property, or £1020 per month.[38] Only yuppies will be able to afford to live in Clifton Mansions now.

In another unpleasant manoeuvre, Lambeth Council is currently repossessing properties that it has long ignored. To take one example, Maritza Tschepp has lived for over 30 years in a house in Stockwell, adjacent to Brixton, which was so run-down when she squatted it that it was marked for demolition; she had to dig in a connection to the main water supply herself.[39] She has raised three children in the house and formed a housing cooperative through which she rented it from the council. The settlement appeared to have become permanent; but owing to the surge in property values, in 2009 Lambeth decided to sell off all its so-called shortlife properties. Tschepp has already lost possession in court and now is awaiting an eviction order. The argument that the house actually belongs to the Council does not hold much weight considering the length of time Tschepp has lived there and the money and energy she has expended upon it. This social housing is being sold off at a massive profit to private companies which will then build homes for the wealthy. Yet the Council appears deaf to her appeals.

In another case, Jimmy Rogers, now 74 and the inspirational force behind the Brixton TopCats, one of the UK's foremost basketball teams, was threatened with eviction.[40] The local Member of Parliament supported him in his struggle to avert displacement[41] from his home of 32 years by Lambeth council, which had previously given him a Civic Award. Other places under threat include Carlton Mansions and Rectory Road in nearby Clapham. A "super cooperative"[42] has been formed to represent a united front of opposition, but the Council is unlikely to back down with so much money at stake.

In other European cities such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen, squatters have ended up owning their houses, yet this happens rarely nowadays in London. The ex-squatters and activists of Berlin, many of whom live cooperatively in

38 http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/AdviceBenefits/Benefits/CurrentBenefitsAvailableToYou/HousingBenefit/LocalHousingAllowance.htm

39 http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/01/woman-lambeth-council-home-faces-eviction

40 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brixton_TopCats

41 http://www.brixtonblog.com/council-says-it-will-delay-evicting-brixton-basketball-coach-jimmy-rogers/13735

42 http://www.lambethunitedhousingco-op.org.uk

"hausprojekten" (large tenement blocks, often legalised squats), should be looking on with interest. A majority of those projects are on rolling 10-, 20-, or 30-year contracts and group themselves together under the Wir Bleiben Alle (We All Stay) campaign.[43] While squatting in Berlin is difficult, ever since the 1980s squatters have made a point of responding to evictions with as much property damage as possible. The custom that every eviction should be met with 1 million Deutschmarks worth of damage (now updated to 1 million euro), used to strike some British squatters as more tantrum than tactic, but it appears to work very well. There have been few evictions in recent years; the legalised squats that have been evicted, such as Yorckstrasse and Liebigstrasse, have been fiercely defended, and in the former case, this resulted in a new squatted project which then was able to legalize, New Yorck im Bethanien.[44] The threat of disorder and economic damage certainly seems have an impact, especially in the case of large well-loved projects such as Koepi and further afield, the Rote Flora in Hamburg.[45]

▶ Demonstration in December 2013 supporting the [Rote Flora] in Hamburg.

43 http://wirbleibenalle.org/
44 http://newyorck.net/
45 http://beyondeurope.net/144/heavy-clashes-in-hamburg/

If only such militancy and solidarity could help the people under threat in Lambeth. The problem is that the former squatters are forty years older than they were and in many cases have become disconnected from the current movement, despite the formation of the super cooperative. The endangered squats are all small and individualized. Recent evictions have been resisted, but not ambitiously or successfully; after forty years of residence and long, draining legal battles, it is understandable that people would give up, but this also indicates the low ebb of the current movement.

When squatting itself was threatened, social centres and squatted protests blossomed all over the country, but now things have quieted down. SQUASH (Squatters Action for Secure Housing)[46] continues to fight proposals to extend the criminalization of squatting to all buildings, but most local groups have disappeared off the map. This does not necessarily mean they have ceased to be active, it is more likely that they have gone underground again. A diffuse and scattered scene may be harder to repress, but we cannot help wondering what would have happened if all the thousands of people squatting had allied together to oppose criminalization.

The war over the public image of squatting has already been lost. As Ian Townson puts it, "Things were not always like this. In the not too distant past, Labour politicians and councillors stood up for social justice and were on the side of ordinary working people, the poor and dispossessed."[47] Unfortunately, it seems that those who bought their squats or formed housing cooperatives that had luck in engaging with the system are still around, while more precarious squats are now endangered or else already evicted. Will it even be possible to squat in the future?

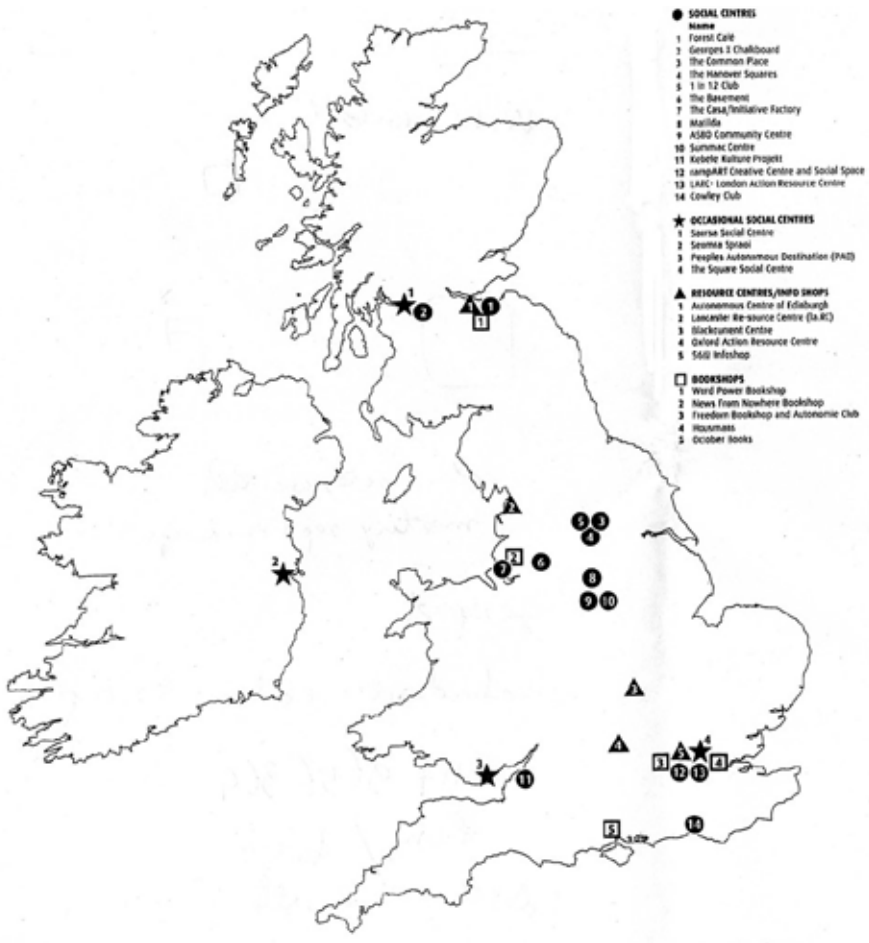
Social Centres as Agents of Social Change

The precarity of squatting set against the perceived necessity of having long-term spaces from which to organize has recently inspired the establishment of cooperatively owned or rented social centres. These are often based on the constitution of working men's clubs and continue the self-organized spirit of

46 http://www.squashcampaign.org/

47 http://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2013/11/look-back-in-anger-lambeths-betrayal-of-social-commitment-in-housing/

rented or squatted predecessors such as the autonomy centres of the 1980s.[48] One trailblazer was the 1 in 12 Centre in Bradford, which bought its building in 1988. Other spaces include Kebele (Bristol, originally squatted then bought with a loan from the Triodos Bank), London Action Resource Centre, Cowley Club (Brighton), Sumac (Nottingham), Freedom (London), 56a (London, the one remaining squat from a squatted estate in Elephant & Castle, now legalised), Autonomous Centre (Edinburgh, Scotland) and the Star and Shadow (Newcastle). These centres are loosely linked through the UK Social Centres Network,[49] which also includes squatted projects such as the Red and Black Umbrella (Cardiff, Wales) and 195 Mare Street (Hackney, London).



►The UK Social Centre Network (in 2006)

48 http://www.uncarved.org/music/apunk/autcent.html
49 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UK_Social_Centre_Network

There have also been countless squatted social centres, and the legalized projects often provide infrastructure and support for these more fleeting interventions, which tend to last months rather than years. Honourable exceptions include Rampart, Ratstar, the 491 Gallery, the Spike, and the previously mentioned 121. Squatting offered a chance for alternative cultures to thrive without the pressure to pay rent.

The anti-globalization movement has utilized squats as convergence spaces, but these antagonistic spaces have often been raided and illegally evicted, as during protests against [an arms fair in 2001][50], [the G20 in 2009][51], and [the G8 in 2013.][52]

In another take on the precarity of public, political squats, some groups have decided to reinterpret the short time frame as a positive feature. The Anarchist Teapot (Brighton), Temporary Autonomous Arts (Brighton, Bristol, Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Sheffield), A-Spire (Leeds), and OK Cafe (Manchester) all opened up for periods of a few weeks at a time. The idea of the short term pop-up social centre has been used in London recently for various specific actions including Palestine solidarity, anti-cuts organizing, radical housing activism, and an exhibition about the history of squatting. The latter, Made Possible by Squatting,[53] is hopefully just the beginning of new efforts from within the squatters' movement to narrate its own multiple histories.

Direct Action and Resistant Spaces

Squatting has also been used as a means to protest about single issues, such as the establishment of unwanted supermarkets. As huge supermarket chains such as Lidl, Aldi, Sainsburys, Tescos, ASDA (owned by Walmart), Morrisons, and the Co-operative seek to remake all high streets in their own image, many prospective sites have been occupied in often unsuccessful attempts to prevent their conversion. Failure to prevent the eventual establishment of a supermarket does not necessarily mean the campaign against it was futile; even occupations that did not achieve their object have slowed the pace of progress, gathering support and making it more difficult to impose future projects from above.

50 http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2001/09/101539.html
51 http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/04/426159.html
52 http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2013/06/510373.html
53 http://www.madepossiblebysquatting.co.uk/

The Dis'ASDA crew managed to block an ASDA development for over a year in South London, repeatedly reoccupying[54] the buildings and the land on the site. In Cambridge, the Mill Road social centre lasted three months as an anti-Tesco protest; it was evicted the day after Tesco had their planning application refused. The Tesco Metro eventually opened, but as the No Mill Road Tesco campaign[55] records, "Tesco lost three planning applications, an alcohol license application, and a public enquiry, leaving it with one of its smallest stores in the UK that it will have extreme difficulty in delivering to."

In Brighton, there have been frequent interventions against supermarkets. Near the city, the treehouses of the Titnore Woods land squat successfully prevented ancient trees being chopped down. The Harvest Forestry and Sabotaj squats, in 2002 and 2011 respectively, served as short-lived catalysts for long-term anti-Sainsburys campaigns. The Lewes Road Community Garden lasted for a year; when it became known it was being evicted to make way for a Tesco, resistance increased. Although a building was eventually constructed on the site, the shop space under residential flats remained empty and indeed was squatted again in 2013. Unfortunately, this has now become a supermarket (but not at least a Tesco).

▶The Sabotaj squat in Brighton.

54 http://archive.corporatewatch.org/newsletter/issue13/issue13_part4.htm
55 http://www.nomillroadtesco.org/

Rioting occurred two weeks in a row in Stokes Croft, Bristol, when an area that was undergoing gentrification exploded after police raided a squat opposite an about-to-be-opened Tesco store, to look for Molotov cocktails. None were found, but the supermarket site was completely trashed in response.[56]

To our knowledge, there have not yet been large-scale public squats for and by undocumented migrants in the UK along the lines of the occupations in many West European cities, although in London there have been large low-profile squats and also the Occupy spin-offs such as the Hobo Hilton.[57] In Europe, protest squats include the We Are Here project in Amsterdam, the Refugee Strike in Berlin, and the Refugee Protest Camp in Vienna. In Calais[58] and Brussels,[59] there have been large squats for hundreds of migrants. Further south, there are projects like Mount Zion[60] in Barcelona and Metropoliz and Porto Fluviale in Rome.

▶The We Are Here occupation in Amsterdam; photo by [hansfoto.] (http://hansfoto.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/vlgtgar.jpg)

56 http://325.nostate.net/?p=2210
57 http://www.demotix.com/news/1484395/hobo-hilton-opens-its-doors-central-london
58 http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/06/481369.html
59 http://www.demotix.com/news/3136557/200-people-suffer-after-eviction-squatted-convent-brussels#media-3136049
60 http://www.furnessphotography.com/4/post/2013/07/on-the-road-mount-zion.html

As Fortress Europe continues to tighten its security, more people will fall into the cracks and we will likely see "sans papiers" (without papers) squats in the UK. We hope that the scattered and fragmented UK squatting movement will be able to help out. There is already much No Borders work being done, and the recent case of Irina Putilova was inspiring.[61] A Russian LGBTQI activist and squatter seeking asylum in the UK was unexpectedly put into fast track detention at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, then released as a result of public and legal protests. This was inspiring both because Irina was not deported and because efforts were consequently made to help the other people threatened with deportation who do not have a similar support network around them.

Radical Histories to Inspire New Movement

There is much more to say about squatting as a social movement. We have focused primarily on the boroughs of Lambeth and Tower Hamlets in London, but there are other boroughs with equally strong squatting heritages, such as Hackney and Southwark. But what will happen next? No one knows how many people are squatting, the figure is surely still in the thousands. Squatting in residential buildings is now criminalized, but it seems unlikely that the new law will be enforced much, since two court cases[62] have already shown it to be hard to implement. Squatting is defined as living or intending to live in a property without the permission of the owner, but in practice it appears to be difficult for the police to prove that someone is living somewhere without surveillance, forensic analysis, and witness reports. This sort of intelligence gathering would require the police to expend already overstretched resources. An occupation in Southwark protesting the sale of Council housing defied the logic of the law, occupying a building without anyone actually living in it.[63] However, when recently a similar action was attempted in Camden, two people were arrested.[64] Still another matter, yet to be explored legally, is how exactly a residential building is defined.

The criminalization of squatting was ineffective in Spain. In the Netherlands, following a period of uncertainty, squatting now occurs regularly again. It only

61 http://irinamuststay.wordpress.com/

62 http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2013/11/513676.html

63 http://housingactionsouthwarkandlambeth.wordpress.com/2013/10/28/occupation-against-southwark-sell-off-still-going-at-park-street/

64 https://en.squat.net/2014/02/25/camden-london-council-houses-occupied-in-stop-the-sell-offs-protest/

really paused in Amsterdam while the new law was challenged in the courts, as is taking place in the UK now; squatting continued in other cities, and squatting actions have now resumed in Amsterdam again. The heyday of the squatters movement in the early 1980s now seems quite distant, when in Amsterdam there were over twenty local "kraakspreekuren"—squatters' advice hours providing assistance on the practicalities of squatting and information on available buildings. Yet three kraakspreekuren are still going strong in Amsterdam: Centre/West, Student, and East.

In Amsterdam, as in London, it is still possible to squat. The scene has dwindled, but it may begin to grow again. There has been considerable activity around the Valreep social centre,[65] which was squatted after criminalization, and also support for refugees with the We Are Here project noted above, which recently squatted offices adjacent to a parking garage. Support for migrants remains a key issue.

In the 1990s, the mayor of Amsterdam declared "No culture without subculture," encouraging a view of squats as breeding places for cultural activities (broedplaatsen). This led to a number of squats becoming legalised; some were glad to see squats glean mainstream appreciation for hosting theatres, hacklabs, rehearsal spaces, venues, and cinemas. Yet this policy was divisive: the value of squatter culture was appraised by those in power according to their own interests, rather than by the creators themselves, and some projects were favored over others. Even projects that appeared to fit the broedplaats template, such as the Kalenderpanden, were sometimes evicted. Legalization poses further questions around institutionalization and co-optation.

In the UK, these questions are rarely raised, since the average life of a squat is three months, the time it takes for an owner to go to court to regain possession. Yet since there are still many groups which can benefit from squatting, it continues. As the housing crisis deepens, we anticipate that more people will turn to squatting. Shelter, a homelessness charity, has warned that "Britain is now at the centre of a perfect storm of housing problems. High and rising rents, the cripplingly high costs of getting on the housing ladder, and the lowest peacetime building figures since the 1920s have all combined with a prolonged economic downturn to increase the pressure on families."[66] Another

65 http://valreep.org/

commentator ends a long analysis by suggesting that we will soon be witnessing the return of slums in the UK.[67] If the Conservatives carry out their threat to remove housing benefit for the under-25 age group, squatting will become an attractive proposition for the youth of tomorrow in the absence of other housing options. Victims of the bedroom tax may soon squat their own houses. We can only hope that once people have secured housing for themselves they will organize in structures that are antagonistic to the state, which created the housing crisis in the first place.

The lesson of history is that in times of housing deprivation, people squat the empties. The fact that this has been made illegal does not blind people to the empty buildings or to the use of squatting as a tactic. The kraakspreekuur in Amsterdam East promotes the slogan 'what is not allowed is still possible' (Wat niet mag kan nog steeds). The criminalization of squatting in England can be seen as a pre-emptive attack on direct action for housing justice. But if enough people disregard the new law, or indeed occupy the many non-residential buildings that stand empty and unused, this could produce a new population that understands itself as being in open conflict with the state. Who can predict the diverse autonomous movements to come?

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63 http://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/610449/Eviction_Risk_Monitor_2012.pdf

67 http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n01/james-meek/where-will-we-live

Squatting in Denmark

by Frisk Flugt

Squatting in Denmark has been a strategic form of action for the radical left since the 1960s (with Copenhagen as the most important centre of activity) and has taken many different forms – from the vast utopian experiment of Freetown Christiania where a large autonomous community has sustained itself in the centre of Copenhagen since 1971 experimenting with alternative housing, horizontal decision-making, alternative culture and so on, to the infamous autonomous social centre Ungdomshuset (the Youth House) that has served as a constant political and cultural disruptive factor since 1982.

The fact that there have been several successful squatted projects in Denmark over the years doesn't mean that squatting is legal though, nor that it is generally accepted as a legitimate form of political action for that matter. The parliamentary attitude towards squatting in Denmark has always been one of repressive tolerance under the influence of the social democratic tradition that was dominant in Denmark for most of the 20th century. Thus, there are an abundance of examples where politicians, in the name of tolerance, have met certain squatters' claims while ignoring most of the others', and in the same manner they have legalised a few squatted projects like Christiania and the Ungdomshuset with one hand, just to be clamping down manically on all the rest with the other.

Squatters did have some political impact historically though. For example, they played a central role in preventing a massive highway from being built through the centre of Copenhagen and also managed to have it made legal to squat temporarily in buildings due for demolition in crisis-ridden Danish cities in the 1970s. This law was subsequently put effectively to use by resident activists who managed to turn entire neighbourhoods into local experiments in urban self-management.

However the 1970s movement was almost entirely wiped out in 1980, when the local state won a crushing victory in the battle of the adventure playground

‘Byggeren’ in the Nørrebro neighbourhood in Copenhagen. The level of state violence used to evict what had functioned as a popular free space for children for almost a decade came as a shock to many and made most of the older squatters withdraw entirely from activism. However, a new more radical movement did grow out of the struggle around Byggeren, a movement of disenfranchised children and youth using squatting as a means to build free zones for collective living and self-management at a distance from patriarchy, mindless consumerism and what the young squatters saw as ‘adult fascism’.

This new movement successfully squatted a vast number of buildings in the centre of Copenhagen (and a few other large cities in Denmark), and in the squatted houses a new autonomous and self-managed culture flourished, experimenting with horizontal forms of decision-making, communal forms of living, DiY-culture etc. This was also the time when Ungdomshuset, The Youth House, was founded.

However at the end of the 1980s most of this autonomous infrastructure was totally wiped out in a series of violent police actions sparing only the Youth House and one squatted commune that was in the process of being legalised. In 1986, there had been an extreme escalation in the clashes between squatters and police during the Battle of Ryesgade where a whole street in the city centre was barricaded and defended militantly for nine days. After this fight, which the squatters eventually lost, the state was bent on getting rid of all the squatters projects in Copenhagen, including the Ungdomshuset in Jagtvej 69. It took another ten years though before this goal could actually be realized.

In 1999, the municipality in Copenhagen decided to sell off the Ungdomshuset to the highest bidder, which later turned out to be a fanatic religious sect that (with an irony that is almost too much to bear) was called the Father’s House. This obviously caused a major outcry among large parts of the population. There was very much a feeling that the Ungdomshuset was the last stand against the rising tide of neo-conservatism. ‘Normalisation’ was a concept that was often flung around in the early 2000s since an alliance between neo-conservative and nationalist forces had recently come into power and declared war, not only on terrorism abroad in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also on its own population – on political activists, migrants, the homeless and everybody else who didn’t conform to their reactionary standards. Especially young people living in the larger cities turned massively against this project of normalisation, which locally

►Ungdomshuset at Jagdtvei 69, Copenhagen

in Copenhagen was most clearly represented by the heavy police repression of Christiania and the sale and subsequent violent eviction of the Ungdomshuset in 2007. “The Youth House stays,” we cried, “Evict City Hall instead”. A movement was born and it grew bigger every day with weekly protests, actions and sabotage, a movement that also reintroduced squatting as a political strategy on a bigger scale as the particular conflict around the Ungdomshuset (Youth House) sucked in all kinds of more general social struggles and spread all over the city. “When we say the Youth House, we mean the whole damn city”, we thus declared and demanded “Not just one, but insanely many Youth Houses” and “Freespaces everywhere”.

The municipality realised that the conflict was spinning out of control, but all attempts to reverse the sale failed, so finally, after years of protesting and a series of major riots with street fighting, burning cars and barricaded buildings, the local politicians were compelled to make a new public building, one year after the violent eviction of Ungdomshuset in Jagtvej 69, now in Dortheavej 61, available for the Ungdomshuset -movement. This happened in 2008.
Sadly this movement has ebbed away in the recent years. Not only because of the victory it won, but also because subsequent activist campaigns – e.g. around migrants rights – has been so heavily repressed that many activists have withdrawn with burnouts and depressions. Squatting as a political strategy has mostly been replaced with the construction of more or less depoliticized social centres in buildings that are most often leased on temporary, precarious contracts. Thus Copenhagen’s social centres have come to play an integral part in the urban economy of Copenhagen where autonomous activists are either being shoved around by the local state or willingly move around in the city to perform temporary functions in areas due for redevelopment. This even goes for the Ungdomshuset (Youth House), which is now situated in a neighbourhood that has been designated as the next big thing by urban planners as a state sponsored producer of edgy alternative culture.

Later, Freetown Christiania bought the land for 10 million Euros, thus becoming owners through a debt-based purchase of the land, which they had been already occupying for over 40 years. Christianites now face a complex financial situation.

It’s not all over though. The current economic crisis has left many young people in Denmark without a job and the number of homeless especially in Copenhagen is rising fast, so we’re now witnessing a situation somewhat similar to the one

in the early 1980s. I think we can expect a new cycle of squatting in Denmark in the near future, a new movement that will recombine the struggle for autonomous social centres with squatting as a means to affordable housing and once again urge you to “squat your city, squat your life!”

Copenhagen

▶ The autonomous community of Metelkova has withstood many transformations, since it was first squatted in 1993. In the past years it has become a popular tourist destination, further promoted through the opening of an adjacent hostel. This is viewed critically by many activists, artists and locals involved, but is has provided leverage when Metelkova was threatened by eviction.

A history of urban squatting in Slovenia

by Tina Steiger

"The goal of autonomous social movements is the subversion of politics: the decolonization of everyday life and civil society, not the conquest of state power." (Katsiaficas 377)

Introduction

The bulk of existing literature and academic research on left-alternative social movements who have used squatting as a tactic is focused on countries in western Europe, particularly the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, Germany as well as Italy, Spain and Greece. Discourses about urban social movements which use squatting as tactics in the pursuit of autonomous communities, as they occurred in eastern Europe and the former soviet bloc have been few and sporadic. Does this lead us to conclude that these regions did not have youth movements which claimed abandoned buildings, as they did in the cities of western Europe?

Let us take a look at Slovenia, a country which represents an anomaly in the context of the Cold War as it belonged to the Yugoslav People's Republic – following the 'third way'. Slovenian society was therefore marked by the proliferation of a centralized Socialist state, open to negotiations, trade and individual travel opportunities with both sides of the Iron Curtain. Slovenia, as a member of Yugoslavia was albeit a controlled, socialist state, where youth nonetheless had more access to and exchange with culture – music, arts, literature -- and hence also subversive subcultures from the West than young people in countries of the eastern bloc.

Subversive movements in Socialist Yugoslavia

Urban squatter movements throughout western Europe, are considered urban social movements, often associated with the underground punk,

anti-globalization, and radical environmental scenes. Autonomous movements are about the subversion of authority. As an urban social movement, they are therefore difficult to define – if at all. Often a barometer for measuring their presence in urban contexts and cities, has been the existence of social and autonomous cultural centers, or squatted houses for living. Since the late 1960s many European cities have experienced various cycles of squatter movements which coincided with housing struggles, left-alternative urban movements and underground cultural milieus. However, in the case of socialist Yugoslavia, similarly to the majority of countries belonging to the Eastern bloc, 'waves of squatting have not been identified', per se, have yet to be academically described. In Slovenia, a youth punk culture was flourishing by the late 1970s. In contrast to countries of the eastern bloc, and in part due to the open boarder policies of non-aligned Yugoslavia, which allowed Yugoslavs to freely travel. Beyond music, the punk scene included punk discos, fanzines and graffiti. The Yugoslav punk scene can be considered the first of its kind in eastern Europe, and emerged most notably with Slovenian bands like Pankrti, Berlinski Zid and later Laibach and CZD, later Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK).[1]

If we consider autonomy to be the subversion of authority, the vibrant Slovenian punk scene offered space and a medium to proliferate and reproduced an anti-authoritarian culture. Rather than being inherently political, the punk scene satisfied the very basic need to party in a 'totalitarian' environment (Raijo Mursic: Punk Anthropology). Culturally this scene laid the foundation for the subsequent autonomous and squatter movements that emerged in independent Slovenia by the early 1990s.

As a federal province of the socialist federation of Yugoslavia, housing was provided by state companies, and actions which challenged the central government's self-manage-model were not tolerated by the political establishment. It was nearly impossible for urban social movement to occupy and squat houses in pursuit of autonomous communities, as was the case in Berlin or Amsterdam. (Bibic Interview 2011, Mlinarič Interview 2012).

Erjačeva 29

Nonetheless, the first short-lived squatting did occur in 1976; when a villa in

1 Neue Slowenische Kunst "New Slovenian Art" (NSK) is a controversial political art collective that formed in Slovenia in 1984

Slovenia's capital city, Ljubljana was seized by a group of 15 young people who had been involved in the student movement and more generally the Slovenian Spring (Slovenska Pomlad)[2]. With the occupation of Erjačeva Street 29, the squatters tried to raise awareness about the inefficiencies of Yugoslavia's housing policies, and the possibilities of using vacant spaces for socio-cultural experimentation (Bibic 2002, Tomc)[3]. The villa had been owned by the Ljubljanska Bank and media pressure was used against the squatters, presenting them as outlandish and even criminals. The occupation was too short to make concrete demands and was not able to grow into a movement. Slovenia's political establishment saw the young people's action as an attack against their system, and they were evicted after two weeks of occupying the villa (Babic 2002). After the occupation of Erjačeva 29, which never gained widespread public support, there are no records of public or politicized squatting throughout the 1980s in Ljubljana (Babič 2002) or Slovenia. Nonetheless, the 1980s did bring forth the emergence of new social movements which voiced their criticisms towards the Yugoslav state – making demands for peace, free speech, rights of women, homosexuals and minorities – later to be absorbed into civil society organizations.

1990s First wave of squatting in Independent Slovenia

With the transition to independence in 1991, former military barracks in Slovenia's two largest cities were squatted by artists, activists and actors within civil society who sought spaces for the production of alternative culture and autonomous communities. Within the country's transition to a market economy and the demilitarization of Slovenian cities, former Yugoslav military complexes in inner city locations, were left obsolete throughout the country. Sites in Ljubljana and Maribor became targets for the punk scene, alternative cultural producers and actors from the newly leftist emerging civil society.

Ljubljana : AKC Metelkova

In Ljubljana, the Mreža za Metelkova (Network for Metelkova) had formed by the early1990s, comprised of more than 200 artists and civil society actors from across the alternative left. The network became one of the most active contributors of a wave of new social movements calling for the demilitarization of

2 Slovenian Spring; cultural and intellectual resistance to socialist Yugoslav State.
3 http://www.slovenskapomlad.si/1?id=163

Slovenia (SOVA Slovenija odpravi vojaški apparat)[4].

While negotiations between the Metelkova network and Municipality of Ljubljana were being held, the municipality began demolishing buildings of the former military complex. This animated more than 200 people, many of which were members of the Mreža za Metelokva to resort to the direct action of squatting the vast military complex in September of 1993[5].

When the municipality reacted by cutting off water and electricity to Metelkova, squatters sought help from the Ljubljana fire brigade, and tapped electricity from the nearby street (Interview Zadnikar 2011). During the first period, the movement received strong public support while the city's autonomous Radio Študent provided 24-hour coverage. One of their most successful actions was to invite intellectuals, public officials and politicians to sleep at the complex without water and electricity for one night, and then have them inform the public about their experiences[6]. Since Ljubljana has a vibrant university community, with more than 60,000 students, many autonomous actions received support by students, academics and the university community.

During that first year, experienced squatters from the Netherlands came to share their knowledge of squatting and renovating derelict complexes of such a vast size. Together, the Dutch and Slovenian activists would organize a number of actions, parties and events such as the Forbidden Fruits of Society Festival (Jasna Interview).

Rather than addressing the need for housing, the squatting of Metelkova articulated the need for places of expressing and producing autonomous and non-commercial art, culture and community. With the city as a common enemy, the group - consisting mostly of young artists, punks and civil society groups, had found a unifying force in defending their newly claimed space.

The site of Metelkova covered more than 12,500m2, comprised of 7 buildings which would be converted and re-functioned into concert venues, galleries, bars, workshops, artist spaces, bike workshops, an infoshop and offices for various leftist civil society organizations and NGOs. AKC Metelkova Mesto became

4 Bratko Bibic Hrup V Metelkove. P 216.
5 New Time New Models. 2010.
6 http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors2/grzinictext2.html

an autonomous cultural zone comparable to the Arena in Vienna and Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen. Not just a meeting ground, but a sanctuary and safe space for leftist initiatives, groups and emerging movements.

Although Mother Metelkova remains the most vibrant space for the alternative scene in Ljubljana, the degree of the autonomous city's involvement with direct actions and mobilizations of the wider autonomous and anti-globalisation movement have also fluctuated over time. This can be noted by the change in name, as in the early 1990s Metelkova took the acronym SKC (Socialini Kulturni Center) but since 2000 goes by the name AKC (Autonomski Kulturni Center) Metelkova Mesto. From socialist cultural centre to autonomous social centers invokes a transition in meaning and identity, especially within a post-Yugoslav society.

In the course of its existence, AKC Metelkova has survived hostilities from the municipality and police, but also various internal problems common to large-scale free spaces. One of the greatest challenges has been the successful communication and negotiation with junkies, the trafficking and use of hard drugs, or 'death drugs'.[7]

▶ AKC Metelkoval City covers an area of more than 12.000m² in the centre of Slovenia's capital city, Ljubljana. It continues to be one of the most important meeting spaces for left-alternative groups and cultural producers. Credit: Nicha 8

7 Katsifikas, George. Subversion of Politics and Decolonization of Everydaylife. P 119.

By 1998 the Workers' Punk University (Delavsko-pankerska univerza (DPU) within the Peace Institute of the Metelkova was formed. This is an 'invisible college' that fosters critical education in the form of lectures, discussion groups and reading seminars on critical socio-political topics often overlooked or ignored by established academia8[8]. The group holds weekly meetings in Metelkova's Club Gromka and would later become a mobilizing force in the anti-NATO campaign and Ljubljana's Occupy Movement in 2011.

Generally, AKC Metelkova was heavily politicized during the period of 1999-2004, while Slovenia was in the process of joining the European Union and NATO. Today, its activities are mostly connected to the autonomous scene by a few individuals and the anarchist [A]Infoshop. While the majority of venues, associations and artists are primarily focused on artistic productions and cultural spectacles (Zadnikar 2011 Interview).

In 2008 the Ministry of Defence ceded the land of the Metelkova complex to the municipality of Ljubljana.[9] Rather than demolishing Metelkova, attractively located near the inner city, it's autonomy is rather threatened by legalization of the municipality which seeks to gain control of the flows of money going through the clubs and venues which continue to be run on a DIY basis (Interview Jasna).

Maribor: Pekarna

In 1994, a year after Metelkova was squatted in Ljubljana, a complex which served as a bakery of the Yugoslav army in Slovenia's second largest city - Maribor was squatted with similar demands. What came to be known as Pekarna Magdalenske Mreze was squatted after negotiations with Maribor city officials had failed - as artists, activists and alternative cultural producers took over and squatted the vacant bakery.

The squatting of the Metelkova and Pekarna can be considered the first wave of squatting in post-socialist Slovenia, resulting from the 1980s movements for demilitarization[10]. Participants of both movements came together in formal cultural associations, in Metelokva the Retina and in Pekarna the Magdalenske Mreze, through which they negotiated with the municipalities to achieve a semi-

8 http://www.dedi.si/dediscina/345-kompleks-metelkova
9 Barbara Beznec (Rog) New Times New Models p 31.
10 http://www.mladina.si/93930/sistem-svobode/

▶ Housed in a former military bakery complex, Perkana in Maribor has provided vast spaces for cultural production and provided many of the city's youth space for a range of self-managed projects. Credit: Dejan Bulut

2000s Second Wave of Squatting and Autonomous Actions

"The beginning of the Ljubljana squatter movement was definitely with Metelkova, although they are two different stories" (Dunja, Ljubljana squatter)

A second wave of political squatting and the beginning of autonomous actions and anarchist networks, came with the occupation of a former sugar factory in Ljubljana's Pojanskem Napisu 40 in February of 1999. Housed in a massive sugar refinery in one of the city's largest buildings, it became a space from which the Slovenian Anarchist Collective Anarhistični Kolektiv Cukrarna formed[12]. The Cukrarna was the revival of a younger Ljubljana punk scene and became a space for hosting many DIY, hardcore and punk concerts. This squat, which served primarily as a social center, was founded as a counter

11 http://www.dedi.si/dediscina/36-cukrarna

12 http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=01/06/13/7500221&query=ljubljana

movement to emerging right-wing and neo-nazi groups in Ljubljana (Jasna, InfoShop Interview).

In the same year, UZI Urad za Intervencije or Office for Intervention formed as a loose network of mutually supporting activists who were connected by the clubs of Metelkova and via email list-servs. The office was composed of leftist students and professors, as well as radical left activists, LBGQT groups and members from the wider autonomous movement. UZI participated in the alter-globalisation demonstrations in Seattle, Prague and Genoa, and their actions have often been described as 'happy guerrilla' interventions, implementing carnevalesque and performative tactics.' Together with Italian activists from Ya Basta! the group staged various "No Border" demonstrations between Slovenia and its neighbouring countries, drawing attention to problems of migration and the possibility of a world without borders.[13] The group also staged a 'Festival of Resistance' leading up to the meeting of George Bush and Vladimir Putin which took place in Ljubljana in June of 2001. This festival addressed a referendum restricting reproductive rights of unmarried women, as well as Slovenia's NATO membership.

Cukrarna (The Sugar Factory)

"After Cukrarna we really got the self-consciousness that we are squatters, with a deeper meaning, not just making socio-cultural centres, but an autonomous centre" (Jasna Interveiw 2011).

In 2000 squatting actions took place again and became visible enough that the actions in Ljubljana developed a self-consciousness as being part of a broader movement, and as a squatter from Croatia posted "we finally started to develop a real squatting movement in Ljubljana, with Vila Mara and Autonomna Cona Molotov' (maja, squat.net)

With the inclusion of Slovenia into the European Union and the joining of NATO, autonomous actions and networks throughout Ljubljana gained momentum. Especially with the Statement of Vilnius in 2003, in which the Slovenian foreign minister openly supported the US invasion of Iraq, autonomous actions and networks organized and gained visibility, as they organized actions in resistance

13 http://www.pwhce.org/docvil.html

to the military intervention. (Zadnikar Interview).[14]

AC Molotov

"AC Molotov differentiates itself from previous squatting, because Molotovci understand squatting not only as a political act, an action to another end, but as means of political struggle... They are active members of the anarchist scene and participate within the dispersed Say No to NATO campaign"[15]

Mladina paper depicted AC Molotov as a conflict between the right to property and freedom of creativity, as well as a conflict between those opposing and those supporting NATO.

Within Metelkova city, it was especially the AC Molotov which became a central organizing point for "Say No to NATO" movement, where activists would meet to make flyers, banners and organize for actions and mobilizations (Babic 2002). Additionally, Metelkova was pivotal in enabling the 15F demonstration in February of 2003, the largest anti-authoritarian demonstration since Slovenia's independence with an estimated 7,000-10,000 people gathering to oppose the war in Iraq and globalised capitalism more generally.

An important outlet for autonomous voices and reporting about the Ljubljana squatter movement has been the critical Mladina paper and Ljubljana's autonomous Radio Študent - both remnants of the 1960s student movements. Many of those publishing Mladina were involved in the first Erjaceva squatting, and the paper has done widespread coverage of the eviction of AC Molotov and more recent autonomous actions. Radio Študent remains one of the largest non-commercial and autonomous radio stations in Europe, with critical discourses and widespread coverage of autonomous actions.

Autonomous Factory Rog

In 2006 the vast building of a former bicycle factory, in the cente of Ljubljana was squatted and an autonomous social center was founded. Known as the Republic of Rog it became a vibrant space opening room for the production

14 http://www.mladina.si/93930/sistem-svobode/

15 http://news.infoshop.org/article.php?story=03/02/19/3145269&query=ljubljana

of autonomous culture and social activities spanning from football, kung-fu, philosophy debates to ateliers and studios. After bicycle production ceased in the building in the early 1990s, the site had stood vacant for more than 15 years, when a group of architecture students and activists joined together in a group called “TEMP” and proposed a 2-week festival to propose uses for the spaces. At the last moment, the festival was cancelled by the municipality, but the community decided to continue and squat the site.

Since 2015, Rog has also become an important site for Refugee Welcome groups to come together and as an activist in Ljubljana described: “This is the only place refugees can come and be proactive, take self-initiative, actually have a social life with the 18EUR of monthly pocket money they receive. It’s an open space, where they can hang out with local people, or other asylum seekers, as they wish. Here they can have their head up high and keep their dignity.”

In recent years, squatting buildings in the pursuit of autonomous cultural centres has also occurred in some of Slovenia’s smaller cities, such as the Autonomous Zone Argo squat in Izola and the former INDE factory in Koper. Activists, cultural producers, students and civil society come together in these spaces and continuously find new ways of building networks, using new technologies for communication and open spaces for empowerments and subverting power structures. Inherent in this is a new Slovenia which is finding its role as a member of the European Union, within a globalizing world.

Dedications

A great thank you to all people who agreed to be interviewed in the late autumn of 2011. With special thanks to Borut, friendly folks at A-Infoshop, students and activists at the Occupation of Filofax of Ljubljana University, the Ljubljana 15O camp, Pekarna and Metelkova. Especially Jasna Babic, Mija Zadnikar, Marko Brummen and most of all, my Oči.

▶Berkin Elvan, Istanbul

Istanbul - Beyond Gezi

by some comrades

As in most uprisings in world history, the Gezi protests of 2013 in Turkey led to a large number of popular neighborhood assemblies and ‘forums, frequently accompanied by the birth of new common spaces - squats, urban gardens, reclaimed parks, squares etc. Although most such spaces in Istanbul have ceased to exist, and the forum movement is on a downtrend, the energy thereby created can be and is being transferred to other fields of struggle.

The grassroots protest movement in Istanbul followed a path rather similar to examples in south European countries: The protesters first occupied a central square and tried to hold on to it; but after fierce police repression, they scattered to their neighborhoods and tried to gain foothold in their local communities.

Occupy Gezi and beyond

It all started out with the occupation of the Gezi Park and the adjacent Taksim square - the main urban hub of downtown Istanbul- in the summer of 2013. There were plans to build a shopping mall in the guise of a historical building on the park and a handful of activists set up tents to stop the first bulldozer coming to the area in the early morning hours of May 28th. They were later joined by tens of thousands people in the following days, and after uninterrupted clashes with them, the police abandoned the area on June 1st. The result was the creation of what some called the “Taksim commune”, as an occupied, self-managed space consisting of hundreds of tents, and surrounded with scores of barricades.

From the beginning, representatives of various radical left-wing groups and trade union confederations joined the committee called ‘Taksim Solidarity’ to form a governing organ. However, that mechanism was not really capable of representing the tens of thousands of people who governed themselves with countless decisions and actions on a daily basis, literally setting up an alternative life in the center of the city. Indeed, when the police announced its intention to storm the area, the first ‘forums’ or ‘assemblies’ convened to decide whether

the occupation of the park needed to continue or not. Already, the divergence between these forums, which decided to continue with the occupation, and most radical left-wing parties gathered around Taksim Solidarity, which wanted to end the occupation and leave behind just one symbolic tent, was all too apparent.

Finally, on June 15th, the police staged a very fierce attack on the Gezi Park and forced the people there to flee. The next day, thousands of people tried to enter the area under police occupation, however, they were pushed back as far as to the district of Beşiktaş. Meanwhile, the leaders of a left-leaning football fan group of the soccer team Beşiktaş (homonymous with the district), 'Çarşı', which played a key role in the clashes, were arrested on June 16th. The activists, who were now fewer in number and unable to reach Taksim square, decided to stage a sit-in at the nearby Abbasağa Park to demand the liberation of their leaders. They were soon joined by other activists unrelated to the Çarşı fan group, and already on June 17th, 2 to 3 thousand people had gathered in Abbasağa Park not only to demand the liberation of Çarşı leaders, but also to discuss how to organize the protest movement. Due to the crowd, it was almost impossible to enter the forum area, let alone hold a proper debate, nevertheless the energy in the air was almost palpable. By the way, the choice of the Abbasağa Park was not a coincidence, as the locals had staged protests to stop the construction of a multi-storey car park in the area a decade ago.

The news of the forum on June 16th spread very rapidly, and already in the next evening, people were gathering in forums across Istanbul and in other large cities such as Ankara, İzmir and Eskişehir to decide on how to wage the struggle. Another key forum convened on the other side of the Bosphorus, in the district of Kadıköy, at Yoğurtçu Park, and it was nearly as crowded as the Abbasağa Park Forum. People kept gathering in these forums and discussing various issues night after night.

White-collars on the forefront

The rise in importance of the districts of Beşiktaş and Kadıköy were largely due to dynamics of urban transformation in Istanbul. Although the Beyoğlu district, which includes Gezi Park, remains the key stage for protest marches in the city, the construction of luxury shops and malls in the area have driven the rents up, such that many individuals - including activists - with modest means

have been forced to flee to the relatively cheaper and more peaceful districts of Beşiktaş and Kadıköy which are also rapidly undergoing urban transformation, already populated by large numbers of university students. This shift of political dissidence from Beyoğlu to especially Kadıköy was already visible in the increasing number of protest rallies held on the opposite side of the Bosphorus, even before Gezi.

It should also be indicated that the forums were mostly limited to these and other central districts, populated by white collar employees, or in other words, the relatively better paid echelons of the proletariat. Most forum participants were university or high school graduate engineers, teachers, doctors, psychologists as well as professionals from the fields of advertisement, publishing, public relations, not to mention university and high school students, all with access to and fluency in modern means of mobile telecommunication. Unfortunately, the number of forums in blue-collar communities was very limited with the exception of some neighborhoods populated by the Alevi community - a heterodox version of Islam.

The white collar population had experienced massive unemployment and staged a limited number of workplace protests during the economic crisis of 2008 with almost no success. They usually held non-union jobs under precarious working conditions. As such they were mostly unable to wage struggles in the field of production despite the fierce exploitations, but at least some of them had been venting their anger in a series of anti-globalization protests since 2009 (Direnistanbul days against the IMF - WB summit in Istanbul), and also reclaiming their “right to the city” in the face of rampant capitalistic urban encroachment in the form of shopping malls, car parks and other massive building complexes. A key event was the massive albeit unsuccessful resistance in early 2013 against the demolition of the historical movie theater Emek in the heart of Beyoğlu. The activists had occupied the movie theater and its street a few times, and held a number of public forums, heralding in a way the new forms of organization to be used during Gezi protests and thereafter.

Protests go local

To go back to where we had left off, although Yoğurtçu Park and Abbasağa Park were home to the two main forums in the protest movement, they followed rather different trajectories. In a few weeks, the number of participants started

to fall, and a number of radical left-wing groups had already started to impose themselves on the forums through top-down mechanisms. To cut a long story short, they were more successful in Abbasağa, where a coalition of those groups dominated the forum and sapped the energy of the protesters to such an extent that in a few months the forum was down to 40-50 participants and did not represent the local community at all. In Yoğurtçu Park, on the other hand, many independent activists decided to abandon the more centralized park forum to instead create smaller forums in their local communities.

The result was the establishment in mid-July of Caferağa, Yeldeğirmeni, Osmanağa, Acıbadem... park forums, each of which correspond to the main neighborhoods of the Kadıköy district. As such, the protesters in Kadıköy managed to escape the fate of Abbasağa, and created vibrant local organizations. They tried to create decision-making mechanisms based on consensus and direct democracy, and rejected vertical mechanisms of representation such as coordination committees which tended to function through negotiations between different political groups. Instead, all the main decisions were taken at weekly forums in which everybody could participate. Besides, these smaller forums soon shifted their focus from the question, How will we topple the government?, to more local issues such as problems associated with urban transformation in their communities -without of course refraining from the nationwide political debate. Especially the Caferağa and Yeldeğirmeni Forums stood as quite vibrant solidarity groups with strong connections in the local community.

By autumn, Abbasağa Forum had more or less died out, and the Yoğurtçu Forum was down to a handful of people, whereas the smaller local forums in Kadıköy and other districts were going strong.

Reclaiming urban space

Due to the rapid rise in urban rents, all these neighborhoods of Kadıköy had been undergoing a swift transformation and the forum participants -which hailed from among the ranks of low- and medium-level white collar employees- were finding it hard to make ends meet. The more modest cafes and restaurants were being closed down one after the other to be replaced with trendy, expensive ones. As such, people needed places to interact freely and discuss their

▶ Don Kişot, Istanbul

problems. Furthermore, with the arrival of autumn and winter, it became harder to hold debates in the parks.

As a result, activists from Y(Kişot)eldeğirmeni Forum occupied an empty, privately-owned building in August 2013. The building had been abandoned at the rough construction stage, due to disagreements among its owners. The activists went on with the construction, reinforcing the roof, installing windows and doors, providing electricity etc. In time, the building came to be called Don Kişot (Quixote) Social Center, and drew not only members of the surrounding community, but also numerous international students and foreign expats living in the city. As the very first squatted building in Istanbul, in fact Turkey, it drew immense attention.

Members of the Caferağa Forum had also taken part in the construction work for the Don Kişot and soon they themselves were inspired to create a squat. Thus,

after 3-4 months of discussion and research, in January 2014, they occupied a state-owned building, constructed by Greek masons in late 19th or early 20th century but later abandoned. It took weeks to do basic renovation work in the building, create a proper lavatory and kitchen, clean up the garden, and repair the roof.

In a way, through the occupations of these buildings and other local action, these solidarity groups were actively claiming their "right to the city". Even before squatting this building, Caferağa Forum had changed the name of a small square in the heart of their neighborhood, and had named it after Mehmet Ayvalıtaş, a young man killed during the Gezi protests. The forum had been holding its assemblies and screening films in that space. Likewise, Yeldeğirmeni Forum held its outdoors assemblies in a small empty lot, which they painted with the colors of the rainbow. They also held activities involving the adjacent children's park, which would soon be renamed Ali İsmail Korkmaz Park, after another young man killed during the Gezi uprising. These names would soon become official following approval by Kadıköy Muncipality.

Both squats soon created their urban gardens tilled by the locals. Caferağa Forum set up the Moda Gezi Bostanı, in a green space surrounded by buildings which was under threat of being turned into a car park. Yeldeğirmeni Forum, on the other hand, created a similar urban garden in the backyard of one of their members. Both groups made their utmost to grow plants by obtaining non-modified seeds. In another modest yet symbolically important action, both groups joined the drive across Istanbul to paint various parts of the city, especially public stairs, parks and pavements, in the colors of the rainbow, in protest of police violence.

Through these and other actions, conducted not only by experienced activists but also by numerous members of the community, the groups actively changed and reclaimed their urban landscape.

One should not think that such common spaces were limited to Kadıköy. Urban gardens have been set up in various districts of the city such as Avcılar, Yeniköy and Cihangir (which has two), and many neighborhood forums (Kocamustafapaşa, Şişli, Maçka, Sarıyer...) continue to gather weekly in public parks or squares which are now almost associated with them.

Activists and the community

From very early on, the activists started to question whether the creation of such communal spaces, or new 'commons' as it were, created a platform to meet with the wider population of the surrounding communities. The response changes from district to district, but at least in the case of Caferağa Forum, one might talk of a modest success.

The authors of this article have indeed had first hand experience as participants of the Caferağa Forum, so discussing certain examples from that neighborhood could help us clarify our argument.

Even before the squat was created, Caferağa Forum had focused its energies on local issues. For instance they had held a series of protests and filed petitions against the municipality's plans to construct huge concrete stairs -a true eye-sore- on the Kadıköy coast line, and were successful in stopping the plan. After the occupation of the building, Caferağa Forum had dubbed the squat Mahalle Evi, which translates(Quixote) as Community House, in a clear indication of its intent to reach out to the locals. Nevertheless this did not prove to be so easy and the Forum took quite some time to establish stronger connections with the community. In fact, the squat drew a large number of new and much younger activists to the Forum - in a way, the squat shaped the Forum as much as the other way around. Not all of these activists lived in the area, many hailed from other neighborhoods of Kadıköy or even other districts.

One challenge which tested the resolve of Caferağa Forum came about when, in July 2014, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality sent a bulldozer to build a parking lot in the green space declared to be an urban garden by the Forum and neighbors. The neighbors reacted even before the activists did and stopped the dozer, which was normal considering that the Harvest Festival held at the garden in April had drawn a significant crowd from among the neighbors who continued to work in the garden through summer. Just as at Gezi, people set up a few tents near the urban garden and held watch over the area day and night.

The petition demanding the repeal of the parking lot plan was signed by over 8,000 people. However, as Kadıköy was undergoing a rapid transformation and the number of people with higher income and multiple vehicles rose, many members of the community vehemently demanded more parking space. As

such, the forum could not include them, and it became quite obvious from the start that such 'commons' appealed more to people with modest means. Finally, after weeks of resistance, the parking lot project was cancelled, and this victory brought immense prestige to the Forum, which was now increasingly invited by people from the surrounding communities to intervene in all kinds of local issues ranging from noisy establishments to sexual harassment.

In a second example, the Forum found itself obliged to intervene in a problem which arose on the very street of the squatted building. Due to the rise of alcohol taxes and prices under the rule of the Justice and Development Party, many youngsters had taken on a habit of drinking on this and the adjacent streets. This annoyed the locals, as young people tended to make a considerable amount of noise and urinated around apartment buildings. Although the activists knew how tense the issue was and were unwilling to intervene despite calls from the locals for help, they simply were obliged to get involved in September 2014, when a few of them had to break up a fight among the young revelers and locals on the street of the squat.

A number of assemblies were held in the coming days with the participation of both parties. The participants reached the conclusion that the best way to prevent the consumption of alcohol on the streets would be to explain to the youngsters the problems that they were causing. As a result, for a number of evenings, the neighbors and squat activists took out their tables and chairs in front of their buildings and simply asked the young people not to drink alcohol as it led to immense noise and pollution. Sure, there was tension and not a few rows. In fact, many young people accused the Forum of being despotic, while some elderly neighbors accused the Forum of being too soft on the youngsters and threatened to call the police. Nevertheless, the result was a modest success as most young people respected the demand of the locals, and the streets became much more peaceful.

The Forum remarkably strengthened its ties with many neighbors and shopkeepers from the area, as well as some of the youngsters.

The Forum was becoming increasingly popular across Kadıköy. When tap water was cut off for 5 days in late September, again following the demands of the locals, the Forum members staged a protest rally joined by hundreds of people. Soon afterwards, the Community House was bustling with people

▶Don Kişot, Istanbul

and housed a meeting or workshop almost every day of the week: The graphic design workshop, men's debate group against patriarchy, the women's forum, a work group to defend the rights of the local Christian population and their heritage, a community kitchen, campaigns to send toys to Syrian refugees, various arts events and exhibitions etc. The squat had a kitchen, a library, a carpentry workshop, a room to barter second hand clothes, and a room for yoga workshops, among others.

In a way, as suggested by Silvia Federici, the activists were creating new common spaces to transform 'reproductive work' into a liberating experience - as most of them did not have the chance to challenge the conditions in their work lives.[1] Evidently, this rise of community organization did not go unnoticed by the authorities. In early December 2014, the riot police stormed the squat at dawn and evacuated the building. Although a number of campaigns were held to urge the community to reclaim their Community House, it ended in failure, pointing to the limits of the success of community organizing by Forum activists. Unsurprisingly, the evacuation also led to a weakening of the Caferağa Forum which was fraught with a number of internal divisions.

Any future for Gezi activism?

By the time the Caferağa squat was evacuated, most of the 30-40 forums across Istanbul had also died out. The Don Kişot (Quixote) Social Center had become gradually disconnected from Yeldeğirmeni Forum, after a group of individuals started to sleep there overnight despite the objection of most Forum members, creating a chaotic atmosphere which drew off most activists, especially women. In brief, the Istanbul squatting experience did not lead to a mushrooming of squats across the city, unlike what happened for example in Madrid, where the occupation of Puerta del Sol led to a squatting drive for both political or habitation purposes.[2]

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1 "But through land takeovers, urban farming, community-supported agriculture, through squats, the creation of various forms of barter, mutual aid, alternative forms of healthcare – to name some of the terrains on which this reorganization of reproduction is more developed – a new economy is beginning to emerge that may turn reproductive work from a stifling, discriminating activity into the most liberating and creative ground of experimentation in human relations."
http://endofcapitalism.com/2013/05/29/a-feminist-critique-of-marx-by-silvia-federici/

2 "Ocupar las plazas, liberar los edificios" Miguel A. Martínez & Ángela García

Nevertheless, although weaker, the park forums of Yeldeğirmeni, Caferağa, Göztepe, Cihangir, Şişli, Maçka, Kocamustafapaşa, Avcılar and Sarıyer among others continue to gather, and organize campaigns in their neighborhoods.

Interestingly, one platform where the forum 'spirit' of horizontal organization and street activism has resurfaced was the general elections of June 7, 2015. Some members of the aforementioned forums came together to create a campaign designed to support the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in its struggle to cross the 10% electoral threshold.

The local elections and presidential elections held in 2014, had indeed had the opposite effect, as a large number of Gezi activists and forum activists -under the influence of certain radical-left groups- had decided to support the centrist and nationalist Republican People's Party (CHP) in the elections, under the pretext of stopping the ascent of the conservative and Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in power. This largely sapped the force of forums and street activism to the benefit of 'high' politics. Furthermore, the electoral results were very disappointing for CHP, whose neoliberal social and economic policy proposals were anyhow not radically different from those of AKP.

Nevertheless, some forum activists had managed to preserve a more independent political line critical of all pro-status quo political parties, and thus decided to support HDP, created by the Kurdish liberation movement, in the June 2015 elections, although they were not members of the party. They managed to mobilize large numbers of people, and surprisingly created a not centralized but grassroots, or bottom-up election campaign dubbed "10danSonra", which implies "going above the 10% threshold", but also "activism beyond electoral politics". Kadıköy's forum and squatting activists were among the first to formulate the campaign.

Completely independent from HDP, the 10danSonra activists acted not according to any centralized plan, but instead created local initiatives which utilized methods best suited to their needs.

Not content with just distributing tracts and hanging up posters, the activists resorted to more colorful and participatory methods such as meetings and festivals in parks, bike tours, forums on ecology, forums with MP candidates in parks and streets, kite-flying days, etc -a legacy of Gezi and the park forums.

The campaign had a very vibrant street presence, and looked nothing like any previous electoral campaign in Turkey. It was particularly successful in reaching out to the white-collar masses living in the downtown districts of Istanbul, which HDP struggled to communicate with.

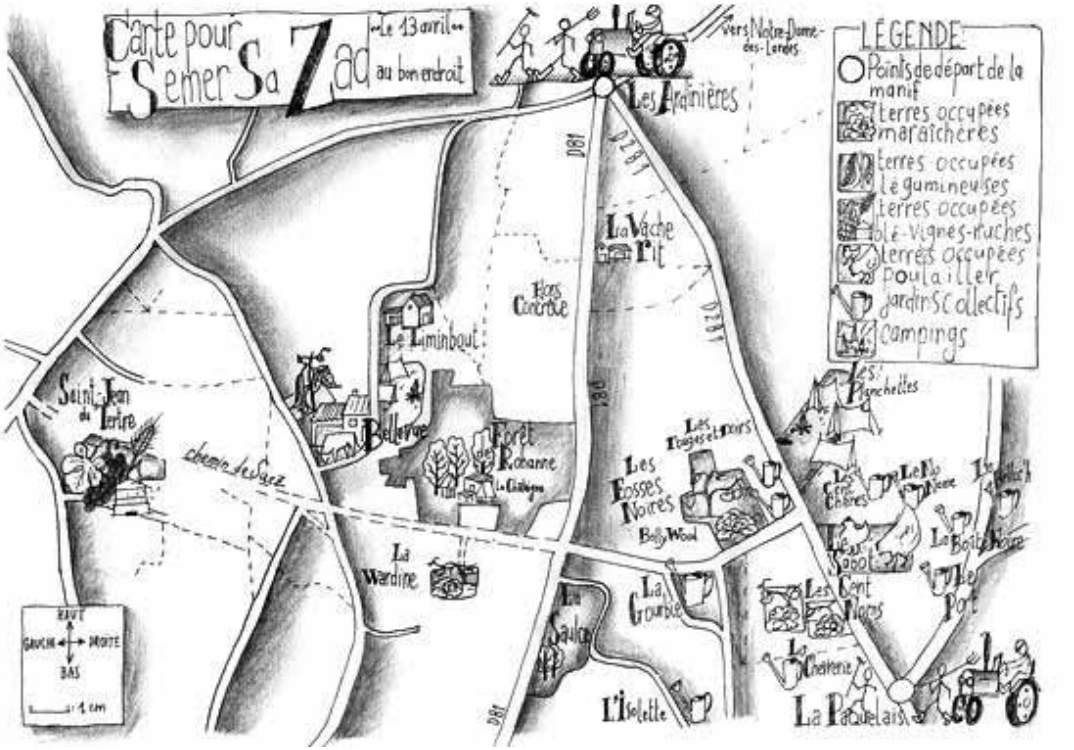
In the end, HDP gained a whopping 13% of the votes -the highest rate ever for a left-wing party in Turkey, and reached very high percentages in central districts such as Kadıköy, Beşiktaş and Şişli where the forums remain more vibrant.

Although the 10danSonra electoral campaign can be criticized on various grounds, its success nonetheless suggests that this more horizontal form of organizing based on forums or assemblies now has stronger roots in Istanbul. It would not be illogical to expect the creation of similar massive campaigns and movements on diverse issues such as femicides, workers' rights or the demands of the Kurdish people in the coming years, as a strong and participatory alternative to the more conventional and top-down political methods of the traditional radical left in Turkey.

Overview of squats in Istanbul[3]

- Yeldeğirmeni, *Don Kişot*: Began during Summer 2013. Evicted in November 2015. Torn down in November 2016
- Kadıköy, *Caferağa*: Began in Autumn 2013. Evicted in December 2014. Burnt down in November 2016.
- Beşiktaş, *Berkin Elvan*: Began in Spring 2014. Evicted within a month…
- Söğütlüçeşme, *Samsa*: Began in Spring 2014. Abandoned by many activists by Winter 2015. The building still stands with doors locked.
- Acıbadem, *Lojman*: Began in Winter 2016. Abandoned by many activists by Summer 2016. This squat is still open.

3 taken from Squat.net November 28th, 2016



▶Sème ta Zad, April 2013
zadforever

“Zad News” - The occupation of Notre-Dame-des-Landes narrated through its weekly newspaper

by Margot Verdier

Over the last decade, the influence of the occupation of the Zad of Notre-Dame-des-Landes (NDDL) on French social movements has not stopped growing. This humid zone of 1650 acres of fields and forests, squatted by about two hundred to three hundred persons, and supported by more than two hundred committees and thousands of individuals engaged in parties, associations or autonomous collectives, is considered one of the largest occupations Europe has known. It was largely publicized and several books and films were made to explain the reasons of the struggle and recount its history. Few, however, spoke about the daily life in the occupied village that was built from dumpster diving and collective creativity.

When I began writing this article, I wondered how I could give an account of its social organization in a way that would not be too theoretical but linked to the reality of its inhabitants. Among all the materials I collected when I was there, I choose to use the “Zad News” (ZN), a weekly newspaper published on the zone. The production of autonomous media has always been an important issue for social movements. All the experiences of independent radios, newspapers, websites, comic books, fanzines, that squatters produced all around the world, opened spaces for the expression of dissident points of view on economic, political, social and cultural issues, maintained the memory of past struggles and allowed the diffusion of informations on current ones.

Another newspaper, published approximatively every trimester, and called “Lèse Béton” (a word play meaning “Let it go”), was also produced by the squatters of the Zad of NDDL, but was addressed to the inhabitants of the villages around in order to explain the struggle and create more links with them. The specificity of the “Zad News” is that it is only distributed on the zone, and has

a great influence on the daily life of its occupants. Through the analyses of its functioning, the roles it plays and its contents, I will try to sketch some of the issues of this inspiring collective experience.

Building a free zone
A brief history of the struggle

In May 1970, the inhabitants of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, Vigneux-de-Bretagne, Grand Champs, Treillières, Héric and La Paquelais, six villages of French Brittany, discovered in the daily news that the government had decided to build another international airport (one already exists in Nantes, 20km away) on the fields and forests of the humid zone that unites their communes. The agriculturists threatened by the project created the first association to oppose it, the ADECA. Four years later, the area was declared "Zone d'Aménagement Différé" ("Differed Development Zone"), a juridical status that allows the state to expropriate the land through a financial compensation. The oil crises of the 1970s delayed the beginning of the construction works, but in 2000, the socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin, relaunched the project. It was then integrated into a broader project, the metropolitanization of Nantes, the historical stronghold of the socialist party. The idea was to build a network of highways and restructured urban areas to connect the cities of Nantes and Rennes to the harbour of Saint Nazaire in order to create a pole of activities integrated to the global market.

The inhabitants of the villages of la Zad created another association, the ACIPA, which leads the Coordination of forty citizen collectives set up in 2003. Nevertheless, the expropriations began. In 2007, a first house, Le Rosier, threatened by destruction, was occupied. One year later, Bernard Hagelsteen, then prefect of the department of Loire-Atlantique, declared the project of public utility in order to legitimize and facilitate the process of eviction. After his mandate ended, he joined Vinci Highways, the enterprise designated to build and manage the airport, as the personal councillor of its general director.

The Zad of NDDL became increasingly famous inside the activist spheres and in 2009 a Climate Action Camp (CAC) was organized there. The collective of The Inhabitants Who Resist, taking distance from the citizen associations, launched a call for people to come and occupy the lands that were sold to the state. Some of the activists of the CAC decided to stay and the house of La Gaïté

▶ Riots in Nantes, Minni, 22 February 2014

was occupied. Several others followed. Collectives and citizens' associations supporting the struggle began to rise all over France attaining the number of two hundred in 2012.

This evolution can partly be explained by the diversity of the issues that this struggle covers. The humid zone is a fragile ecosystem that contains several endangered species of plants and animals. If the airport thus became a symbol of useless projects that threaten the environment, it also raised the problem of access to fields for alternative ways of growing food and of living. Moreover, the imposition of the project against the will of the majority of the inhabitants, the shared interest of the officials in charge and the builder Vinci, and the juridical and physical repression of the movement, raised issues of social justice and of the repression of social movements in contemporary societies. Finally, the

▶ Demonstration in Nantes, Minni, May 2013

occupation which opened a space of self-determination, revealed itself as an incredible collective experiment of alternatives to the Capitalist organization of social relationships.

In October 2012, 1000 cops and gendarmes launched the operation Caesar and evicted the occupied houses, destroying some of them and taking the rubble to prevent activists from rebuilding the village. One month later, on November 17th, the operation Astérix[1], a demonstration of 40 000 persons, left the village of NDDL and walked towards the Zad to reoccupy it. With the recycling materials that were brought to the zone, they built the Châteigne, a

1 From a famous Franco-Belgian comic book where a Gallic village resists Roman invasion thanks to a magic potion that gives them an incredible strength.

collective space including a kitchen, a meeting room, a bar, three sleeping areas and a bathroom (with collected rain water). On November 23rd the cops came back to stop the construction. Fights broke out and dozens of persons were injured. Nevertheless, activists stayed and the police began to circle the zone, organizing checkpoints on the main roads. Barricades were erected on strategic places and despite a particularly cold winter, squatters fought to defend the zone. The police and military occupation stopped in mid April 2013. From then on and until new events, the Zad of NDDL is a free zone.

The "Zad News"
A broadcasting device for everybody to use

"The team of the Zad News is a little team of two to three persons who did the Zad News every week for six months" (Zad News, May 6th to May 13th 2013).

The Zad News played a great role during the winter of 2012, a period where dozens of people were settling in the area, making the flow of information increasingly complex but also increasingly necessary. Edited by a little group of volunteers, this weekly newspaper includes an agenda announcing the different activities which will be hold on the zone (meetings, workshops, parties, knowledge exchanges, sports games, etc.), the program of Klaxon, the radio which pirates the waves of Vinci Highways' station, reports of previous collective meetings and decisions, small ads and demands, health prevention articles, brochures, controversies, etc.

The functioning and the contents of the newspaper gives a good idea of how the "zaddiste's"[2] daily life works. The occupied village is crossed by three main roads forming an A around which can be found the majority of the cabins. Three mailboxes are distributed on each of these paths. One on the western part of la Zad, in the media bus of La Rolandière, where a library and a copier are available, one in the eastern part, in the Sabot grocery, a free shop where you can find clothes and food from dumpster diving and donations, and one in the centre, in the Gourbi, a Do It Yourself (DIY) bar and café where lots of meetings and parties are held.

Every individual or group of individuals can post in these boxes. The procedure to follow is explained in the newspaper.

2 "Zaddistes" is the name given to the occupants of the Zad.

▶Zad News, Margot Verdier, 15 June 2015

“How to leave an appointment, a super interesting meeting, or a little ad such as “I lost my left boot last Monday”?” (Zad News, September 3rd to September 9th 2013), “If you want to pass texts, reports, flyers… Please copy it in fifty copies for an insertion in the ZN. Put it in one of the ZN mail boxes” (Zad News, June 4th to June 11th 2013).

The documents are collected every Sunday by the team in charge. They layout the information and announcements, without selecting them. The aim of the ZN is to be a broadcasting device that everyone can use. The individuals who volunteered to edit it are not supposed to appropriate it ideologically. That’s why there is no censorship and no editorial. Everyone can participate in editing the newspaper and when a team gets tired, they can place a message in the ZN, calling for a meeting to explain to the new volunteers how the process works.

“The team of the Zad News is a little team of two to three persons who did the Zad News every week for six months and we would like to stop next week. We hope that there will be people who would like to continue and we organize a meeting to speak about that next Friday” (Zad News, May 6th to May 13th 2013).

One of the main function of the ZN is thus to facilitate the organization of

activities that work on the principle of Do It Yourself. An individual or a group of individuals who wants to organize a meeting, to build a cabin, or to launch a party, can make an appointment to find people ready to invest themselves in the project.

“Thursday 6. 10 AM. “Well” workshop in the 100 Noms” (Zad News, June 4th to June 11th 2013), “Wednesday 4. 9 AM. Potatoes workshop in Le Rosier. Leave with your potatoes. French fries evening after” (Zad News, September 3rd to September 9th 2013), “Wednesday 18. 2 PM. Discussion around the creation of a space dedicated to multiple sport activities in Le Gourbi” (Zad News December 17th to December 23rd 2013).

The ZN is distributed every Monday by volunteers who come to take the copies at the meeting point announced in the previous edition. They thus divide the work of delivery in order to ensure that every occupied place of la Zad gets its copy. It is indeed very important that everyone accesses information to maintain a horizontal collective organization. That’s also why reports of decision making processes are publicized in the newspaper.

Meetings and General Assemblies

The collective organization that is built by the occupants of la Zad relies on anti-authoritarian principles and practices. It is based on the will to bring out a radical individual freedom and a strong inter-individual solidarity. Debates and decision making processes are the pillars of this system. I counted an average of 5 meetings per week, never less than 3 and sometimes up to 9. These numbers take into account the regular appointments and the occasional workshops designed to discuss particular events and problems. This doesn’t include the decision making procedures that each collective of habitation hold in autonomy from the broader issues that concern the society of the occupants.

In anti-authoritarian practices, the inter-individual cooperation follows a principle of elective association. The individual can choose the groups and activities in which he, she or they want to invest themselves, assume several roles, change them or be removed if they come to constitute a status of authority. Each individual associates themselves to others depending on their affinities and goals and participates in collective living through the different strata that structure it. There is, for example, several decision making procedures

depending on the level of collectivization of the issues that are raised.

“Thursday 5. 7 PM. Meeting inhabitants in La Saulce Tomate (a new house)” (Zad News, September 3rd to September 9th 2013).

Once a week, the inhabitants of the Zad gather to exchange information, suggest different activities, debate and take decisions on the daily life in the occupied village. Everyone is invited to participate and represent themselves or the group with whom they are living. Decisions are taken on the principle of consensus, which means that a proposal is accepted if no opposition is expressed. The individual has a veto allowing them to refer the decision to further discussions, in order to, if it is possible, find a compromise.

“Tuesday 11. 8 PM. Inter-opponents General Assembly in La Vacherit” (Zad News, June 4th to June 11th 2013).

Every two weeks, the Inter-opponents General Assembly (GA) unites the occupants living according to the anti-authoritarian ideas and the squatters and militants of citizen associations. The GA works on the same basis as the inhabitants meeting.

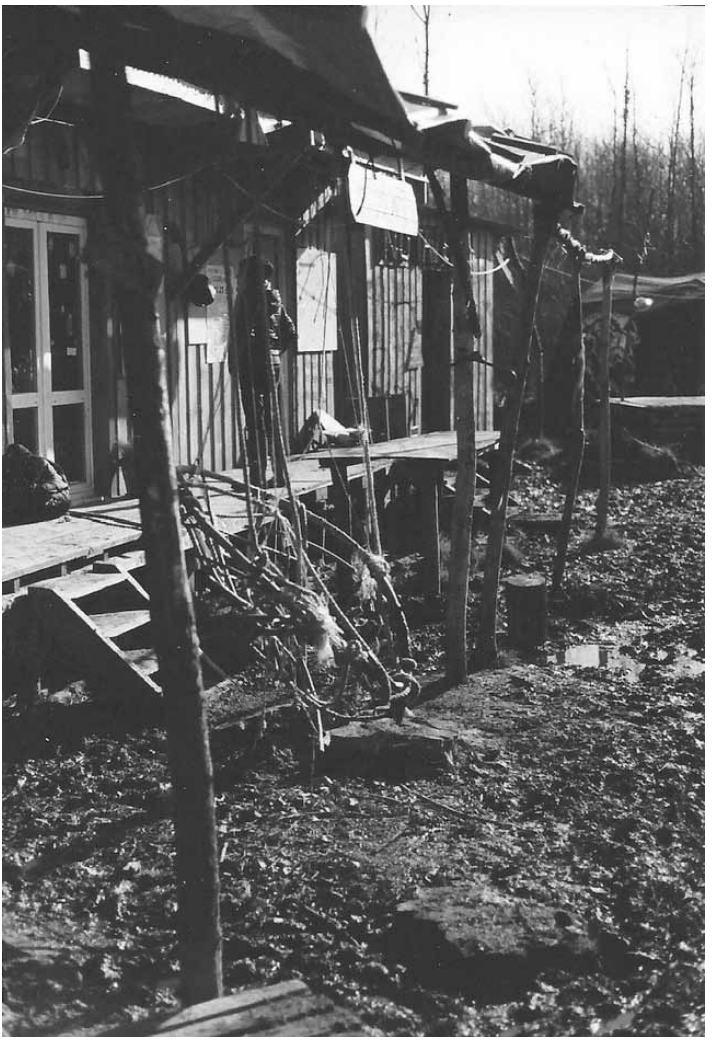
The aim of this procedures is to allow the emergence of a real individual and collective autonomy. Every strata corresponds to a different level of collective structuring. This stratification helps facilitating the diffusion of informations and decision making procedures within an anti-authoritarian system where people can freely differentiate themselves from one another. Controversies and conflicts are both a consequence of this model of social organization and essential elements to its preservation. The issue is then to prioritize what will be discussed in each of the strata. Living Collectives where the consensus on values between individuals is often stronger take decisions on the daily life of their group. They can then join, individually or as a group, the inhabitants meeting where there is a strong consensus on the general anti-authoritarian ideas but less on how to put it in practice (for instance “Is raising sheep a form of exploitation?”). Here individuals and people from the different collectives take decisions on their cohabitation and the general needs of the village. Same principle for the GA where the issues concerning the interactions between anti-authoritarian activists and citizen associations on the area and in the struggle are discussed.

Other regular meetings are held to discuss more specific questions and activities such as the radio, the bakery, the medical team, the non-mixed women, lesbian and transsexual assembly, etc.

“Wednesday 5. 7.30 PM. GA Sème ta Zad in La Châteigne” (Zad News, June 4th to June 11th 2013).

For instance, the Sème ta Zad collective assembles every two weeks in La Châteigne. On April 13 2013, a demonstration of re-cultivation unfolded under the rain, in a festive atmosphere. Despite the attempt of cops, two days later, to re-organize a checkpoint to disturb the event, it was a success. The collective that was formed then, aims to create more links between new comers interested in alternative ways of growing food and local farmers. They exchange knowledge and resources and help each other in their current projects. With the assistance of the collective of the Naturalists in struggle, they mapped the area in order to help people choosing places of settlement that would not endanger the most fragile ecosystems of the zone.

▶ “If those down move, those above fall”, Minni, January 2013



▶The meeting room of La Châteigne, Minni, February 2014

For a free access to resources and knowledge

“Friday 6. 5 PM to 7 PM. No Marché at the Released Crossroad. Vegetables, bread, creamery and +++, at free price”.

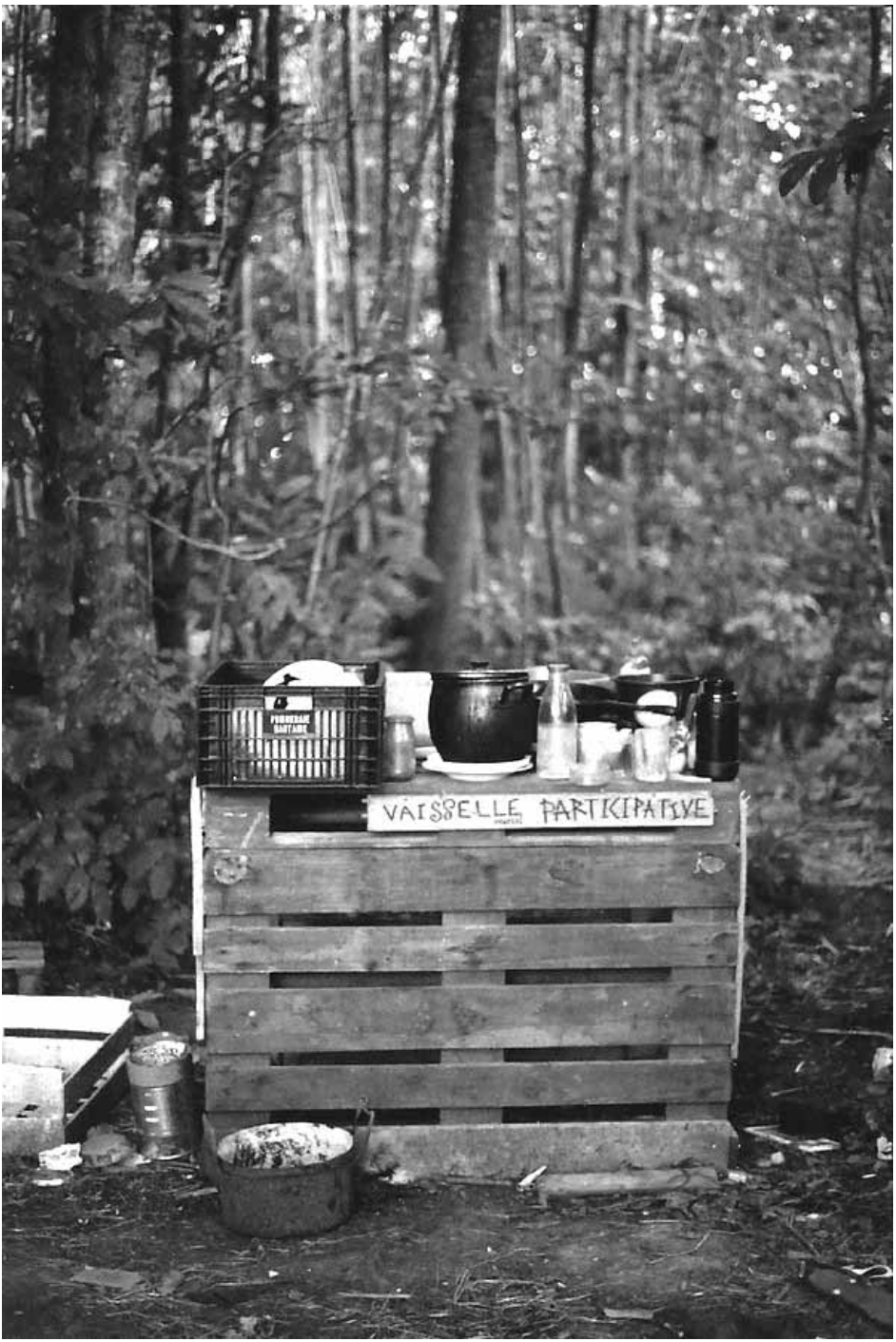
From the first harvests was created the No Marché, a market where vegetables, aromatic and medicinal herbs, bread, cheeses, milk and cream that are produced by the occupants are sold at “prix libre”. Usually translated as “donation” in English, “prix libre” literally means “Free price” which implies that you can donate

as much as you want to or can give, but also that if you have no money, you can still get what you need. The only requirement is to be responsible and leave enough for the others.

Several Free shops distributed in different places of the area enable the storage and distribution of the surplus of clothes and food from donations and dumpster diving. Libraries and Info shops that can be found in many of the collective spaces and houses, offer books, comics, brochures and leaflets that can either be borrowed or simply taken. Apart from the inter-individual sharing of goods, the collective workshop of La Châteigne has tools that can be borrowed for a short time. In Les Fosses Noires, a DIY bike shop offers the possibility for everyone to build and repair his, her or their bike. A few steps away, the internet caravan containing several recycled computers offers an (aleatory!) internet connection. Different places give access to drinking water (people usually collect rain water to do their laundry, dishes and showers and use dry toilets), electricity, washing machines and hot showers.

“Wednesday 1. 4 PM. French-Spanish exchange” (Zad News, April 29th to May 7th 2013). “Tuesday 9. 3 PM. Botanical trip and knowledge exchange on wild plants. Max. 15 people, we leave at 3PM” (Zad News, May 6th to May 13th 2013). “Thursday 17. 2 PM. Sewing workshop in Bellevue” (Zad News, December 17th to December 23rd 2013).

From workshops where you can learn while helping others to more specific appointments dedicated to the transmission of particular skills (How to recognize an edible wild plant? How to use philosophy to understand occupation processes? How to build a wind turbine? Etc.), knowledge exchanges constitute an important part of the activities which take place on the Zad. Capitalist society is based on an important social division of labour where economical, social, political and cultural functions are hierarchical. It thus results in a set unequally organized social status. One of the most important distinctions which class society has brought to its paroxysm, is the separation between intellectual and manual labour. Some conceive, design and order while others execute. In anti-authoritarian experiences such as the Zad, the social division of labour exists but functions are not hierarchical, authority statuses are perpetually questioned and the individual can freely participate in the conception of a critical text against the airport, the organization of a decision making process or of a musical event, the building of a cabin, the harvests, etc.



▶ “Participatory dishes”, Minni, August 2014

►DIY bike workshop, “Bring your bike dead or alive”, Minni, January 2013

“Tuesday 7. 2 PM. Hors Contrôle field. Workshop to empty the field. We take care of our wastes and abandoned stuffs and share a snack and a drink!” (Zad News, May 6th to May 13th 2013). “Saturday 15. 10 AM. Rendez-vous in Les Planchettes to take the Zad wastes to the dump of Notre-Dame-des-Landes” (Zad News, June 11th to June 18th 2013).

Wage labour is replaced by the socialization of production activities. Food, clothes, tools, housing, etc. are produced by groups of individuals that associate themselves through the pursuit of a project that they conceive and realize together according to their desires, needs and skills. Everybody is encouraged to participate in the daily tasks and hard work is done collectively.

Conflicts and Controversies
The real utopia: a revolution that is never achieved

Obviously, these ideals are not always strictly observed and inter-individual relationships can be complicated. Dishes which cannot (unfortunately!) wash themselves, tools which (inexplicably!) disappear, collective spaces that are (conceptually!) redecorated without the consent of other inhabitants, lead to more or less intense conflicts.

Apart from these little arguments of the daily life, some controversies raise issues that engage the whole collectivity of the occupants.

“Wednesday 5. 7 PM to 9 PM. Workshop “Be with” to listen, understand, accept and respect each other in le Gourbi”. “Thursday 6. 10 AM to 12 AM. Workshop “Be with” Session 2 at Gourbi” (Zad News, June 4th to June 11th 2013). “Thursday 13. 10.30 AM to 12.30 AM. Workshop “Be with” Gourbi” (Zad News, June 11th to June 18th 2013).

In June 2013, an important conflict broke out. Participants of a GA that was held some weeks earlier, following the decision of the assembly, began the destruction of a barricade which hindered access to a field. A group of people opposed to the decision sat on the barricade to prevent the farmers’ trucks from rebuilding the road. A violent fight eventually burst out. The collective reaction was immediate. Several meetings were launched to open space for the expression of the dispute. Soon enough, deeper divides appeared. Those who prevented the destruction of the barricade, were accused of not having

▶ Gourbi's DIY bar and cafe, Minni, May 2013

participated in the decision making processes, opposed to the violence some of them have shown, the symbolic violence they experienced in meetings and GAs.

In the Zad of NDDL people come from very diverse social backgrounds. The barricade conflict revealed a divide between individuals with a strong activist experience, often from middle class backgrounds, with a higher level of education and easier access to material and social resources, who perfectly master the ideological norms and invest themselves greatly in the collective structures and activities, and individuals who had less activist experience, more often from working classes, with a lower level of study and less access to material and social resources, who control less ideological standards. Statuses of authority emerged from the involvement of the "good militants" and it was more difficult for others to be considered as legitimate in the meetings.

These problems where extensively debated in the meetings, GAs and exceptional workshops which followed the event. Several experiments were undertaken to open the decision making procedures to people who would otherwise not feel comfortable in the debates and to prevent the institutionalization of authority status (from the practices of speech circulation, to

the places where the discussions must be held, through the forms that they must take and the modalities of the diffusion and appropriation of information on the area). The reports of some of these meetings were published in the ZN. Written controversies followed. They tried to analyse the functioning of the zaddiste social organization and the conditions of the emergence of power relationships ("A propos du mépris de classe sur la Zad" ("About the class contempt on the Zad"), and "A propos du texte: mépris de classe sur la Zad" ("About the text: class contempt on the Zad"), July 2013).

Conclusion

The organization of la Zad of NDDL is deeply influenced by the idea of a permanent social revolution. The aim is to build a sufficiently flexible collective organization with space for genuine questioning. These anti-authoritarian practices participate to the mutations of contemporary social movements. All around the world, squatting movements have emerged and established links of solidarity which promote the exchanges of knowledge and reflections. In France, the struggle of the Zad of NDDL has inspired the development of multiple occupations in urban and rural areas. Despite the physical and juridical repression that they undergo, the activists resist to defend the other worlds they build.

Through the Zad News, I tried to explain some of the values and the practices of one of these experiences. Its richness and its complexity cannot however be entirely transcribed here. Some things are particularly difficult to describe. Time and space do not have the same sense in a place where the clock does not compel the activities of daily life, and where spatial organization does not fit a plan but is formed and modified to suit individual and collective desires and needs. Similarly, the requirement of freedom and of collective goodwill completely modify the forms of sociability that we usually experience. All this to say, that to be truly understood, these experiences have to be lived.

More info (also in English): zad.nadir.org

►from: zadforever.blog/

The Revenge against the Commons[1]

by zadforever

This is a long read by one of the inhabitants of the Zad, about the the fortnight rollercoaster of rural riots that has just taken place to evict the liberated territory of the zad. It's been incredibly intense and hard to find a moment to write, but we did our best. This is simply one viewpoint, there are over 1000 people on the zone at the moment and every one of them could tell a different story. Thank you for all the friends and comrades who helped by sharing their stories, rebel spirits and lemon juice against the tear gas.

"The Revenge against the Commons of the zad or Why France's biggest police operation since May 68 is prepared to kill for Macron's Neoliberal Nightmare. "We must bring into being the world we want to defend. These cracks where people find each other to build a beautiful future are important. This is how the zad is a model." (Naomi Klein)

"What is happening at Notre-Dame-des-Landes illustrates a conflict that concerns the whole world" (Raoul Vaneigem)

The police helicopter hovers above, its bone rattling clattering never seems to stop. At night its long godlike finger of light penetrates our cabins and farm houses. It has been so hard to sleep this last week. Even dreaming, it seems, is a crime on the zad. And that's the point: these 4000 acres of autonomous territory, this zone to defend (zad), has existed despite the state and capitalism for nearly a decade and no government can allow such a place to flourish. All territories that are inhabited by people who bridge the gap between dream and action have to be crushed before their hope begins to spread. This is why France's biggest police operation since May 1968, at a cost of 400,000 euros a day, has been trying to evict us with its 2500 gendarmes, armoured vehicles (APCs), bulldozers, rubber bullets, drones, 200 cameras and 11,000 tear gas and stun grenades fired since the operation began at 3.20am on the morning of the 9th of April.

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1 Posted on https://zadforever.blog/, April 2018

The state said that these would be “targeted evictions”, claiming that there were up to 80 ‘radical’ zadists that would be hunted down, and that the rest, the ‘good’ zadists, would have to legalise or face the same fate. The good zadist was a caricature of the gentle ‘neo rural farmer’ returning to the land, the bad, an ultra violent revolutionary, just there to make trouble. Of course this was a fantasy vision to feed the state’s primary strategy, to divide this diverse popular movement that has managed to defeat 3 different French governments and win France’s biggest political victory of a generation.

The zad was initially set up as a protest against the building of a new airport for the city of Nantes, following a letter by residents distributed during a climate camp in 2009, which invited people to squat the land and buildings: ‘because’ as they wrote ‘only an inhabited territory can be defended’. Over the years this territory earmarked for a mega infrastructure project, evolved into Europe’s largest laboratory of commoning. Before the French state started to bulldoze our homes, there were 70 different living spaces and 300 inhabitants nestled into this checkerboard landscape of forest, fields and wetlands. Alternative ways of living with each other, fellow species and the world are experimented with 24/7. From making our own bread to running a pirate radio station, planting herbal medicine gardens to making rebel camembert, a rap recording studio to a pasta production workshop, an artisanal brewery to two blacksmiths forges, a communal justice system to a library and even a full scale working lighthouse – the zad has become a new commune for the 21st century. Messy and bemusing, this beautifully imperfect utopia in resistance against an airport and its world has been supported by a radically diverse popular movement, bringing together tens of thousands of anarchists and farmers, unionists and naturalists, environmentalists and students, locals and revolutionaries of every flavour.

But everything changed on the 17th of January 2018, when the French prime minister appeared on TV to cancel the airport project and in the same breath say that the zad, the ‘outlaw zone’ would be evicted and law and order returned. I am starting to write 8 days into the attack, it’s Tuesday the 17th of April my diary tells me, but days, dates even hours of the day seem to merge into a muddled bath of adrenaline socked intensity, so hard to capture with words. We are so tired, bruised and many badly injured. Medics have counted 270 injuries so far. Lots due to the impact of rubber bullets, but most from the sharp metal and plastic shrapnel shot from the stun and concussion grenades whose explosions punctuate the spring symphony of birdsong. Similar grenades killed

21 year old ecological activist Remi Fraise during protests against an agro industrial damn in 2014.

The zad's welcome and information centre, still dominated by a huge hand painted map of the zone, has been transformed into a field hospital. Local doctors have come in solidarity working with action medic crews, volunteer acupuncturists and healers of all sorts and the comrades ambulance is parked outside. The police have even delayed ambulances leaving the zone with injured people in them, and when its the gendarmerie that evacuates seriously injured protesters from the area sometimes they have been abandoning them in the street far from the hospital or in one case in front of a psychiatric clinic.

The thousands of acts of solidarity have been a life line for us, including sabotaged French consulate parkings in Munich to local pensioners bringing chocolate bars, musicians sending in songs they composed to demonstrations by Zapatistas in Chiapas, banners in front of French embassies everywhere – from Dehli to New York, a giant message carved in the sand of a New Zealand beach and even scuba divers with an underwater banner. Here on the zone three activist field kitchens have come to feed us, architects have written a column deploring the destruction of unique forms of habitat signed by 50,000 people and locals have been offering storage for the safe keeping of our belongings. A true culture of resistance has evolved in parallel with the zad over the years. Not many people are psychologically or physically prepared to fight on the barricades, but thousands are ready to give material support in all its forms and this is the foundation of any struggle that wants to win. It means opening up to those who might be different, those that might not have the same revolutionary analysis as us, those who some put in their box named 'reformist', but this is what building a composition is all about, it is how we weave a true ecology of resistance. As a banner reads on one of the squatted farmhouses here, Pas de barricadieres sans cuisiniers "There are no (female) barricaders without (male) cooks."

Today has been one of the calmest since the start of the operation, and it felt like the springtime was really flowering, so we opened all the doors and windows of house letting the spring air push away the toxic fumes of tear gas that still linger on our clothes. It feels like there is a momentary lull. For the first time since the evictions, our collective all ate together, sitting in the sun at a long table surrounded by two dozen friends from across the world come to support us. I

hear the buzzing of a bee trying to find nectar and look up into the sky, its not a bee at all, but the police drone, come to film us sharing food, it hovers for hours. In the end this is the greatest crime we have committed on the zad, that of building the commons, sharing worlds together and deserting the pathology of individualism.

Two years before the abandonment of the airport project the movement declared in a text entitled The Six Points for the Zad: Because there will be no Airport, that we would, via an entity that emerged from the movement , collectively look after these lands that we were saving from certain death by concrete. A few months before the abandonment the form that this entity took was the Assembly of Usages. Soon after thethe airport was cancelled, we entered into negotiations with the state (via the Prefect Nicole Klein, who represents the state in the department) following a complicated week of pre-negotiations, where we were forced to open up one of the roads which had had cabins built on it since the attempted evictions of 2012. It seemed that the flow of traffic through the zone was the state's way of telling the public that law and order had returned on the zone. (see the text ZAD Will Survive for a view of this complicated period1). A united delegation of 11 people made up from the NGOs, farmers, naturalists and occupiers of the zone attended the negotiations and did not flinch from the demand to set up a collective legal land structure, rather than return these lands to private property and agro-business as usual. In the 1980s a similar legal structure was put in place following the victory of a mass movement against the expansion of a military base on the plateau of the Larzac in Southern France. With this precedent in mind we provided a legally solid document for a global land contract, but it was ignored, no legal grounds were given, the refusal was entirely political. Three days later the evictions began.

The battle lines were made clear, it was not about bringing 'law and order' back to the zone, but a battle between private property, and those who share worlds of capitalism against the commons. The battle of the zad is a battle for the future, one that we cannot loose.

DAY 1: Monday 9th April – Everything Begins in the dark

The telephone rings, it's 3.20am, it's still dark outside, a breathless voice says two simple words, "It's begun !" and hangs up. Everyone knows what to do, some run to offices filled with computers, others to the barricades, some to

►During the picnic action someone holds up a sign “The zad is ours” , from: zadforever.blog/

the pirate radio (Radio Klaxon, which happens to squat the airwaves of Vinci motorway radio, 107,7, the construction company that was going to build and run the airport) others start their medics shift. Hundreds of police vans are taking over the two main roads that pass through the zone.

Fighting on one of the lanes manages to stop the cops moving further west. But elsewhere the bulldozers smash their way through some of the most beautiful cabins made of adobe and the wastes of the world that rose out of the the mud in the east of the zone, they destroy the Lama Sacrée with its stunning wooden watch tower, permaculture gardens and green houses are flattened and they rip gashes in the forest. A large mobile anti riot wall is erected by the police in the lane that stretches east to west, a technique that works in cities but in rural riots it’s useless and people spend all morning hassling them from every angle. Despite gas and stun grenades we hold our ground. Journalists are blocked for a while from entering, the police stating that they will provide their own footage (free of copyrights!). The “press group” gives them directions so that they

manage to cross the fields and the pictures dominate the morning news. There are over a dozen of us are facing a line of hundreds of robocops at the other end of the field. One of us, masked up and dressed in regulation black kway is holding a golf club. He kneels down and places a golf T in the wet grass. He pulls a golf ball out of a big supermarket bag and serenely places it in the T. He takes a swipe, the ball bounces off the riot shields. He takes out another ball and another and another.

In the afternoon the cops and bailiffs arrive at the 100 noms, an off grid small holding with sheep, chickens, veg plots, and beautiful housing including a cabin built by a young deserting architect which resembles a giant knights helmet made with geodesic plates of steel. The occupiers, who have built this place up from nothing over 5 years are given 10 minutes to leave by the bailiff. Several hundred people turn up to resist, many from 'the camp of the white haired ones' which hasbrought together the pensioners and elders, who have called it a camp for "the youth of all ages" and have been one of the backbonesof this long struggle. There must be nearly 200 of us, at the 100 noms, this time no one is masked up. A massive block of robocops is coming up the path, some of us climb on the roof of the newly built sheep barn, others form a line of bodies pressed hard against the riot shields, we are peasants and activists, occupiers and visitors, young and old and they beat us, burn our skin with their pepper spray and push us out of the fields.

We reply with a joyful hail of mud that covers their visors and shields. The people on the roof are brought down by the specialists climbers and the bulldozer does its job. A few minutes later a one of their huge demolition machines gets stuck in the mud, a friend shouts ironically to the crowd: "come on let's go and give it hand and push it out!", Hundreds approach, trails of gas take over the blue sky, dozens of canisters rain down on the wetlands, many falling into the ponds which begin to bubble with their toxic heat. I try to console Manu whose home, a tall skinny wooden cabin with a climbing wall on its side, has just been flattened, my hugs cannot stop his sobs. Our eyes are red with tears of grief and gas.

In the logic of the state, the 100 Noms (one place) ticked many of their fantasy boxes of those want to be legalised, 'the good zadists'. It was a well functioning small holding, producing meat and vegetables and where the sheep were more legal than its inhabitants. It was a project that had the support of many of the locals. Its destruction lit a spark that brought many of those in the movement

who had felt a bit more distant from the zad recently back into the fold of the resistance. Of course its no less disgusting than the flattening of all the other homes and cabins, but the battle here is as much on the symbolic terrain as in the bocage and it is seems to be a strategic blunder to destroy the 100 Noms. The live twitter videos from the attack are watched by tens of thousands, news of the evictions spreads and a shock wave ripples through France. Actions begin to erupt in over 100 places, some town halls are occupied, the huge Millau bridge over 1000 km away is blockaded as is the weapon factory that makes the grenades in Western Brittanny.

The demolition continues till late, but the barricades grow faster at night, and we count the wounded.

DAY 2: Tuesday 10th April – Between a barricade and a tank

It all begins again before sun rise, the communication system on the zone with its hundreds of walkie talkies, old style truck drivers cb's and pirate radio station calls us to go and defend the Vraie Rouge collective, which is next to the the zad's largest vegetable garden and medicinal herb project. We arrive through the fields to find one of the armoured cars pushed up against the barricade, we stand firm the barricade between us and the APC. We prepare paint bombs to try and cover the APC's windows with. Then the tear gas begins to rain amongst the salad and spinach plants. A friend finds a terrified journalist cowering in one of the cabins, she writes for the right wing Figaro newspaper and is a bit out of place with her red handbag. "What's that noise??" she asks, trembling, "the stun grenades" he replies. "But why aren't you counter attacking?" she says, "where are your pétanque balls covered in razor blades?" Our friend laughs despite the gas poisoning his lungs, "we never had such things, it was a right wing media invention, and it's impossible anyway, no one can weld razor blades onto a pétanque ball! "

There is so much gas, we can no longer see beyond our stinging running noses. The police are being pressurised simultaneously from the other side of the road by a large militant crowd with gas masks, make shift shields, stones, slingshots and tennis rackets to return the grenades. They are playing hide and seek from behind the trees. The armoured car begins to push the barricade, some of us climb onto the roof of the two story wooden cabin, others try to retreat without crushing the beautiful vegetable plot. Its over, the end of another collective living

space on the zone. Then we hear a roar from the other side of the barricade. Dozens of figures emerge from the forest, molotov cocktails fly, one hits the APC, flames rise from the amour and the wild roar transforms itself into a cry of pure joy. The APC begins to back off as do the police. The Vraie Rouge will live one more day it seems, thanks to diversity of tactics.

In 2012 when we managed to stop the first eviction attempts of the zone, this was what gave us an advantage. Over the 50 years that the movement against the airport lasted, it used everything from petitions to hunger strikes, legal challenges to sabotage, riots to citizens ecological inventories of the zone, defensive tree houses to flying rocks, tractor blockades to clown armies. Its secret weapon was the respect we had for each others' tactics and an incredible ability to try and not condemn each other. Pacifist Pensioners and black bloc worked together in a way that I had never seen before, which made criminalising the movement much more complicated for the government. Movements win when they have the richest most colourful palette of tactics at their disposition and they are ready to use everyone of them at the right time and place.

In a woodland dip to the east of the zone, the Cheverie, is still resisting. A huge high cabin made from different types of swirling coloured clay – brown, grey, ochre and white – punctuated by mosaics and carved spiders, constructed by hundreds of hands, is about to be crushed. Hundreds of gendarmes surround it, one of them seems to have a machine gun strapped to his back. From the roof someone uses a traffic cone as a megaphone: "we are defending life and the living." When the cabin is finally brought down a minor miracle occurs, none of the dozens of windows is broken, which will make it much easier to rebuild. At the Fosses Noires, the brewery has been turned into a canteen, but the tear gas is falling on the pots, pans and piles of donated of vegetables. After lunch, a second press conference takes place, yesterday the first one had brought dozens of TV cameras and microphones from radios across the country, 8 people from all the composition of the movement faced the cameras, their dignified anger was so powerful, so palpable, many of us shed tears listening. Today there are 30 inhabitants are in front of the cameras, it is those that have an agricultural and craft projects running on the zone, the tanner is there as is the cheese maker, the potter and market gardeners, cow herders and leather workers. They explain how over the last weeks of negotiations with the state, they handed over documents to develop a collective project within a legal non-

►One of the lanes where clashes take regularly take place, from: zadforever.blog/

profit association that had been set up. They show that on this bocage to think ecologically is to realise that all the projects are interdependent, rotating the fields between folk, sharing tools and and everyone helping out on each others projects when needed. To divide the zad into individual separate units makes no sense.

But the words are not as strong as the striking image of Sarah, our young shepherdess who like a modern day madonna holds a dead black lamb on here lap. She explains how her flock was legalised already and that this one died from stress when it was moved from the 100 Noms farm to avoid the evictions. Her grey eyes pierce the camera lenses, “they chose violence, they chose to destroy what we build, they chose to break off the dialogue with us.” Whilem a young farmer, whose milk herd squats fields to the west, raises his trembling voice, “ If there is no collective agriculture then you get what’s already happening in the countryside – individualism: eat up your neighbours farm land, be more and more alone with a bigger and bigger farm,” he takes a deep breath, “the isolation

is pushing farmers to commit suicide, we are more and more alone on our farms faced with increasing difficulties. On the zad we hold a vision of farming for all, not just for us."

The zad makes a call for a mass picnic the following day. Vincent one of the supporting farmers from the region, a member of COPAIN 44, a network of rebel farmers whose tractors have become one of our most iconic and useful tools of resistance, sighs, "the government has broken any possibility of dialogue now, they have forced us to respond with a struggle for power." Between the tall poles that hold the breweries' hop plants a long banner is raised, "Nicole Klein radicalised me."

DAY 3: Wednesday 11th April – Gassing a Picnic

We are woken as normal by the explosions of gendarmes grenades, fighting continues near the D281 road. A small group is trying to stop the police lining up in a field, there aren't many of us, it feels hopeless, then out of the morning mist comes a tractor, its driver wears a balaclava, in the front bucket – a tonne of stones. He drops them in a pile just where we are standing, puts the tractor in reverse and disappears back into the mist.

In the next door field a towering guy wearing a balaclava and dressed in a full monks habit throws a bucket of water over a handful of robocops – "I baptise you in the name of the zad", he bellows. A cloud of pepper spray engulfs him, but one the gendarmes slips in the mud and drop his truncheon, at the speed of light the monk grabs it and runs off, wielding his rebel relic in the air. The police megaphone calls out "You must return the state's property. Return it now!"
At lunch time, over a thousand people turn up to share a picnic in the fields. Over thirty tractors have come, some from far, despite the fact that its one of the busiest seasons for the farmers, they encircle the large Rouge et Noir collective vegetable garden, now littered with hundreds of toxic plastic tear gas canisters. "The state crossed the red line when they destroyed the 100 Noms" one of them says.

The crowd of all ages walk through the barricades and debris of yesterday's battle that litter the country lanes. The atmosphere is festive, a samba band with pink masks leads us into the field beside the Lama Sacrée. A long line of black clad police stretches across the spring green pasture. The samba band

▶La Chévrerie a few hours after its destruction (photo: Penelope Thomaidi), from: zadforever.blog/

approach, then all hell lets loose: gas canisters shower down, dozens of stun grenades are thrown into the peaceful crowd, panic ensues, people retreat across the hedgerows.

The houses of la Boite Noire, Dalle à Caca, Jesse James and la Gaité fall in the east. Simultaneously they attack la Grée, the large rambling grafitti covered farm at the centre of the zone that has an unconditional welcome policy. There is a car repair workshop, climbing wall and the rap studio and many folk escaping the misery of street life and addictions end up living there together. Farmers' tractors are surrounding the building, a barricade made from the carcasses of cars, is set alight. But the tear gas is too strong and the tractors are forced to back off.

Out of the mist of gas come black lumbering troops, they charge across the fields. The whole zone is split in two by a seemingly endless lines of robocops stretching east to west. The crowd is dispersed, people are coughing up their

lungs, they are furious. It began as a picnic, now it's a war zone again. The gas clouds cling to the pasture, frightened cows huddle together in a corner of a tiny field. The medic post at the Fosses Noires has to move away to the Gourbi, but then the gas catches up with it there too and it moves to La Rolandière just in time before the police arrive to smash one of the zone's most symbolic sites, the Gourbi.

In the very centre of the zad the Gourbi is where the weekly assembly of occupiers is held and Friday's No-market, a place where excess produce is distributed with no fixed price but by donation only. Initially there was a stone farm house there, inhabited by an old couple who were evicted in 2012 and their home destroyed for the airport project. Then a wooden hut was built in its place, but its ramshackle pallet sides soon needed restoring and so a brand new state of the art cabin like meeting house was built over 2015. But one night someone sneaked into this beautiful meeting house and set it alight.

But Gourbi was to rise from the ashes, and as an ironic response to the governments 2016 local consultation about the airport project, we held an all night building party whilst the results came through (55% for building the new airport). To the sound of a wild one man accordion band doing kitsch covers of Queen and other trashy pop songs, hundreds of people stuffed the clay of the wetlands into a huge geodesic metal dome structure to build our new round meeting house. It was made of steel and mud to resist arson, but today the bulldozer crushed it with a single swipe of its blade. Worlds away in the metropolis, the Minister of Interior, Gérard Collomb, tells parliament "We want to avoid all violence in this country, this is what we are doing at Notre-Dame-des-Landes."

By sunset the government claims to have evicted 13 more living spaces, bringing the total to 29 since Monday. The prime minister refuses to pause the operations, and the medic team share horrific photos of some of the 60 injuries since Monday, including 3 journalists. Meanwhile the cops release their figures: 32 injuries, but it turns out most are from the mis use of their own weapons. Solidarity actions pour in from thousands, including squatters in Iceland, farmers in Lebanon and eco builders in Columbia. In Paris, sex workers send in kinky zad themed S and M photos and students occupy the EHSS elite social science school in solidarity. That afternoon electricity is cut across a large part of the zone and many of our neighbors homes outside of the zad. It is a tactic

reminiscent of collective punishment used during military occupations. At night the gentle lulling croak of mating frogs in the marches mixes with the hum of back up electric generators. Four hundred of us meet at the Wardine, in the old concrete cow shed covered in bright murals, we share stories, dogs bark, tempers fray.

DAY 4: Thursday 12th April – Are they ready to Kill ?

The day begins with some good news on radio Klaxon. An affinity group action just shut down the motorway that passes near the zad. Emerging from the bushes they flowed down onto the tarmac armed with tyres, fluorescent jackets and lighters. Within seconds a burning wall blocked the flow of commuters to Nantes. The group disappeared just as quickly as they materialised, melting back into the hedgerows. The more we fight for this land, the more we become the bocage and the harder it is to find us. Every day more and more people converge here, many for the first time in their lives.The art of the barricade continues across the zone, including one topped with an old red boat. Some of our most useful barricades are mobile, in the form of tractors, dozens of COPAIN 44's machines take over the main cross roads of the zone.

Following an attempt by friendly lawyers to prove that the eviction of the 100 noms was illegal, the prefect is forced to appear in court in Nantes, but the case is adjourned. The indefatigable zad press group sends out a new communique entitled, After 3 days of evictions are they ready to kill because they don't want a collective ? Clashes continues across the bocage as Macron take to the TV screens for a national statement about his policies. A social movement is rising against him, with university occupations, supermarket, rail workers and Air France on strike – he has to respond. The mise-en-scène is bizarre, he sits in a primary school class room. He speaks about the zad for a little over a minute, "republican order must be returned" he says, and "everything that was to be evacuated has already been evacuated".

As he speaks a hundred and fifty concussion grenades are launched in less than half an hour in the Lama Sacrée field, the explosions echo across the bocage, bursting the ear drums of those nearby and raising the anxiety levels of those within hearing distance, which on this flat landscape of the zad, is all of us. The league of Human Rights demands that all parties come back to the table. A call is sent for people to converge on the Zone on Sunday: " The time has come to

find ourselves together, to say that the zad must live, to dress our wounds and re build ourselves.."

We walk home to la Rolandière, with its ship shaped library attached to the lighthouse, built where they wanted to build the airport control tower. The sun is setting, 20m high up on the lighthouse's balcony a lone figure is playing a trumpet, fluid sumptous jazz floats across the forest. It is one of those moments when you remember why you live here.

That night under a clear constellation filled sky, the Assembly of Usages meets. We sit on wooden hand made bleechers under Le hangar de l'avenir (The Barn of the future). This cathedral like barn was built by over 80 traditional carpenters in 2016 using mostly hand tools, it is ornamented with snakes and salamanders carved into the oak beams. There are several hundred of us at the assembly, one of the peasants whose tractor is blocking the crossroads reads out a series of texts messages he has received from the préfete (prefect) who is trying to negotiate with COPAIN 44. "Yesterday the Prime minister said it was war, today the president says its peace, therefore it's all over." It's clear that she's feeling that the situation has become much more complicated than predicted. A deal is made, move your tractors she writes, and I promise that by 10pm I will announce to Ouest France, the regional news paper, that it is the end of operations by the Gendarmes.

The meeting continues, we wait for the article to appear on the newspaper's web site. I reload my phone endlessly waiting for the site to update. Suddenly it does, but it's just a story about rock legend Johnny Hallyday, was it all a bluff ? Then it arrives, half an hour late. A cheer rises from the tired voices. At home we try to party a little, at least we might get a lie in tomorrow morning, it seems that it's over for the time being?

DAY 5: Friday 13th April – Utopias with teeth

I'm half awake, there is a rumble of vehicles on the road… At first I think it's tractors, then I see the lights, blue and flashing, van after van of cops passing. We leap out of bed and run to the top of the lighthouse, the entire road is filled with vans as far as the eye can see. The huge barricade at the crossroads, which the tractors left last night following the préfete's announcement, is on fire, a plume of black smoke frames the the orange dawn. The familiar pop of tear gas

▶ The toxic dawn mist in the bocage,
from: zadforever.blog/

cops are heading towards the Rosier. The Lascar barricade, made of several burnt cars, with a huge metal doorway and a trench that is several meters wide, is being defended by a nearly 100 of us. The forest is wrapped in toxic mist, ghostly rebel silhouette run from tree to tree, stones are aimed at the robocops with catapults that were made by Andre, an 83 year old who set up a production line for us during the eviction threats of 2016, his team churned out 1000. The cops throw stun grenades blindly from the fields into the forest, one explodes just above my head, caught in the tree it rips the bark into smithereens. Is this what they call the end of operations?

A communiqué from the gendarmerie explains that they are clearing the roads and are not doing any expulsions or knocking down any squats, but that they are looking to arrest people who fired a distress rocket at their helicopter. At la Grée they take away two people but not for that charge. The gas pushes everyone back from the Lascar's barricade and the grinders come out to cut the metal gateway into pieces. Despite the rising clouds of tear gas, people on the roof of the brand new Ambazada, a building that will host folk from intergalactic

struggles, manage to sing some of our re purposed folk songs, recount the history of the struggle of the zad.

Then a moment of joy, one of the armoured cars attacking the Lascar tips into a ditch and has to be pulled out by the other one. The mud of this wetlands has always been our ally, its wetness our friend. When they retreat a banner is put up, “Cheap APC driving license available here.” Our other accomplice is humour of course, even in what feels like a war zone, with tarmac scorched, broken glass and rubble everywhere, being able to laugh feeds our rage. The police retreat again and the barricade grows back out of its ruins, bigger and stronger than ever. We notice that where the APC fell into the ditch is now a huge deep hole at exactly the place where the drain for the Ambazada was going to be dug, no need for digging, just put the plants in it to make our grey water reed bed. That’s what you call radical permaculture, least effort for maximum gain.

At midday the préfete begins her Press conference in Nantes. She confirms last nights message – evictions are over – and in a dramatic gesture, flourishes a page of A4 paper towards the cameras. “It’s a simplified form” she tells the press, “so that those who wish can declare their projects as quickly as possible…The deadline is the 23rd of April” she continues “ all we are asking is that they declare their names, what agricultural project they wish to develop and to tell us what plot of land they wish to work on, so that the state can process them.” She also confirms that it was Macron who was running the operation not the prime minister or interior minister, it was he who decided to stop the expulsions.

“I am holding out my hand” she says, and asks for negotiations to re start on Monday, “I am giving the zadists a last chance.” Sitting next to her General Lizurey in charge of the Gendarme’s operations says that the number of zadists on the zone has increased from 250 to 700.

I walk through the Rohanne forest to The Barn of the Future, I breathe in the forest air, the sweet pine, the musty damp smell of mushrooms. The barn has returned to its normal use as a saw mill and carpentry workshop for the zad. It is the base of the Abracadabois collective that looks after the forests and hedgerows, harvesting fire wood and building timber and setting up skill shares to learn carpentry, forest biology, wood carving, chain saw use and learning about other ways of inhabiting forests inspired by indigenous practices from

past and present. The saw mill is planking the logs, twenty carpenters are busy preparing frames for a new building, a new assembly and no-market hall for the Gourbi, that we aim to put up on Sunday during the mass action.

This morning I was enveloped in tear gas and now I'm watching some of the same barricaders without their gas masks making a barn using the techniques that have been used for millennia. It is somehow healing to watch the attentive work. It is this capacity to fight and build, to block capitalism and to construct other forms of life which gives the zad its strength. It is also another reason the state wants to destroy us, they can deal with nice clean alternative eco projects, easy to buy off and recuperate into new forms of green capitalism. But when those who have a systemic critique are also providing material examples of other ways of being, it becomes dangerous. The resistance and creativity, the no and the yes, are the twin strands of DNA of this territory, split one from the other and the zad dies. It becomes another ecovillage or Transition Town, alternatives without teeth.

Yet a second helicopter is flying above the barn, this time with Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and the minister of interior inside, they are getting a private birds eye tour of the zad. They have come to congratulate the troops for their hard work. As he shakes hands with the gendarmes Phillippe tells the press that "the state will not accept any reconstruction or reoccupation." He is referring to the action planned on Sunday, "Any place that tries such an action will exclude itself from any possible regularisation…. and will thus put themselves under judicial proceedings." Once again the threat of sorting the good zadists from the bad. The carpenters work late into the night.

DAY 6: Saturday 14th April – We won't forget our scars

Bang, another wake up call, the APCs and dozens of vans pass by at the speed of a TGV train, bulldoze the barricades away on the D81 road again, and continue South, probably to Nantes where striking workers are holding a demonstration followed by one against the eviction of the zad.

Barricades are cleared at the Lama Fachée at the same time, and a strange new gas is spotted, dark yellow. It makes people throw up, sows mental confusion and a loss of all spatial and temporal senses. Behind one of the barricades, a trio of action medics are keeping an eye on the adjoining woodland where grenades

are exploding, " It's been war wounds here," they explain "skin and nerves hit by shrapnel, open gashes, eardrums damaged, necrosis and bone fractures." Some folk have over 70 pieces of shrapnel in their limbs, it takes hours every day to pull them out and clean them, some have gone 3cms deep into the skin. Many of the new comers on the zone throw themselves into picking up the thousands of gas canisters that litter the fields, placing them in big bags for everyone to see in the "camp of the white haired ones." Each canister costs 110 euros.

The demonstration in Nantes is big, 10,000 people. The 1000 riot police on duty attack it and gas people drinking on the café terraces.
The sun set is dark red this evening. The wood working tools and machines are cleared aside, the Barn of the Future becomes a meeting hall again for the Assembly of Usages. The fresh smell of saw dust perfumes the discussions about whether we should go to back to the negotiations on Monday. The response is no, not yet.

DAY 7: Sunday 15th April – The Human millipede realises a dream

It's the big day, thousands of people from all over the country are converging on the zone for the day of mass action. The troops have cut off a third of the zad, they line the lanes for kilometers, cutting off access to any of the part of the zone where homes had been destroyed last week. This includes the Gourbi where we hoped to bring the new building too. All road access to the zad are blocked off by the gendarmes, they tell people to go home because they won't be able to reach the demonstration. But more than ten thousand of them disobey, park their cars and coaches in the nearby villages and trek for over an hour across the bocage. The details of the new building are still being finished, as the crowds arrive, such as a large 'fuck you' finger and the face of a fox that are being carved.

Through the pirate radio, text messages and word of mouth, we tell people to converge on Bellevue, the big farm in the west and wait for a decision about what we will do. 50 of us meet in a field in an emergency meeting, the farmers don't want to risk their tractors, we don't want to have a gesture that feels too symbolic, once again the collective intelligence comes to the fore and we come up with a plan B. The building will be erected as close to the front as possible without forcing the police line, there are too many families here to risk being gased.

Simultaneously we will ask people to unearth the staffs and sticks that had been planted in the ground in October 2016 when the government told us they were coming to evict. It was a ritual disguised as a demonstration, 40,000 people answered the call, planted their stick into the ground and made a pledge to return to get them if the government came back to evict the zone for the airport. The ritual magic worked, that time the government stood down. But now they were back with a vengence and the moment has come.

Whilst people pulled the deeply charged sticks out of the clay, others on lane behind carried the huge wooden frames, planks and beams of the new building to the field between between the Wardine and the Ambazada. It takes a few hours to put the carpentry back together and raise the structure up, meanwhile thousands of people push their sticks back into the ground creating a huge circular pallisade around it. In the next door field the police start to tear gas and stun grenaded hundreds of people, some had been reading poems to the cops many held their hands in the air in a gesture of peace. Families hold their ground next to masked up barricaders.

Meanwhile, a handful of people decide as a kind of game, to take the campanille, the tower like addition of the new building, through the forest to the east. A crowd of hundreds follows, we cross the road next to the cops who charge but are forced back by the mass of bodies, we try to get as near to the Gourbi as possible. The wind is on our side and blows the teargas back into the cops lines. But the playful act of defiance ends when its clear that we can't get anywhere near the Gourbi, the police lines are too thick. However, the pleasure of running through forests and fields carrying part of a wooden building is clearly addictive. A few hours later, once the sun has gone down and the cops have left, a new plot is hatched. Why don't we move the whole building, one and a half tonnes of it, 3kms across the fields, in the dark – to the Gourbi !

Despite the general state of tiredness that fills our bodies, we manage a huge heave, 150 of us lift up the structure. A mass of rubber booted feet walk in unison, it feels like a strange chimera shuffling across the bocage, half human half millipede. One of the carpenters directs the operation via megaphone, "a bit to the left ! slow down ! watch that tree branch !" Lit by the beams of dozens of head torches the building seems to float above the prairies, we are plunged into a space between fabulous dream and a scene from an epic film. Someone

▶ The toxic dawn mist in the bocage,
from: zadforever.blog/

sits on the very top of the building pushing up the electricity and phone cables so we can pass under them. This is what we call the magic of the zad, the belief that anything is possible when we do it together.

We half expect to see the police helicopter, to feel its spot light pierce the night, but nothing. The closer we get to the Gourbi the louder the chants: “on est plus chaud, plus chaud, plus chaud que le lumbago” (we are much hotter, much hotter than lumbago). When we arrive, fireworks shoot up into the darkness, a bright red distress flare illuminates the scene. We set the building next to the pilled up ruins of the dome. We light a bonfire, Gourbi has risen again.

Whilst we were moving our house, Macron was being interviewed live on TV, sitting in a black and gold marble hall the Eiffel tower as monumental backdrop. He declares that airport had been abandoned as part of the “ecological priorities of the government” and that therefore our anger is no longer legitimate. Rather than an alternative society, the zad was “a project of chaos… illegally occupying public lands” he tells the nation.

“We have restored republican order” he declares, at least four times. We must

sign individual forms before the 23rd of April or “everything that should be evicted will be evicted” he says. Macron ends with a ridiculous analogy: the zad is as if someone came into your living room to propose an alternative and squated your sofa. Ridiculous and wrong, none of the land here belongs to private individuals, it all still belongs to multinational airport builders Vinci and the state. But his statement was a new ultimatum, a declaration of total war against all collective forms of life. We return home to the news, but it cannot blunt the memories of this improbable night.

DAY 8: Monday 16th April – We will always re-surge, return, reclaim

There are a half a dozen bodies perched like birds on the rafters of the new Gourbi, one plays a drum, a couple kiss, the green prairies below burst with yellow dandelions. We hear the rumble of APCs, it’s obvious they are coming straight here. The glint of riot visors shimmer in the sunlight, a column is moving towards us. A few flash bangs later and those on the roof are brought down by police climbers. The pillars of the building are cut by a chainsaw and the APC drives into it. Like the skeleton of a dying beast it crumbles to the ground. The police leave under a hail of stones, people sort out the broken beams. “Bastards !” a friend points to a stump of cut timber, “they sawed off the big fuck you finger and took it back to the barracks as a trophy !”

The Gendarmerie release their drone footage of the destruction on social networks. They need to show some success in their operation, they too are getting tired of this infernal cycle of destruction and reconstruction. A communication from a group called “Gendarmes and Citizens” denounces the fact that they are feeling “bogged down” and feel like “cannon fodder” faced with “rural guerrillas”. They deplore the “political paralysis” of the government who are on the one hand communicating with a “warlike tone” but are not following it up with effective orders on the ground. “Why are we not being given orders to arrest everyone in the squats ?” they complain. So far there have been suprisingly few arrests, we wonder if they will just come back later, raid our homes, pick us off one by one, when things are quieter ?

There is a new moon above tonight’s Assembly of Usages. Unsurprisingly the debates are heated, we have to decide to re start negotiations or not. The question has never been negotiate or fight, we always knew that we had to do both, but after so many days of attacks it’s not easy to accept to go back to the

table. In the end we decide that we can meet the préfete, not to negotiate the base issues, but make demands for the continuation of talks, one of which is take the troops off the zone. “You don’t negotiate with a gun to your head”, one of the locals says, but we known that if we refuse to meet, Macron’s machine could return and destroy everything that is left, risking lives and in the end depriving us of this territory where we found each other.

An older friend of mine, someone who experienced the uprisings of ’68, writes to me. His letter just says, “the zad will never end, it will simply change shape.” And he is right. This attachment we have to this territory where we have been able shake our dependence to the economy and the state, is something that brings us together, however disparate our political perspectives. Our love for this huge play ground which inspires us to organise together, this deep desire for the wetlands that lubricates our imaginings, these are not abstractions but feelings that are deeply anchored to our experience of this bocage and all our experiments that emerge from it. It is a place that compels us to recompose, to renew, to have the courage to put our political ideas into question, to always push ourselves further than what we thought was possible, to open ourselves up beyond a radical ghetto or walled off utopia. Despite our barricades and the diversity of disobedience, if the state really wants to eradicate the whole of the zad, they can. Everyone would have lost their homes, workshops, fields, tools and we would probably find ourselves banned from returning to the region (a common judicial punishment in France). Scattered across the country without a place that enables us to grow roots together, we would loose all our strength. We know that changing shape is painful, but like a cameleon changes colours, we need to find a way protect this laboratory and camouflage its revolutionary potentialities from the eyes of the state. If we want to stay we need to find a compromise whilst refusing to let go our the commons.

Day 14: Sunday 22nd April – The art of Changing Shape

It’s a week later. Over breakfast, Paul tells me about last night’s adventures. “It felt like we were robbing a bank. So organised, dressed in black, head lamps, maps, scouts etc. Except all we were doing was evacuating the bee hives from the destroyed homes and gardens, getting them off site.” he smiles “we had to carry them full of bees across the hedgerows behind police lines.”

The days have calmed down. Less cops on the zone, more bird song than

explosions. The cycle of barricade growing and then being smashed slows down, partly because on the main roads the police bring in huge skips to take the materials away. In the smaller lanes barricades remain.
The restart of the negotiations on Wednesday went badly, nothing shifted, despite the presence of ex TV personality Nicolas Hulot, now Minister of Ecological Transition, in charge of the zad case since Marcron's election. He is flown in specially to Nantes in the presidential jet. Following the meeting with us, he gives a press conference in the palatial hall of the Prefecture. The government's hard line is held, the rights of property and the market reign, there will be no global or collective contract for the land, we have to give individual names and land plots by the 23rd or face evictions. In a rhetorical floury he ends, "ecology is not anarchy."

Not surprising for a man whose 'ecology' involves owning six cars, signing permits for oil exploration and supporting the nuclear dump at Bure. Hulot is simply the 'eco' mask for Macron's "make the planet great again" form of authoritarian neoliberal green capitalism. But his statement shows Hulot's absolute ignorance of the history of both ecological and anarchist thought. Many of the first theoreticians of ecological thinking, were anarchists. Élisée Reclus, world famous geographer and poet, whose beautiful idea that humans are simply "nature becoming aware of herself," fought on the barricades of the 1871 Paris Commune. 19th century geographer Peter Kropotkin, spent many years in jail and exile for his politics, but was renowned in scientific circles as an early champion of the idea that evolution is not all a competitive war of "red tooth and claw" but instead involves a cooperation, what he termed Mutual Aid. From the 1950s onwards, US political philosopher Murray Bookchin (now best known for the influence he has on the Kurds to build a stateless form of Municipal Confederalism, taking place in the autonomous territory of Rojova – Northern Syria) brought ecology and anarchy together.

At the heart of his Social Ecology is the idea that humans dominate and destroy nature because we dominate ourselves. To avert ecological collapse we had to get rid of all hierarchies – man over woman, old over young, white over black, rich over poor. According to Bookchin, our greatest lesson to gain from the natural world was that we had let go of the idea of difference, and reclaim the concept held by many small scale organic societies, of unity in diversity. Diversity being the basic force of all bio-systems. He envisioned a world that would be neither communist nor capitalist, but what he called "Communalist". "The effort

to restore the ecological principle of unity in diversity," he wrote, "has become a social effort in its own right – a revolutionary effort that must rearrange sensibility in order to rearrange the real world." For him the question of society, to reframe Rosa Luxembourg's: "Socialism or barbarism" – was: "Anarchism or extinction." When we truly inhabit an eco system it becomes obvious that life has no control centre, no heirachy, no chiefs or bosses, no governments or presidents. Every form of life is a self organising form of commons – deeply connected and interdependent, always changing, always embedded and entangled – from the cells in your fingers to worms in your the garden, from the trees in the forest of Rohanne to the bacteria in your gut. As biologist and cultural theorist Andreas Weber says, all life forms "are continuously mediating relationships among each other – relationships that have a material side, but also always embody meaning, a sense of living and the notion of belonging to a place." The more we observe the living world in all its complexity the more we are able to understand how to become commoners, how to truly inhabit a place and see that the separation between the individual and the whole is a fiction.

"In the ecological commons" writes Weber "a multitude of different individuals and diverse species stand in various relationships to one another – competition and cooperation, partnership and predatory hostility, productivity and destruction. All those relations, however, follow one higher principle: Only behaviour that allows for the productivity of the whole ecosystem over the long term and that does not interrupt its capacities of self-production, will survive and expand. The individual is able to realise itself only if the whole can realise itself. Ecological freedom obeys this basic necessity."

And so to be really free is not to be an individual able to operate free from constraints, but to be tied to beneficial relationships with people and habitats, relationships that feed you materially and psychologically. Without a tie to your food – you starve, without the tie to lovers – you sadden. We are free because we are linked. Freedom is not breaking our chains but turning them into living roots and veins that connect, share, flow together and enable us to change and evolve in common.

Since the abandonment of the Airport, changing together on the zad has been a very a painful process. On the zad often it is a fight between those of us who try to read the terrain and invent something new that is messy and hybrid yet fits the situation we are in and those of us who want to keep a pure radical position,

more based on uprooted ideas and ideology than the complexity of the present moment, the here and now, the forces we hold and don't. In 1968 Bookchin asked"When will we begin to learn from what is being born instead of what is dying?" It is a question still just as relevant today on the zad.

Things have been moving so fast. After Hulot's ultimatum, a ministerial announcement suggests that the Prime minster and minister of interior are on a war footing, they are prepared to go for it, evict the whole zone on Monday's deadline, the 23rd.

During the restart of negotiations on Wednesday a technical meeting between our delegation and the bureaucrats, who look at the case from a purely land and agriculture question, had been set for two days later, Friday 20th. Once again we are on a knife edge, this could be the last moment of negotiation before a full scale attack, an attack that most of us who live on the zone know we can't win against, how ever big our barricades.

The Assembly of Usages makes a huge strategic gamble, its a paradigm shift in tactics. We decide to hand in the forms at the Friday meeting, but in a modified way, to show that yes we can fit the state's square boxes of individual projects if they want, but that on the bocage nothing can be separated out, everything is interdependent. Whilst at the same time making a call out for people to come and be ready to defend on the territory from Monday onwards if the state attack. Its the logic of hacking, take what's there, re purpose it, change its use.

Then one of the most unexpected types of zad magic takes place, an office of form filing is set up in the zad's library, and for 24 hours the building becomes a disturbed ants nest, dozens and dozens of people are running around carrying white pages of paper, writing on computers, having meetings together, looking at maps of the zone, making phone calls. Comrades with great legal and administrative knowledge help out and and by Friday afternoon, just as the meeting at the Prefecture begins a huge black bound file of 40 different projects is produced, each with a name and plots of lands earmarked, but no single name attached to a single plot. A colourful cartography of the commons of the zad is attached to further illustrate the interdependent and cooperative nature of the projects, be they a school of shepherding or the library, orchards or the sports group, mechanics garage or a snail farm, sunflower oil production or bringing up children together. Of the 70 living spaces on the zone, 63 are covered by the

forms, only 7 decide not to take this bet of a barricade of paper. Of course paper barricades are not half as fun as ones on the streets, but this time they just might be the ones that save zad from becoming just another orgasm of history, another free commune which shined briefly but ended in bloodshed, another martyred experiment in freedom sacrificed for the sake of a pure revolution.

The zad always tried to go beyond the idea of a TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone), in favour of a building a PAP (Permanent Autonomous Zone), this desire is embeded in the solid buildings, the long term agricultural plans, the vineyards planted for win in 5 years time. We can' just let go of all the ties we built here, with the locals, surrounding farmers, pensioners, workers in the city, wanderers of all sorts, Nantes students and the youth, the owls, the black squirming salamanders, the knarly oaks trees, the mud. We must hold onto all these deep friendships and networks of struggle that we have shared with such intensity over the last decade.

The state bureaucrats were confused, some enchanted, the préfete seemed relieved. Leaving the meeting our delegation tells the press that "we have responded to the injunctions of the state because we want to stop the escalation of tension and at last find the time for dialogue and construction," warning that " if we take away one element of the collective, it cannot work. It's up to the state now to negotiate."

As I finally finish this text, the helicopter returns, anxiety rises again in my chest. It spends a long time swooping over the zone, observing this rebel bocage that it wants to reclaim back. Perhaps it is preparing for a final revenge against the commons, who knows, all we know is that during this last fortnight we have fought with every weapon we thought possible including the unexpected. Now we wait to see if the bet worked out…

▶Barricade at the entrance of the Vraie Rouge (photo: Penelope Thomaidi) from: zadforever.blog/

You can also find further information about ZAD in English on the webpage of crimethinc: https://crimethinc.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=zad

The economy of the squatters: How squatters live with less money and suffer less from the crisis

by Claudio Catteneo

It is already a few years that Europe is suffering from an economic crisis that, to a greater or lesser extent, is affecting most of its population. This crisis is due mainly to the collapse of the housing sector which has had wide repercussions on the rest of the economy.

The fact is that nowadays most people's life depend on an economy that goes well, that can provide jobs and a financial security for living, for paying house expenses, for some leisure etc. But in the market economic system all is connected and, when things go bad in one place, all the rest gets affected. In reality not all are affected in the same way. The rich and the banks, we all know, are profiting from the crisis and from the help they receive from corrupted governments. But we can do little about it because most of us are not rich. And that is why it is important to talk about the squatters. In fact they are much less affected from the crisis and it can be interesting to explain how they do it and, perhaps, apply it: there are many empty buildings and plenty of opportunities for turning into squatters.

The great thing about the economy of the squatters is that they do not pay for rent. Yes, at a first glance it looks unfair that they do not pay for something they take, but if we look at what type of places are normally squatted, we can understand that they follow a certain common sense: the squatted buildings in fact are often abandoned, many falling into pieces, with broken windows and sometimes leaking roofs; or also, they are owned by large developers and property speculators (yes, those who have contributed to get us all into this crisis) and who see housing as a business for their profit and not as a universal human need.

Squatters contribute to improve the quality of a neighbourhood by fixing up

a derelict building and by acting to enhance our rights to housing, not as a market commodity characterized by high rents, precariousness and poor quality of life for many people. Many are forced to move out of their cities because large developers, with the support of government development plans, decide the way the city should look like and the type of people who should live in a neighbourhood. This is called gentrification. Squatters, by squatting properties that are going to be demolished put an obstacle against gentrification and contribute to maintain a neighbourhood that is destined to suffer from radical transformations.

But let's get back to the economy of the squatters. Not having to pay for rent, allows them to transform radically their lifestyle and, particularly, the perspective towards the need of a paid job, or an income. We can say that squatters can live with less money: they are more independent and during a crisis, when there is less money in circulation, they are more protected against the crisis itself. If all the economy is connected in a crisis, to be independent from the rent and the economy means to be more independent from the negative effects of a crisis. Once one gets established as a squatter, a part-time job is enough to keep going, or money can be spent in other interesting things instead of filling up the pocket of a landlord.

The easiest way to explain the economy of the squatters is to change the focus from the use of money to the use of time and to the pursuit of quality of life. Squatters, instead of selling most of their time to the labour market and get a salary, use directly part of this time directly to satisfy their needs and improve their quality of life. We might all agree that money is not the most important thing in life; it is more important to be healthy, to feel love, security, affection, in general to live well, and the role of the economy should be of making sure people live well and not only focussed on the money. The most ancient meaning of the word "economics" comes from the Greek word "oikonomia": oikos = house/community; nomos = the rule, the management, it literally means "management of the house". Aristotle, a philosopher who lived in Greece 2,500 years ago, referred to it as the "art of living well".

Unfortunately today's capitalistic society has made "living well" a pre-requisite for those who have the money or own properties, and squatters are an exception because living well depends on their capacity to fix up a house, to help each other, to share their skills and knowledge, to satisfy their needs directly: the

Do-It-Yourself is widely applied and, because the cohesion of their group is so important, we can say “Do-It-YourCommunity” is even more typical. Because yes, once you have some time out of the labour market, and if you join your local squat community, you will see that there is a universe of relationships beyond the walls of a squat and down in the street.

We have seen that the most clear example of managing without money is the housing need (and is also where one can save most of the money). But this formula can well be applied for all the necessities that are allowed through the practice of the Do-It-Yourself, through the engagement in cooperation with people and through the capacity we have to self-organize our lives and to come together resisting against the alliance of the State with capitalism; unfortunately, one of the most stringent issues in today’s repressive societies is to find mutual support: on the one hand squatting is increasingly becoming a criminal act and on the other our freedoms are curtailed for the sake of economic recovery or national security and the fear of terrorism.

A good outcome from the squat community is that mutual support is not only in finding a roof, but also in getting together against repression and in the struggle for our rights. Divide et impera is the conquest strategy imposed upon the subjugated peoples of the Roman empire and applied today by the capitalist system. An economy based on individualism is destined to fail and, in contrast, the economy of the squatters is anti-capitalist because it substitutes money with mutual aid.

2016

Squatting in Prague

by Arnošt Novák, Jan Trnka

Squatting in Czech Republic has a long if humble history since the beginning of the 1990s. When we speak about squatting in Czech Republic we speak first of all about Prague, which is a little paradoxical. Prague as the capital city is very different from the rest of country. It is much wealthier and for the last twenty years it has been a fortress of neoliberal parties and voters. To understand this paradox it is useful to start with a wider context and a bit of history.

A very short introduction to the Czech Republic

After World War II Czechoslovakia became one of the socialist states of the Eastern Bloc and the Communist Party ruled for forty years. This form of rule developed from the 1950s Stalinist totalitarian regime: full of repression with violent collectivization in farming and nationalization of even small craftsmen and tradesmen, softening in the 1960s with the Prague Spring and a hope for a "socialism with a human face". These hopes were destroyed through the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968. The 1970s brought about a period of "normalisation" of the "communist" rule and most people welcomed improved social security, "real socialist" consumerism and political conformity in exchange for a resignation on public engagement, an escape to a private sphere.

This period of normalization saw subtle control of citizens rather than open political repression. In Czechoslovakia it was impossible to produce social movements similar to ones in the Western Europe such as environmental or feminist, nor even a labour union-based movement like Solidarity in Poland. Only very small groups of a few hundred dissidents and a later rather apolitical underground culture constituted any voices of opposition to the reign of the Communist Party. Furthermore, they were isolated from the majority of the population, which remained obedient. The dissidents didn't openly challenge the system but rather they appealed to the state to respect its own laws and human rights, which it was required to do after signing the Helsinki accords of 1975.

The repertoire of their actions consisted of complaints, open letters and petitions and this opposition was based more on an attempted dialogue with Power

than on confrontations or refusal of the system. The first mass demonstrations appeared in 1988 and 1989 after the Soviet power clearly weakened and some weren't organized by dissident groups but had rather spontaneous character. On November 17, 1989 (International Students' Day), riot police suppressed an official student demonstration in Prague. This event sparked a series of demonstrations and strikes lasting from November 19 to late December. This is known as the Velvet Revolution, a non-violent transition of power from the one-party government of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (and the regime of "real socialism") to parliamentary democracy with free elections. It has also started an economic transition to a free market-based economy. This political programme of "Back to Europe" included the privatization of state-owned companies and properties, restitution of nationalized properties and a gradual deregulation of prices of goods and services.

During the 1990s this programme of transition from planned and bureaucratic "real socialism" had a strong support from the majority of the population. When in 2000 the anti-globalisation protest against the IMF and World Bank summits took place in Prague, the Czech society dismissed the anticapitalistic critique of the protestors and couldn't understand their often violent repertoire of protest action.

But in the following years the expectations and hopes in the positive aspects of the politico-economic transition to capitalism started to disappear. Especially after the economic crisis of 2008 the right-wing parties with neoliberal programmes lost public and electoral support, and only Prague as the capital city, and also the city of capital, remained the last island where neoliberal parties still won the elections. This dominance of right-wing parties in Prague politics started to lessen after 2010 mostly due to their rampant corruption and incompetence.

And this is perhaps the paradox that Prague as the most neoliberal and right-wing region in the Czech Republic has also been the space where the majority of anarchist, squatter and radical left-wing actions took place since beginning of the 1990s.

Squats as islands of freedom

The first squats after the Velvet Revolution appeared in the beginning of 1990

in Prague. The majority of squatting attempts were carried out by very young activists from anarchist, autonomous and hardcore punk milieu. They were not primarily motivated by deprivation but rather by squatting serving as an alternative housing strategy and/or by political visions. They were influenced by their trips to squats in Berlin and Amsterdam.

For squatting of the 1990s it was a typical that only state-, publicly or municipally-owned empty houses were squatted. In the context of the transformation of society from “unfree socialist“ to “free capitalist“ private property was regarded as a fundamental basis of freedom.

This is why squatters avoided occupying privately owned properties. They defended their actions by arguing that the state didn’t use its property in the public interest and they did so instead. From a present-day point of view it could seem as another paradox because exactly to this period we can trace the roots of incredibly large speculations with houses, land and properties in Prague. But at the time to squat an empty private property was considered as a housebreaking and a squatter would be perceived as a burglar.

One of the first famous squats in Pplk. Sochora street in the Holešovice district was squatted by anarchists in 1992. For several months they operated the first Czech anarchist infoshop on the first floor and in the cellar they organized concerts, exhibition and lectures. This squat was the target of several neonazi attacks. In December 1992, after one such attack the police attempted to evict the squat and partly succeeded but within a few weeks the house was re-squatted.

The squatters aimed at legalization and at the end of 1997 they partly succeeded: they had to leave the house but they received a much smaller space for living and activity, which they used for the next few years.

Definitely the most famous Czech squat is Ladronka, which existed from 1993 till 2000. In September 1993 a group of young people associated with the Prague anarchist and autonomist magazine Autonomia moved into the 17th century farmhouse Ladronka, situated in the middle of a park just on the periphery of the city, and declared an “autonomous cultural centre”. They established an “infocafe” featuring video and film presentations, a reading room stocked with alternative publications and environmental and anti-fascist literature, a small

music rehearsal studio and concert hall with a bar, a photo gallery, and a simple lodging space to accommodate young activists travelling from abroad.

The first police raid on Ladronka took place in February 1994 at the command of the Prague Municipality, which was the owner of house. The Trade Company, the official administrator of the Ladronka site, hoped to develop the building into a tourist hotel. The Ladronka squatters were given a month to vacate the building. However, small demonstrations, protests and petitions pushed the City to back down, and the deadline passed without incident.

The next raid, in January 1995, was a heavy-handed police action reminiscent of "communist" police raids on pro-democracy activists and underground activities before 1989. Fifteen patrol cars descended on Ladronka and the police thoroughly searched the premises, videotaping everything. Eight squatters were detained, an Autonomia editorial collective member was interrogated by the "antiextremist" police and was deported from the city. But the squat wasn't evicted and squatters got another ultimatum to leave the house before March. Further action was delayed by the Trade Company's problems in financing the hotel development.

Still the company said they hoped to begin the development in the spring of 1996, and that if the Ladronka squatters wouldn't leave, "they would be forcibly removed."

So the campaign for the support of the squat Ladronka began in February 1995. Squatters organized public actions such as a happening in front of the City Hall, an open day at the squat, and demonstrations. The biggest one was a few days before the planned eviction, where more than 500 people came to support the squat, which was considered a big success. Several thousand people signed a petition in support of Ladronka, including several hundreds from the neighbourhood. A public meeting was also arranged within the grounds of Ladronka (a former farmhouse) and was attended by about 50 people. Squatters, trade officials, investors and local people from the neighbourhood all participated in the discussions.

At this meeting, the investors presented their business plans for the transformation of Ladronka into a hotel. However, the neighbours expressed their complete support for the squatters and refused outright the hotel project.

Squatters sought a legalisation of the autonomous centre and argued for the continued existence of the non-commercial autonomous space being in the public interest. Despite opinions of the locals and squatters, the city council representative declared that financial needs were more important.

On the day of the eviction the squatters handed over the Ladronka farmhouse to the representatives of the Municipality but only as a large paper model of Ladronka and refused to leave. They hung out banners: “Ladronka – island of freedom“, “Squat and live“ and “You cannot evict our spirit“. Squatters also received international support from Poland, USA, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands. The eviction didn’t come.

Throughout the summer the squatters continued to repair the house and arranged many concerts. Friends from Poland again showed their support for the autonomous centre by demonstrating in front of the Czech embassy in Warsaw. In July the squatters organized their next protest demonstration. During the march 500 participants carried slogans such as “Eviction is not a solution” and “Money + profit = new jails.” The demo passed through the centre of Prague and culminated in a happening outside the City Hall. A festival against the impending eviction and in celebration of two years of Ladronka was held between Aug. 31-Sept. 8. Several hardcore and reggae bands performed as well as the famous Russian theatre group Teater Novogo Fronta.

On 2nd September 500 people (including members of autonomous groups from Poland and Western Europe) once again demonstrated in support of Ladronka and against housing policies. Aside from traditional banners, also new ones appeared: “Free houses for free people,” and “Houses for people, not for speculators.”

In mid-September the squatters learned that the investor of hotel Terminal Club was not given sufficient funds from its foreign partner to begin a reconstruction of Ladronka. After monitoring press coverage of the protests and hearing the publicity generated by the campaign, the foreign company became reluctant to finance the project. Later, however, the company director announced to the media: “If we get enough finance, we will ask squatters once again to leave. If they don’t, they will be forcibly removed.” After that the Municipality entered into a contract with the squatters and they could use the space.

For the next few years Ladronka became a famous place for non-commercial and DIY culture. The banner “Ladronka - island of freedom“ hung out from the house. Over time, with people changing in the squat, Ladronka started to have more space for cultural events and less space for political activities.

Around that time a new squat emerged in Prague. On May Day 1998, a group of young anarchists inspired by Ladronka squatted a house, villa Milada, which had been empty for 10 years. They wanted to find a place to live and tried to create a cultural social centre, a place for community life and self-realization. Due to historical plans for its demolition the house was not registered in the land registry, which also meant it had no owner. The squatters immediately started to rescue the building from total destruction and organized concerts, art exhibitions, puppet show and opened a bar.

The first raid of anti-extremist police happened in June and another just before Local Street Party in August. Nobody was charged, but the owner of the land where the house stood (Institute for Information in Education, an organization of the Ministry of Education), ordered the squatters to leave the house before 4th September 1998. The squatters didn’t respect the ultimatum and tried to contact the owner. The representatives of the landowner visited the squat on 14th September again and tried to come in. Squatters decided to resist and built first barricades in house. The second date to leave was 7th October but again squatters remained.

The owner of the land, a state organization, hired a private security firm to evict the squat. Five squatters were barricaded on the roof but three of them under the pressure of representative of owner and police left on the second day. The last two people stayed there till the security firm left. The security firm prevented people from entering the house for four days and destroyed personal belongings and internal equipment of the squat. Squatters on the roof were supported by people around the house. During the four days of the security firm siege with two squatters on the roof a support protest camp of squatters’ friends and squatters from Ladronka was set up and even a live TV discussion on this issue was broadcast from the camp. Eventually, the security firm left and the rest of the squatters returned to the house. This was perceived by squatters as a victory. The squatters then organised a benefit and happenings, contacted media and started lobbying for Milada and for squatting generally. They wanted to legalise the squat but because of the unclear ownership and because of the publicity

nobody wanted to negotiate; but also nobody wanted to evict. Thus villa Milada became for the next ten years a squat without permission, without agreement.

Thus, in the late 1990s Prague had two squats, both spaces for alternative living but also autonomous social centres. Ladronka gradually depoliticised: while in 1998 squatters still actively participated in the Global Street Party, in the beginning of 2000 they only passively provided space for a preparation meeting of anti-IMF protests in Prague. In the summer atmosphere of moral panic concerning violent protestors they remained distant from protests. On the contrary, squatters from Milada had stronger links to the anarchist milieu. But both squats had in common strong subcultural inclinations. They weren't part of wider social struggles for the right to the city or against property speculations or commodification of housing, they were rather fighting for particular places with a roof as spaces for alternative activities, for islands of freedom.

It is, however, necessary to emphasize that it was at least in part a result of the social and political conditions in that period. The Czech Republic of the 1990s was a society with a widespread belief in the benefits of the coming capitalist and primarily Western consumerist paradise. It was a society without social struggles with a firm faith in private property, market economy, with a deep distrust of non-conformist political action such as demonstrations, direct actions, strikes or blockades. It was and largely still is quite a conservative, adaptable and obedient society.

Times of repression and criminalization of squatting

If the 90s were a golden age of squatting their passing meant the end of the liberal times and the beginning of the end of certain tolerance to squatting. This change was not immediate. Yes, there was some gradual decline of Ladronka but there was also the new occupation of Milada, its successful defence and the first years of Milada were a sign of new squatters' enthusiasm. There still existed the cultural squat Medáci, which still at the break of the millennium had a chance for legalisation.

However, in November 2000 the city councillors of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) had Ladronka evicted. They did not wait for a court decision and used the atmosphere after the IMF and WB protests, which was filled with moral panic regarding anything even remotely resembling anarchists. This eviction

of a long existing and legendary squat without a court decision prefigured the coming repressive approach. While the eviction was accompanied by protests (about 500 people came to the demonstrations and squatters camped overnight in the centrally placed Palachovo náměstí), the protests did not have enough force and dynamics. They were not intensive enough, nothing followed and thus they petered out. Many of the Ladronka people connected to the techno scene went abroad and there was no one left who would lead the campaign and fight for a replacement space, which was still at least theoretically under negotiation. The autumn protests against the NATO summit in 2002 were then the swan song not only of the anarchist movement in Prague but also the squatting scene tied to it. The movement went into decline, many activists burned out and left, new ones were rarely appearing and the level of activity decreased. Milada remained but was riddled with internal problems. The enthusiasm of those originally occupying and defending the house had to face not only problems brought about by everyday life in difficult conditions but there was also a change in opinion and the original idea of Milada as an autonomous centre gradually morphed into a space mostly for living. Similar to Ladronka depoliticisation took hold in Milada, there was less and less politics but also fewer concerts and Milada turned into a living squat with occasional problems. In the following years it acquired even abroad a reputation of a dirty squat with issues with hygiene, noise and dogs. Students from university dormitories nearby, who had originally tolerated or even supported the squat, started to complain more and more, in addition to neighbours from the gardening plots, who reported thefts of vegetables, fruit, wood and petrol. This crisis period of the only squat in Prague started to change in summer 2007 when a new generation of younger squatters gradually moved in and attempted to make it again into a functional autonomous space. Milada was for them an “empty bubble” which they wanted to fill. Over its last two years the squat was rejuvenated, squatters sorted out running water, made a new kitchen and organised over 200 events – concerts, performances, film screenings, workshops, readings. Despite the fact that Milada was primarily oriented towards punk and techno subcultures it became once again a sort of a gateway for new activists into politics. This revitalisation, however, did not succeed in improving the relationship with neighbours, quite the opposite as the more frequent cultural activities brought about more noise caused by musical productions and people moving about later at night. The squatters did try to deal with these issues but failed to get on a better footing with neighbours. Milada thus helped perpetuate the negative media image of squatters as people who “break the rules and interfere with lives of decent citizens”. This negative

publicity and complaints from the neighbours were used by the owner of the building, the Institute for Information in Education, to have it evicted on 30th June 2009, immediately after it was re-entered into the land registry. The eviction was carried out by a private security firm full of neo-nazis, who in the process completely destroyed the roof where some of the defending squatters sought refuge. The police surrounded the building and provided a shield for the security firm by preventing supporters from entering the building. The eviction of Milada was a turning point in the repressive approach of the police and politicians to squatting in Prague and it clearly contrasted with the eviction in 1998, when brute force wasn't openly used.

Some repression of squatters existed already since the early 1990s in the form of evictions without court orders or attempts of the police and prosecutors after 1998 to start criminal proceedings against them. However, evictions weren't too brutal and if squatters defended themselves and appealed the criminal proceedings were stopped, they were found not guilty and only in a few exceptional cases there were suspended sentences. The repression was mostly random, not systematic. The violent eviction of Milada thus signalled a break with the past and the beginning of what could be called a period of zero tolerance of squatting in Prague.

The eviction invigorated the autonomous-anarchist scene, one sign of which was the action "Week of non-conforming" in September 2009 with a number of protest actions, lectures, concerts and performances, during which squatters symbolically occupied a long term privately owned empty house in Albertov. The action aimed at highlighting the problems of the cost of living in the city and property speculation. The occupation took place as part of a demonstration of about 200 people. In the evening this non-violent protest was dispersed by riot police who detained several dozen people, surrounded the building with 24 squatters inside and in the early morning started the eviction. The squatters were taken to police cells and in accelerated court proceedings they were given suspended sentences and community service. Upon appeal, the squatters were acquitted due to the low social threat of the act.

The eviction of Albertov was, however, another step in police repression of squatting: previously squats were being evicted by security firms with police (Milada 1998, 2009), by municipal police (Zlatá loď 1994, Ladronka 2000), or by lightly armed state police (Sochorka 1992, or Ladronka raid in 1995). At

Albertov we saw a planned militarised action of heavily armed riot police with a helicopter. In the following court sessions one important fact surfaced: during the summer squatters set up an internet list of several dozens of empty buildings called “Squatterská realitka” (“Squatters’ real estate”). Since the squatting action was announced in advance within the “Week of non-conforming” the police contacted all the owners of these empty buildings to acquire their approval for eviction and in the following years the police took over the initiative and immediately evicted any political squat and probably pressured owners of buildings who may have been negotiating with squatters.

From the point of view of the squatting scene an important turning point was the action “Vzpomínky na budoucnost” (“Memories of the Future”), which took place in August 2013 in connection with the 20th anniversary of the occupation of Ladronka. “We live in a city where twenty years ago a group of young people occupied the empty Ladronka and for seven years filled it with life. Occupy and live! The squat Ladronka etched itself into our collective memories. Fragments of these memories tell us that it is meaningful to resist. Once again we want a place where anything is possible, a place connecting us together, a place that cannot be bought, a place we must struggle for. We are alive…, and after twenty years we will once again go and occupy empty houses as symbols of the absurdity of the sacred status of private property. We will breathe a breath of life into them and fill them with culture made by people for people, not for profit. We will stand up against the market logic, which bares more and more its inhuman essence and impoverishes more and more people” (translated from the statement for the action).

The main aim of the action was draw attention to the commodification of the city and at the same time mobilise forces of resistance. Several empty houses all over Prague were occupied and filled with exhibitions, poetry readings, workshops and small-scale concerts. A house at Pohořelec close to the Prague Castle lasted the longest (until the next day), then it was evicted by the police. The organisation of this action included a wider range of people not only from the anarcho-autonomous scene and ex-squatters from Milada, but also the wider radical-left political spectrum and some artists. An increased politicisation of the younger generation was also visible. In the preceding year there were student protests against higher education reform, which was to limit university autonomy and introduce tuition fees. This was a moment of politicisation for many students and some found their way to left-wing activism and squatting. “Memories of the

Future" was positively reflected by its participants and surprisingly there was also positive media coverage, which started a debate about empty houses and property speculation. One of the results of this action was the creation of the squatting initiative "Obsaď a žij" ("Occupy and Live"), which over the next two years attempted to squat in order to initiate debates about property speculation and commodification of the city and also to liberate an autonomous space. On the eve of parliamentary elections they occupied a long empty house in Washingtonova street under the slogan "We do not rely on ballot boxes, we vote 365 days a year" and opened an autonomous social centre. Within a few hours they organised an exhibition, a concert and held an assembly. The police surrounded the building and after three hours riot police supported by a helicopter attacked and detained over thirty squatters.

Another eviction occurred in Neklanova street in a living squat existing for almost half a year. This house was occupied after the "Memories of the Future" action when the last remaining tenant in the house asked the squatters' initiative for help against bullying by the owner of the house, who pressured him into moving away. The squat on Neklanova was the first where squatters succeeded in connecting their struggles with the fight of a tenant against forcible removal, however, it remained a rare case unlike e.g. in Poland, where squatters successfully cooperate with the tenants' movement and often are an important part of it. This does not happen in Prague mainly due to the non-existence of organised tenants' rights groups. After the eviction of the Neklanova squat there was a 300 people-strong demonstration and in June an occupation of an empty house in Hálkova St. owned by the same owner as Neklanova. The aim of this occupation was to draw attention to this and other specific property speculations. The squat in Hálkova was evicted by the police within one hour without even getting the owner's assent, without even finding out who the owner was. Seven detained squatters were charged with criminal offences.

The eviction of Milada, the repression at and after Albertov together with the economic crisis around 2009 helped the politicisation of squatting, which became more and more a tool for expressing political views and after 2013 one of the most radical and visible expressions of the weak radical left, which further strengthened police repression with active focus on political squatting. In the autumn 2014 the scene was faced with the question of how to move forward. Fewer and fewer people wanted to take part in squatting actions with little chance of success and face criminal charges. The collective decided to change

their tactics and instead of a publicised occupation of a building with hanging of banners they entered an empty building of a former lung clinic dressed as workers, started to clean it and improve the space and handed to the owner a project of a social centre.

Squats as political instruments

The former lung clinic ceased its operation in 2009 and remained unused except for short term-inhabitants who, over years, filled the house with refuse. It is located in a highly lucrative location, close to a large park not far from the centre of Prague, in the originally working-class district of Žižkov. It was (and currently still is) a state-owned building and at the time it was allegedly under consideration for new offices of the General Inspection of Armed Forces.

The "Autonomous social centre Klinika" opened to the public on 30th November 2014 with workshops, concerts, readings, lectures and debates. The centre quickly attracted substantial support, many people took part in the activities and about two thousand signed a petition supporting the centre. After ten days, on 9th December, the police evicted the building and an attempt to re-occupy it during a demonstration four days later failed due to a heavy presence of riot police.

▶ Demonstration after eviction of Klinika 2014

The collective continued its activities and the centre received, among others, the support of the Green Party, then in a coalition municipal government. The most important political player at this point was, however, the oligarch-billionaire cum finance minister Andrej Babiš, who after negotiations personally intervened and agreed to lease the building for free to a collective with the best project for a social centre. On 3rd March 2015 Klinika signed a contract for one year with an option for its extension. With the help of volunteers the building was gradually adapted for the new use and the centre started its legal operation. In the meantime, the General Inspection gave up on the building and returned it to the state property management administration as a building without a use.
A turning point in the political support of Klinika came in the end of summer 2015, when Klinika became one of the first organisers of help for refugees coming through the Balkans. Mostly local right-wing politicians started expressing their views that Klinika was a security threat and was trying to bring Muslims en masse to Prague. These views found a fertile ground in the ensuing anti-refugee hysteria and marked the beginning of the efforts by the district town hall to bring Klinika down.

On 6th February 2016 after large anti- and pro-migrant demonstrations in the centre of Prague a group of neo-nazis attacked Klinika with stones and firecrackers, which lead to injuries and a small fire inside. While the police later identified the attackers none of them were charged with criminal offences. This attack provoked a spontaneous wave of solidarity with Klinika, with the Mayor of Prague and government ministers expressing their support, but it also strengthened the line held by the district town hall seeing Klinika as a security risk – the district right-wing mayor Hujová even officially warned the state about this. The local building authority (subordinated in fact to the district town hall) using fabricated evidence then informed the state that a continuing function of the social centre was illegal, which was then used as the official reason for not extending the contract, despite the fact that Andrej Babiš, still the responsible finance minister, had publicly supported its extension just a couple of weeks before.

When the contract ran out on 3rd March 2016 the collective decided to stay (despite severe contractual fines) and continue running the social centre in an “occupy” regime with dozens of people outside the inner collective sleeping over, keeping watch and helping around the house. A crucial difference from all other similar situations was that on the basis of the lapsed contract the state

filed a civil lawsuit for eviction. This was the first time ever that the eviction was submitted to a court and this fact alone probably saved Klinika from an immediate eviction by the police.

At the same time a petition was started asking the City of Prague to purchase the building from the state and use it for a social centre. Within a few days over 3000 people signed the petition and the city assembly had to discuss it. The state, however, used another trick to prevent this. They announced the Social Affairs Ministry wanted to use the building and therefore it cannot be sold. The minister cancelled this plan only a short time after the city assembly showing it was just a trick. Through the efforts of the Green Party the City Council in the end expressed interest to buy the building but over the summer months the building was transferred in great secrecy and under suspicious circumstances to the State Railway Infrastructure Administration. In the meantime Klinika received the František Kriegel Award for civic courage from Charter 77 Foundation, which interestingly connected the squatting collective to the pre-1989 dissident times. In May and June 2016 several bomb threats were made against Klinika and in the first two cases the police used this to evict the building and return it to state representatives. In both cases the eviction was resisted and later the same day the building was re-occupied. Later in the summer the state filed for an injunction to stop the activities of the social centre under crippling fines but after a few weeks this was overturned and the social centre continued to function. The lawsuit itself was decided by a lower court against Klinika in February 2017 and upheld by an appeal court in September 2017.

Klinika's aim has been to create a non-commercial space for people and collectives to gather, meet each other and create new politics, culture, knowledge and relationships. While people can stay in the house for limited periods of time it is primarily an open social centre. It succeeded in bringing new people to radical grassroots politics and connect existing groups. On the other hand, with very small exceptions it failed to connect deeply with its neighbourhood and take up local political topics such as access to housing in a rapidly gentrifying district. What makes the case of Klinika special is not only the wide political involvement at the highest levels at various stages of its existence but also the unprecedented legal battle for eviction, which, unfortunately, does not appear to change the repressive approach of the police.

►Anarchist Bookfair at Klinika, 2016

►Klinika

In June 2017, in an effort to draw attention to other empty buildings the state could use instead of Klinika, a vast house in Hybernská street in the very centre of Prague was occupied by a varied collective using the demonstrative tactic with banners and widely publicized program. Instead of starting legal proceedings the police similarly to previous years contacted the owners (the state and the City) and after a few hours riot police started the eviction. Over thirty people were detained and charged with misdemeanors.

While the situation of squatting in Prague in the end of 2017 does not seem much improved the topic of empty houses has become very well known and even public institutions such as the City of Prague are aware of the problem and introduced the concept of temporary, even non-commercial use. Unfortunately, the urgent topics of affordable housing and gentrification-induced displacement remain mostly unreflected.

Interview with a Seattle Squatter

by Mujinga

Here we supply a short interview made with one of the participants in the Turritopsis Nutricula house in February 2012' [shame it's not more timely but hey zines can be hard to finish off sometimes..]:

1.) Heyup! How's it going with finding a new place?

I went and opened a new place the day before we got kicked out of the first. The new one's still open [as of February 2012], with electricity, heaters, furniture, barricades and relatively friendly neighbors. This one's more surreptitious though. I'm looking at one other house in particular right now, too. A really nice one. Very public too-- So it'll be difficult, but potentially meaningful and definitely fun. Seattle has no shortage of empty houses.

2.) It's really cool to hear about people squatting in Seattle (and Oakland, Chapel Hill, Detroit, Santa Cruz, New York, Miami, all over the shop really in a public way in the U$A. What are your thoughts on this pretty recent development?

I think a lot of tactics that many of us have been using for years/decades in the U.S. have recently gained local mainstream popularity, or at least acceptance. Black bloc is another example of this. The #occupy movement, because of it's openness in regards to political affiliations, analyses, tactics, intentions, targets, etc. has drawn a wide variety of participants and a huge audience, many of whom have never been involved in any protest or action before. This means, for better or worse, that there are a lot of new activists using old tactics and veteran activists taking advantage of the spotlight.

3.) Occupy is obviously a reference point, what else is inspiring you to take action?

Squatting in other countries and contexts? Punk houses? The European social centre movement? Occupations in South America?

Ungdomshuset. Hahahah, there are A LOT of inspirational actions and movements I could mention here, but Ungdomshuset was definitely talked about frequently in the T.N. squat. I also want to highlight the Korean occupations, South American occupations, the squats in Athens [and all the intensity there!] and of course, the spaces here in the Central District of Seattle that were claimed as community centers through years and years of highly confrontational squatting. Also, most of the collective were active long before #ows and brought our own backgrounds [with squatting and otherwise] and inspirations from our own experiences. The person whoput up our castle locks learned how to make them while squatting in Europe.

4.) Regarding the story of the eviction [covered with photos at http://pugetsoundanarchists.org/node/1299], it's interesting reading the media about the eviction, but for me it's a bit unclear why no-one got arrested. That seems weird. Is it because they didn't want any more publicity around squatting or Occupy? The Fox TV clip says it's because the owner didn't want to press charges (love the way he pronounces anarchy by the way).

The Fox TV clip is the best-- he mentions bottles of "urine" [actually vinegar, in case of tear gas or fire] and a "pipe for smoking drugs" that none of us have ever seen, then he shows our rules but blurs out the "no drugs or alcohol" rule! Hahaha...As far as no one getting arrested, the laws are really tricky around that here. Since we had to be evicted through court, we weren't ever actually trespassing, legally. The sheriff just had to come enforce the eviction, but when they did, we just went to the next house. I *would* like to point out though, that the police couldn't get through our barricades. They needed to get a gas-powered saw to cut the door down.

5.) On the ground, were local residents actually sympathetic with your occupation? In my experience I find most people are OK with squatters if you get a chance to talk to them and show you are "normal" "real" people rather than the stereotype the mainstream media presents.

Some of them were. A lot of them were not. We tried to talk to the neighbors, put up fliers about what we were doing, held open houses and block parties, but

a lot of people still hated us for one reason or another. Our next door neighbor, who's been interviewed by I-don't-know-how-many news crews is involved in house repossessions. We are the manifestation of "the enemy" to her, and as far as I'm concerned, that's just fine; the feeling's mutual. A lot of that neighborhood is gentrified and the rest is *being gentrified*. So, as anti-gentrification activists, we, of course, were hated by a large part of "the community". Also, local gangs and others would fuck with us sometimes because they knew we wouldn't call the cops. We had our windows broken, got attacked and shot at, but always stood our ground, and after a little while of us showing our strength and unity and the broader community coming out, ready to fight to defend us, those attacks stopped. So, it was pretty well split.

6.) Is there a kind of squat scene in Seattle? In Brighton there is in that there's a tradition of squatting since the 1970s (incompletely covered in Using Space 5) but it's pretty small. We have five active squats at the moment and that's probably the best it has been for the last three years.

No, not since the struggles in the C.D., over the African American Heritage Museum and the Coleman School and Umoja P.E.A.C.E. Center. I've been complaining about the absence of a squat scene/counterculture here since I got here. But it looks like we've changed that. Squats are opening up left and right here now.

7.) Maybe connected to the previous question about a scene, do you have many underground media connections, within Seattle and beyond? In Brighton we have a few zines and SchNEWS, a weekly newsheet...

Tides Of Flame printed stuff about the squat, someone made a video about it to show as an introduction to the collective at an Umoja event, [They asked for the film.] Other than that, I dunno...I mainly get my news from pugetsoundanarchists.org, lol.

From: Using Space 7 - https://cobblebooks.wordpress.com/2013/12/06/usingspace-seven-a-zine-about-squats-social-centres-and-alternative-ways-of-living/

Ireland's Autonomous Zones and Collectives

by Freda Hughes

This chapter was written in 2013 by Freda Hughes based on an article written by Darren Malone in 2007 prior to Ireland's first Social Centre Gathering which was hosted by the Seomra Spraoi collective. The chapter is a culmination of many conversations with people involved in these spaces and a whole lot of trawling through the internet, fliers and zines. This is very much an abridged version of the story of Irish social centres and autonomous spaces as it continues to unfold.

Belfast Just Books (1978-1994) and Warzone/Giro's (1986 –present)

Just Books was a 'bookshop' that was opened by the Belfast Anarchist Collective in June 1978. More than just a bookshop, the building became a centre for anarchist ideas and activity – during its time the building included a short-lived library, the Print Workshop, a meeting and exhibition space, the Hideout Café, Belfast Independent Video, Belfast Unemployed Group, Prisoner Book Scheme and Women's News office. The location of the bookshop in the contentious old Smithfield Market area of Belfast, at the bottom of the Shankill Road and the Falls Road, was important in terms of making the space accessible to people from all communities. Just Books closed its doors in 1994 proclaiming that "16 years of providing an invaluable service to the community and being a focus for social change and revolutionary ideas is something to celebrate. Just Books now operate online only.

Giro's was an entirely volunteer run collective that existed for 18 years.The Warzone space housed a music venue/rehearsal space for bands, veggie cafe/ drop-in, various artists' facilities, library, recording studio, food co-op, info-shop, office space, & was home to many groups, organisations and a mishmash of Belfast misfits wanting to carve out a space that was free from sectarianism & intolerance. The activities of the space put emphasis on keeping things cheap & accessible.

Warzone is 'mecca' of punk in Ireland. Hundreds of bands from around the world have played there culminating in the annual the Warzonefest. Anarcho-punk introduced many of the kids to anarchist politics. In 2003 the Warzone Collective closed temporarily, however, in 2007 discussions began and eventually in 2009 the Warzone Collective reformed. By 2011 a new centre was opened once again on Little Victoria Street . The collective continues to host gigs, run Giro's Cafe and produce it's DIY newsheet, The Warzine.

Other autonomous spaces in Belfast that deserve a mention are; the Anarchy Centre where Crass played in 1982, the Sans Souci Sqat and the Our Kitchen Squat Cafe that ran in 2003, and the Queer Space Project which opened in 1998 and still operates today.

Cork Autonomous Zone, Cork (2002 – 2007) and Solidarity Books (2009 – present)

The Cork Autonomous Zone (CAZ) started running early in 2002. It hosted campaigning groups, facilitated art and music. It was originally located in a small lane off Camden Quay, but a new space was found at 61 Barrack Street, sharing the space with the workers' cooperative, Barracka Books.

The CAZ filled an important gap, gave a secure meeting place to several groups and a work space to many others. The CAZ was financed from voluntary donations and subscriptions from users. All work was done by volunteers on specific CAZ work days. There was a good sense of ownership amongst the users. Unfortunately momentum began to wane after a while partially due to the location and the space was wound down by 2008.

Solidarity Books opened it's doors on Douglas Street in Cork city in 2009 as a home for radical books. It's moto is 'Books not bosses!' and it's website proudly states that it is 'under no management'. The space comprises of meeting rooms, an office and a ground floor bookshop. Film screenings and talks are a regular occurrence at Solidarity Books and it is a hub for anarchism in the south of Ireland. The space is linked closely with the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) Ireland's largest national anarchist organisation.

Rossport Solidarity Camp (2005 – 2007) Mayo

The Rossport Solidarity Camp was a tactic in a campaign against Shell and not set up specifically to create a community space, none-the-less the space operated as a kinda very scenic social centre providing links between people wanting show support for the campaign & the Rossport community. The camp enabled people who wanted to show practical solidarity to stay in the area.

Galway Social Space (2007-Present)

The Galway Social Space Project was a collective of individuals and groups working together to create a vibrant alternative space for music, art, discussion and learning. This collective wound down after a year, but there is a similar project called An Mheitheal Rothar (Galway's Bike Workshop). The group running this space are connected to Galway's university Eco Society. The space runs talks and classes and a sound system/speaker building workshop.

Beyond Buildings: Community Gardens

The 'Anarchist Plot' in Belfast & the Dolphins Barn Community Garden in Dublin where both offshoots of the Grassroots Gatherings in 2004. Phibsboro in Dublin saw the creation of the 'Cursed Earth Garden' by some people previously involved in the Magpie Squat. These early anarchist attempts at community gardening made a point of not asking permission for anything. They may not have been long lasting, but they paved the way for a much more open attitude towards community and urban gardening in Irish cities today. Some great independently run community gardens that exist today include; The Sitric Garden and the Lifeline Project in Dublin and the community garden in Scarriff, County Clare. The Lifeline Project focuses on the disused Midland Great Western Railway in north-west inner city Dublin, as a living laboratory for sustainable development including sustainable food system planning, urban biodiversity, eco-tourism, green transport and innovative models of health-care, recreation, and waste management.

Dublin

The Youth Expression Centre (1983 – 1988)

In the 1980s the now affluent Temple Bar area of Dublin was a run down area full of abandoned buildings. A group of individuals rented a large building in the heart of Temple Bar and set about opening "The Youth Expression Centre" (YEC). There were four floors; the basement had rehearsal space, the ground floor was a dojo, the first floor was a cafe and the top floor housed workshops. In 1984 The Subhumans played along with nearly every Irish punk band over 4 days. The YEC kick-started the DIY music scene in Dublin. When the YEC closed BYOB punk gigs were held in a hall owned by the bus company in the city centre. It was from these gigs and the YEC that the Hope Collective was later to emerge.

Hope Collective (1990s)

The Hope Collective organised independent gigs from around 1994 to 1999. However, it all began back in 1984 with one guy trying to get a band together and put on some gigs. By 1986 'Hope' had grown and hosted bands such as The Vandals and Fugazi. By 1994 more people got involved and The Hope Collective was named. The collective gave out leaflets explaining the DIY independent ethos, whereby the collective wanted to provide the music for the greatest number of people - for example by organising afternoon gigs, all ages were allowed to attend as well as the entrance fee being very low. Years later members of the collective decided to publish a book about their gigs and experiences. Each page documents a gig and has a vegan recipe to accompany it.

The Lodge (1994-1996) and The Basta Collective! (2004-2006) were youth-led collectives who organised DIY gigs providing space for many bands to play that wouldn't normally have a chance to play to large crowds of their peers as well as occassionally hosting bigger acts.

Garden Of Delight (1997)

The Garden of Delight (GoD) was a self-managed space in Dublin's city centre that was run by a collective for nine months in 1997. It provided space for a

range of campaigns, public meetings, art exhibitions, political exhibitions and a huge variety of parties and happenings. Armed police raided it after a banner declaring the EU to be the Fourth Reich was hung on the roof during the European summit. The space saw many other police visits, normally in response to parties that went on late into the night.

▶Garden of Delight, Dublin

Disco Disco (2003)

On the 13th July 2003 activists calling themselves 'Autonomous Community Spaces' entered 'Disco Disco', a building in Parnell Square that had been vacant for 11 years. The high profile squat action was the first in Dublin in many years. They were violently evicted 24 hours later. Although the life of the squat was short it fired the imagination off many and helped put political squatting back on the map in Ireland for a time. Many of the people involved in ACS went on to become part of the Magpie Squat and Seomra Spraoi.

Magpie Squat (2003-2004)

From August 2003 to April 2004 the Magpie Squat was a beautiful space in Dublin, proving that a bunch of crust kids and some cleaning fluids could ignite the imagination of a city. The squat facilitated meetings by groups such

as Reclaim the Streets, Gluaiseacht, Food not Bombs, anti-war groups and a woman's group. It housed the Bad Books' library and was used as a creative space for artists and street theatre enthusiasts. Friends and neighbours living in nearby flats and apartments with no access to gardens, turned the yard into an organic vegetable garden.

The house was quite a hub of activity in the run up to MayDay 2004, and it was probably the sudden Garda interest in all things Dublin Grassroots Network that brought an end to Dublin's best-kept secret. With the pressure of constant surveillance and eviction imminent the Magpie Collective decided to close in April 2004.

►Eviction of Magpie Squat, Dublin

The (Una)Warehouse (2004-2005)

The (Una)Warehouse situated on North Strand was an alternative living, leisure and social space. Hosting gigs, art shows, meetings, film screenings, and housing a bike workshop, the Bad Books and Forgotten Zine library. The Certain Death Café became a regular Sunday autonomous space, serving vegan food and brain-poppin' Zapatista coffee. The Dublin Grassroots Network used the warehouse as a creative space in the run up to Mayday 2004; it was also an important space for 'Dissent! Ireland'.

Also worth a mention are Spacecraft, from whom the warehouse space was inherited. Spacecraft was formed as a response to a growing need for available and non-commercially organised space for a wide variety of cultural exploits. The collective concerned themselves with the importance of creative and unapologetic use of public and waste space to reintroduce direct and people-based culture, street theatre, oration, visual arts etc.
Also operating around this time was Red Ink (2003-2005) was a book & zine shop stocking a whole host of radical literature on anarchism, eco-action and music. It had a selection of sex guides which transformed the sex lives of the radical left in Ireland. Murder City Records shared the space & provided a soundtrack of DIY & independent music.

A4 Sounds and A4 Towers (2008 - present)

The mission of the A4 Sounds art collective is to foster multidisciplinary collaboration, curate innovative participatory art events and broaden engagement through community arts education. The purpose of the 'A4 Towers' workspace is to act as a base for these group activities, as well as a resource for individual members to develop their practice. The workspace is run as a not-for-profit co-operative; all members have equal ownership of the space and contribute equally to its operation. After almost five years in operation A4 Sounds will sadly have to leave A4 Towers due to the building being sold for redevelopment. They are currently packing up and looking for a new home.

Supa Fast (2011 – 2012)

Supa Fast was a social centre open to everyone with no private space within the building.The space was sustained and maintained by the money raised from their monthly BYOB pop up restaurant which was a top notch gastronomical experience. As well as occasional weekend gigs, 'Cine Fast' was a monthly film screening where the film score was performed live by some of Dublin's up and coming electronic artists. Unfortunately the space closed after a year in existence.

Unlock NAMA (2012)

Unlock NAMA was established in direct response to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). The campaign aimed to access NAMA

properties for social and community use and to hold NAMA to account. In January 2012 activists successfully occupied a large NAMA owned building in Dublin city centre. They held a series of talks, films and workshops there which focused on the "unmitigated failure of NAMA" and explored alternatives. The building was raided and forced to shut down within less than 24 hours of opening, but the campaign continues to call for empty NAMA buildings to be given social & community use.

Exchange Dublin (2009 – present)

Exchange Dublin is a collective arts centre in Temple Bar, Dublin. It holds discussions, gigs, visual arts and performance. Most of these projects originate from the autonomous "Exchange Groups" that use the space as a hub for their activity. Exchange Dublin is a non-alcohol space and events are open to people of all ages. Although Exchange initially did receive some funding from the Arts Council and support from Temple Bar Cultural Trust it has since become incorporated as an independent co-operative and is attempting to stay afloat without any outside funding.

Seomra Spraoi (2004-Present)

The Seomra Sproai collective was started in 2004 with the intention of setting up an autonomous social centre in Dublin. It is now is Dublin's longest running autonomous social centre. It is run by a non-hierarchical, anti capitalist collective on a not-for-profit basis. Since its beginnings the collective has occupied 4 different spaces. In 2008 the collective moved to 10 Belvedere Court in the North Inner City where it can be found today.

The space includes a small garden and a renowned vegan cafe. The space also houses the Forgotten Zine Collection, Bad Books, The Free Shop and the national offices of the Workers Solidarity Movement. Previously it was also home to Revolt Video and the Soupstone Kindergarden project. Various groups use Seomra Spraoi to hold meetings and events including; Queer Thing, the Abortion Rights Campaign, the Anti-Racism Network, Shell to Sea, Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Latin American Solidarity Campaign, Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group and Auntie Underground Cinema. Basque, Spanish, Italian, Arabic and Irish classes are also offered.
The Seomra Bike Workshop is run entirely on donations, based on the principle

of people taking what they need and contributing what they can. The Seomra Spraoi bike workshop applies the values of a user-organised, anti-capitalist, anarchist social centre to the maintenance and building of bicycles. No one is ever refused assistance or denied involvement because they cannot afford it, as there is no price to pay. The bike workshop endeavours to organise itself on its own initiative to educate each other and facilitate an essential service. It also engages with a number of local youth projects in disadvantaged areas of the city.

Seomra Spraoi hosts regular reggae, drum & bass, jungle, afro-beat, electronic, punk and ska gigs and has developed a reputation as one of Dublin's leading underground music venues due to the involvement of Poster Fish Promotions & Audio Terrorists DIY collaboration.

The collective is highly organised, with around 20 people managing the social centre, via working groups, and an open meetings of the collective. The safer spaces policy is regularly reworked in line with user groups feedback. All activities are not-for-profit and aim to support new and existing groups and projects that share its ethos.

[It closed in 2015]

►Poster Fish gig at Seomra Spraoi, Paul Reynolds

The Hidden History of Squatting in Ireland (1996)

by Alan MacSimoin

Twenty years ago Dublin Corporation was forced to give tenancies of hundreds of squatters. Those people got themselves housed, not by pleading with politicians, but through direct action. Alan MacSimoin, who was one of the organisers of Dublin Squatters Association, remembers how they did it.

In 1976 there were several hundred families squatting in local authority flats in the Corporation area. Waiting lists were long and increasing numbers were housing themselves in flats which had become vacant or were due for rehabilitation work.

Evictions were common, with most being put out within a few months of squatting. Nobody was jailed or even prosecuted under the Forcible Entry and Occupation Act as this would have been politically embarrassing for local councillors. In the private sector, however, there had been jailings. So what usually happened was that after being evicted families would squat another flat. And this process would repeat itself again and again.

The Williams family in Dolphin House, a large south inner city complex, were served with an eviction order. The offer made by the Housing Department was the Legion of Mary hostel for the wife and child, nothing for the husband. They decided to resist.

An information picket was held outside the local rent office and we also went door-to-door in Dolphin House, where there are 400 flats, asking people to help. On the morning of the eviction we went around with a megaphone asking the locals to stand with the Williams family. By the time the sheriff, his bailiffs and the cops turned up we had 400 locals blocking the landing, stairwell and courtyard. It was amazing.

After a feeble attempt to execute their order the eviction crew withdrew in

defeat. Two further unsuccessful attempts were made. The Williams family were then offered a flat in a complex across the road, Fatima Mansions. All of this was carried on the front pages of the evening papers.

On foot of this victory we were approached by squatters from other areas who wanted our help and advice. The Dublin Squatters Association was formed, with about 40 squatters regularly attending meetings in Killarney Street. The DSA built up a membership of about 100, mainly in Joseph's Mansions and Mary's Mansions in Sean McDermott Street, Phil Shanahan House and St. Bridget's Gardens in Sheriff Street, Dolphin House and Basin Lane, off James's Street.

Our first task was defend squatting as legitimate. This we did by convincing squatters and many local associations that it was a direct way to force the Corporation to increase the housing stock. We were quite successful, in the areas where we had a base, in winning the argument that families should not have to spend a couple of years on the waiting list or have additional children to build up their points.

Leaflets making this argument were widely circulated in the north inner city flat complexes. We went door-to-door in Sheriff Street and brought over 80 squatters to the May Day march under a DSA banner.

The next threatened eviction that we were asked to organise against was in Phil Shanahan flats in Sheriff Street. Through door-to-door canvassing and a meeting in the local community centre we won the support of the majority in the flats. When the day of the eviction arrived the sheriff found that the entrance to the flats was closed off to cars (we had placed some pallets across the road to stop the cops and bailiffs driving right up to the door) and that groups of women and teenagers were waiting. The eviction was called off.

Next came a threatened eviction in Basin Lane, behind James's Street. A teenage couple and their baby were due for eviction. The woman suffered from heart trouble. The Corpo was offering only hostel accommodation. We organised, once more, on a door-to-door basis. On the day of the eviction about 100 locals faced about 60-70 cops and eviction crew. Time after time they dragged us away from the door. Finally they got us clear but little did the bailiff with the axe know that we had nailed a metal grill to the inside of the door and connected it to the mains electricity. When the axe struck the door the bailiff

went flying back across the courtyard, extremely shocked but not injured.

At this stage we got the ambulance crew from James's hospital to break through the window and take the young mother out on a stretcher. While this was a preventative measures in case the excitement got the worse of her heart condition, people in the area thought it was more serious. A very angry crowd pushed the cops back. One cop even broke ranks and announced he was not going to evict anyone, before walking away while his inspector impotently yelled at him.

This victory received front page coverage in the evening newspapers. Squatters from Ballymun wanted to join the DSA. Confidence was rising all the time. Panicky officials even talked of bringing in the army to assist bailiffs. The bureaucrats decided that things were getting out of hand. People, the most difficult people to organise, were defeating the Corporation and the gardai. They were doing it in public, and it could spread.

The Corporation responded with an amnesty. All squatters would be rehoused as tenants. However anyone squatting after that date would go to the bottom of the housing list if they squatted a local authority dwelling. With evictions being called off and tenancies offered the DSA rapidly ceased to exist. That particular phase of the housing struggle was over.

Guest article - Alan MacSimoin writing for Workers Solidarity

http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws/squat48.html
http://struggle.ws/ws/squat48.html

Resisting Evictions: Squatting in Rio de Janeiro as an Alternative for Housing

by Juliana Canedo and Julia Caminha

In most Brazilian cities inequality and poverty are major and historical problems. Along with that, the difficulty in accessing housing by poor people has been an issue that no government or policy had been able (or has really aimed) to solve. In fact, we have seen over the past decades public policies that have helped increase the housing deficit[1] instead of fighting it.

In 2009 the federal government launched what would become the biggest housing program in Brazilian history. Titled Programa Minha Casa Minha Vida (PMCMV – loosely translated: "My House, My Life Program"), the program has built over 2 million new units of social housing until 2014. But despite that, the housing deficit has increased for about 300 thousand families, going from 5.5 million families in 2008 to 5.8 million families in 2014. This shows not only that the program was not really aimed at reducing the deficit but also that, along with the inefficiency of the new housing, there is a process of evicting poor people that creates homeless families much faster than the new units of PMCMV can absorb.

One critical aspect of the program is that it concentrates new constructions in the periphery of the city, in places with no public transportation, access to public services or job opportunities. This happens because, among other factors, the program is built to put in the hands of the construction companies – or better said, private capital – all the main decisions regarding the new constructions. The public sector finances and approves the architecture plans, but it's up to the developer which land to buy, and therefore where to build. In major cities where urban segregation are extreme and costs for land varies enormously from

1 The housing deficit consists not only of homeless families, but also of people living in conditions that are not considered healthy or safe.

central areas to the periphery, this represents an incentive for builders to choose areas farther away from the center and thereby increase their profit margins. It's also important to say that the amount of money financed remains the same regardless of land price (R$75,000 per apartment), which also induces choosing cheaper land.

Along with that, there is a process of valuation and devaluation of parts of the city, according to a capitalist logic of production that excludes poor dwellers, expelling them to undesirable spaces. In Rio de Janeiro this has been especially significant, since large events taking place in the city (specially the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games) have been used as an excuse for major urban renewal projects, with massive investments. These has often resulted in the eviction of favelas and squats in central areas. As an important example, almost half the inhabitants of the oldest favela in Rio, Morro da Providência, were removed since 2011 with the controversial construction of a funicular, along with other changes that were not demanded by the local population.[2] Another widely documented case is the favela Vila Autódromo. Itis situated near land designated for the Olympic Games, and for that reason the Municipality has been trying to removed it. This attempt to remove the favela has been resisted by legal means and with the support of universities, activists and public defense lawyers. In the Porto Maravilha area, several squats and poor dwellers were evicted and the land was sold to big companies to build luxurious residences, such as Trump Towers (see below). These evictions are also carried out with extreme violence, sometimes led by police and sometimes, and with psychological violence through threats and unfair deals. Other cruel measures include demolishing part of the buildings of people who have already left, for example, and letting the remains stand, attracting disease vectors and destabilizing nearby buildings.

From 2009 to 2014, the mayor Eduardo Paes, re-elected in 2012, has evicted more than 70 thousand people, setting a record in the highest number of evictions in the history of the city. Most of the people who have been evicted occupy other buildings or other favelas, often in more precarious conditions.

Some of the evicted are relocated in new PMCMV units, almost all of them 10 or 20 km away from where they originally lived, where their jobs, families and friends were. This represents not only a process that will intensify urban

2 More information about this case can be found at http://forumcomunitariodoporto.wordpress.com/ and Canedo (2012).

segregation, and all that comes along with that (urban violence, increased precariousness, etc), but it also constitutes an extreme violent action against these dwellers. Even when there is no actual physical violence during evictions (which is not always the case), is the process is still extremely violent. It is led by the municipality with the support of the federal government, which is represented in this housing program.

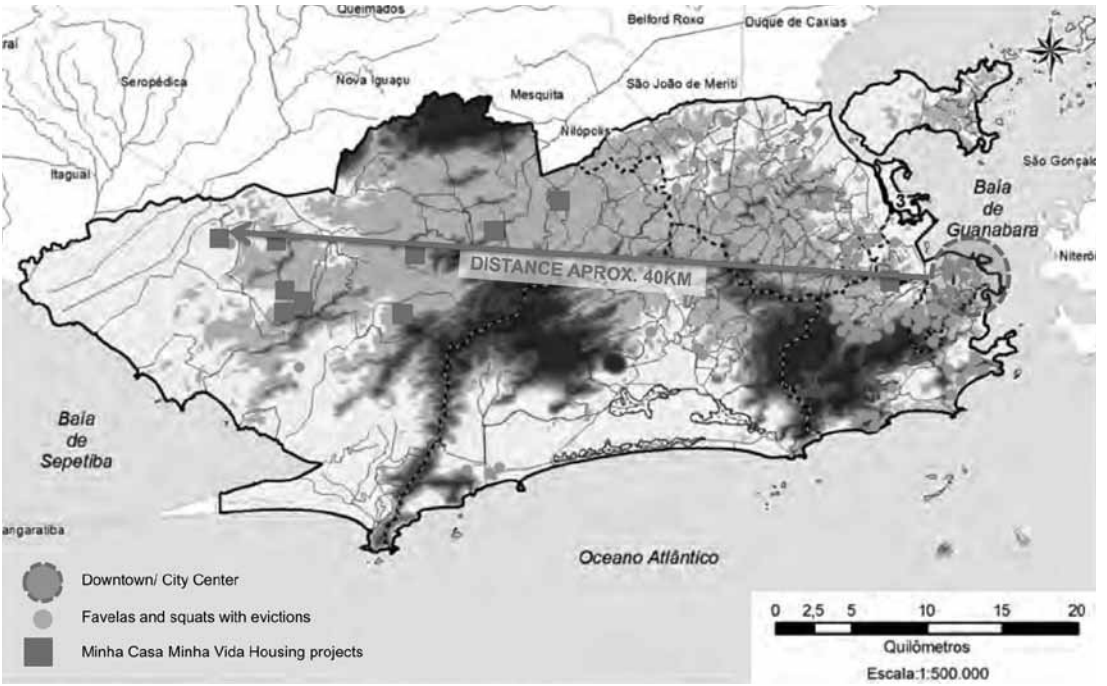
We argue that this large number of evictions is only possible because the national program is used as an important tool in negotiations with dwellers, convincing part of these people to accept the new units regardless of where they will be put. This weakens resistance by splitting the community into those who fight for their right to stay in their houses and the ones who negotiate with the municipality. So, instead of a solution, PMCMV many times presents itself as an aggravator of the housing crisis.

It's important to highlight that most of the evictions, especially in Rio de Janeiro, are not directed to precarious housing or to areas with environmental risks. They are clearly focused on areas that could be valorized and given to the real estate market to improve their profit rates. These areas are mostly in the central and south zones, which historically fetch high land prices, and around the new constructions for the Olympic Games. Most of the land where these evictions are taking place is owed by the biggest construction companies of the country, such as Carvalho Hosken and Odebrecht.

Along with the evictions, the increasing number of renters in favelas and the recent spiral of costs and rising rent prices inside favelas have represented an even crueler process of displacement.

In this context, we have seen a boosting in the number of squats and new favelas over the last decade. We believe that these signify active resistance by those being displaced, who are not passive agents and who have their own history. They are finding their own ways to guarantee their right to the city and they are striving to winthe freedom to choose where and how to live.

Both squatted buildings and favelas represent forms of occupying empty and unwanted spaces in the city. They represent not only a housing solution for historically excluded part of society, but they also make unused land useful.



▶ Faulhaber, 2012

Although the processes are extremely complex and diverse--and even trying to make comparisons between favelas and squats is not that simple--we can affirm that the main actors in both cases are poor marginalized dwellers. They share an aim of ensuring a basic right of access to housing, here understood in its urban version.

In the specific case of empty buildings, in 2008, while the national housing deficit was 5.5 million residences, there were about 7.7 million empty houses in the country, most of them located in central areas and areas with infrastructure. Brazilian legislation claims that all buildings and spaces in the city should exercise a social function and that the right to decent housing, in practice the right to property, often stands above the right to housing and the city. In this sense, we see squats and favelas as a possible alternative to the cruel process of excluding a significant part of the population from basic housing provision. More importantly, it is an alternative that has been led by these dwellers themselves. It's important to discuss how the planners, the university, the activists can participate in order to strengthen the movement and find possibilities inside the system to make it work properly.

One important example is a clause in the PMCMV, titled "PMCMV – Entidades," created after strong pressures from social movements. The clause aimed at making housing affordable to families. The program is organized through housing cooperatives, associations and other non-profit entities. Despite limited resources - only equivalent to 3% of housing subsidies - the PMCMV-E is important to housing movements because it allows them to take responsibility for all aspects of production and/or rehabilitation of housing, unlike the rest of the PMCMV. This method has broader rules and is more malleable, allowing for a better way to attend to the needs of the beneficiaries.

The PMCMV-E provides for the possibility for urban property redevelopment beyond the purchase of land and construction. We can understand this, then, as an endorsement of the executive and legislative branches of squatting of idle property. The squats organized by the Movimento Nacional de Luta pela Moradia (MNLM, National Movement for Housing Struggle), for example, has used this legalism in Rio de Janeiro to gain the approval of their projects.

We can also understand PMCMV-E as an emancipatory transformation project, since it provides for beneficiaries' self-management (or co-management). In this sense, we can interpret the PMCMV-E as the embodiment of the legal-urban order started with Articles 182 and 183 of the Federal Constitution and expanded by the Estatuto da Cidade (City Statute), which provides the fulfillment of the social function of property. Although this was just an adjustment to the housing policy criticized by social movements, we can see it as advancing possibilities for social movements to have some kind of autonomy in the housing production process.

The first cases of the PMCMV-E in Rio are Mariana Crioula and Manoel Congo[3], and we must say that there are very few projects and money directed to this segment of the program. It is estimated that only 2% of all PMCMV resources is directed to the Entidades. Therefore, squats that can get any sort of government recognition--either for purchase, gift or property reform--are seen like an example worth emulating. The following question then arises: do housing movements understand government funding as an obligation, because it is a historical debt? Maybe.

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3 Manoel Congo originally was financed by the FNHIS (National Fund for Social Housing), but it has now changed to the PMCMV-E.

Evictions in Porto Maravilha

The port area of Rio de Janeiro has long been devalued, as in most such cases, since the loss of importance for maritime transport of goods. Although it's situated in a central area, near the business center and in an area with great infrastructure, it has lost its importance in past decades. This is reflected in the existence of lots of empty buildings, warehouses and vacant land that over time has been occupied by poor people, mostly working class, who needed places close to job opportunities.

Since the 1980's, there have been a lot of discussions and some political measures regarding this area and its revitalization. We can mention the project SAGAS and the program Novas Alternativas as some initiatives aimed at preserving the social and urban structure of the area, but with a healthier environment. Most importantly is that in academia and in society there has been a debate about what to do with this area and how.

Recently, a major urban renewal project for this port area, entitled Porto Maravilha (Wonder Port), is being led by the municipality and has made all of these past discussions invisible. With the excuse of the Olympic Games, the area has been sold cheaply to private capital and most of its original dwellers have been expelled. This area had a population of over 28 thousand dwellers who had established themselves there over the past century, coming from different origins and most of them from the working class (Andrade et al, 2013).

One of the most important examples of this is the case of the oldest Brazilian favela Morro da Providência. Situated in the area around the port zone and with more than a hundred years of history, this favela was part of a revitalization project . Itwas subjected to two urban planning projects since 2010 that, instead of bringing benefits for local dwellers, resulted in the eviction of more than 800 families, most of them in the Cosmos neighborhood, in the periphery of the city. The outcome was reached by means of controversial urban interventions, like a funicular that didn't really improve the mobility of the favela dwellers, since the area was already reached by vans and cars (and could easily have had developed a more efficient transport systems, like trams or electric buss). The funicular was the object of a lot of protests by the dwellers, also because it was designed to be placed in the favela's only public space.[4]

4 For more informations on these events, see Canedon (2012).

Besides the evictions in Morro da Providência favela, many empty buildings that were squatted over the past decade in the port area have had their inhabitants violently evicted for the purpose of the Porto Maravilha revitalization project.

The recent urban interventions being led by the Porto Maravilha project figure as part of a logic where empty lots are used to justify high-impact actions to "revitalize" areas of the city. This discourse ignores the pre-existing life of these regions, and aims to impose a new way of living and inhabiting the city, at the expense of their former residents. This new way of living the city has more to do with the interests of tourism operators and of the upper classes, and it has led to thousands of people being moved away from where they live - slums, formal low-income housing or squats - to make way for another population of the city (Andrade et al, 2013).

This revitalization package has been made possible by Municipal Law 101/2009, which created the Operação Urbana Consorciada da Área de Especial Interesse Urbanístico da Região Portuária do Rio de Janeiro (Urban Operation Consortium for the Special Planning Area of the Port of Rio de Janeiro). This project was justified by major sporting events – the World Cup and the Olympics - and it was part of a strong urban marketing campaign, and the current making of cities into spectacles (Debord, 1997). Using resources and public buildings, these initiatives aim to increase private profit, instead of guaranteeing benefits to the local population and society as a whole.

The works are financed in part with revenue earned through the sale of CEPACs (Potential Additional Constructive certifications), and instrument created in the Estatuto das Cidades, which allows the Government to broaden the height of the buildings allowed in certain areas and sell the surplus building potential. With these resources the government should invest in urban infrastructure and services for the region to benefit its inhabitants. However, instead of investing these resources for the benefit of the poor living there for years, the government is investing it in the project itself and to ensure large company profits through construction, maintenance and administration of land and buildings.

Carlos Vainer[5] points out that the Federal Law, the State Constitution and the Organic Law of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro establish that unused public property shall be used primarily for social housing. In the ort Area, 85% of lands

5 In an interview about mega-events in the city in the tv program, see Juca Entrevista

are public and are being made available to realtors, who will build homes for the upper classes (Canedo, 2012).

The violence of these actions generated strong resistance and counter-actions. Several protests, and organized movements, with the participation of universities, lawyers, architects and many activists, managed to achieve some victories against this capitalist logic of the production of the city. Despite that, many people are being forced to leave their houses and to find other places to live.

Squatting as a solution

The process of squatting buildings in Brazil occurs, on the one hand, as a struggle from poor people in extreme need, organized or not, to find a house. On the other hand, it occurs as a political movement that points out to society the contradiction in having so many people without a home and so many houses without people.

Many squatted buildings in Rio have had some success in their struggle One of them, Chiquinha Gonzaga, secured public funding to renew and fix the old institutional building so as to use it for housing and their dwellers were allowed to stay in the building. This was possible after the involvement of a group of young architects – who later formed the non-profit organization Chiq da Silva[6]. They organized a participatory workshop to develop an architectural project for the building.

Another successful example is the case of Regente Feijó, also in the central area. A public and historical building had been squatted by a group of poor people and, also with the involvement of a group of architects, was able to gain funding from the federal government for the renovation of the building. Several families still live in that building.

Others, like Quilombo das Guerreiras, for instance, didn't manage to stay in the squatted building, but some of the dwellers are to receive a new house in the surroundings, through a project financed by the PMCMV-E program. This project is still in progress and is being made by Chiq da Silva.

None of these victories occurred without struggle. And although these examples

6 See http://www.chiqdasilva.com.

are important landmarks in the fight for social housing in the central area, it is important to emphasize that these victories are still very few. There remains too little potential for decent and healthy social housing, close to job opportunities and access to services.

The main current Brazilian social movements[7] that have emerged in the context of neoliberalism, democratization and urban reform debates in Brazil are: Confederação Nacional de Associações de Moradores (CONAM, National Neighborhood Associations Confederation) in 1982, União Nacional dos Movimentos Populares (UNMP, National Union of Popular Movements) in 1989, Movimento Nacional de Luta pela Moradia (MNLM, National Movement for Housing Struggle) in 1990 and Central de Movimentos Populares (CMP, Central of Popular Movements), in 1993. In general, these movements fight for the right to the city, through awareness-raising among and organization of workers, aiming at decent housing and the national organization and articulation of different struggles.

Taking the MNLM as a parameter for these movements, we see that they stand for national and general principles, and they are not homogeneous, having particular characteristics in each state and city. The MNLM-Rio de Janeiro's political project is the de-commodification of the city, decent housing and economic self-sustainability. Squatting is the way to reach the first two objectives and the last one is by creating a labor's cooperative that links access to housing to the generation of income.[8]

One last thing that is important to mention is that most of Rio's squats were named after important figures in XIX century struggles against slavery. For instance "Manoel Congo"was the leader of the greatest slaves' rebellion in the Vale do Paraíba region, or "Zumbi dos Palmares", in reference to a former slave called Zumbi, the last leader of Quilombo dis Palmares, the greatest quilombo in Brasil. Quilombos were maroon communities of escaped slaves who got together to survive. The allusions in squat names to past maroon communities

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7 Such movements can be considered of major significance because of their participation in public negotiations over urban planning policy, through the Cities Council and Fundo Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social (FNHIS - National Fund for Social Housing).

8 The cooperative was created after MNLM realized that access to decent housing would not be enough to take the families out of poverty and social segregation, and it would not be enough to guarantee the right to the city.

and slave revolts show how the process of segregation is also viewed as a racist process, continuous with the history of slavery in Brazil. It is not by chance that most favelas' and squats' dwellers are black. This also shows how the squatting movement is seen as a form of resistance, as a struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors.

Chiquinha Gonzaga

In 2004, a 12-floor public building in the street Barão de São Félix, just behind the central train station of Rio de Janeiro, was squatted by a group of 64 families. Most of them were homeless or people that lived in shelters. The building belonged to INCRA[9] and had been empty for the previous 30 years. This squat was supported by several social movements, like CMP and Frente de Luta Popular (FLP).

In 2006, through Marcelo Edmundo from the CMP, the dwellers made contact with a group of young architects (Daniel Wagner, Thais Meireles and Mauricio Duarte) looking to plan a project for the building, to make it amenable to housing. This project would have been essential for the building's prospects of legalization. The group then organized a workshop and, with the participation of many architecture students and recently graduated architects, developed a building renovation plan that earned a lot of prizes in subsequent years. The project featured the involvement of the dwellers, who were already very well organized.

Later some of these architects founded the Chiq da Silva organization, which was responsible for other important projects linked to squats in Rio de Janeiro. Along with another important organization, Bento Rubião, they continued with the Chiquinha Gonzaga architectural project and looked for funding from the Ministery of Cities.

It was only in 2009 that they received funding from the FNHIS for the architectural plan and for social mobilization. But they are still waiting for the actual renovation of the building. The squat is not yet legalized, although the federal government has already given the building to land regularization with purposes of social interest - which would be in charge of state government. The example of Chiquinha Gonzaga was not only important for their dwellers,

9 Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA).

but it also influenced other groups in the same direction, for instance Zumbi dos Palmares.

Zumbi dos Palmares

Zumbi dos Palmares[10] squat emerged from Chiquinha Gonzaga's success, when many people started to ask for rooms and places at the recently squatted building. With FLP support, 124 families squatted a public empty building – the former Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social (INSS, National Social Security Institute), in April 6th, 2005. The building is located on Venezuela Avenue, at the port area, and it has 7 floors and a terrace modified to better receive the new dwellers (RAMOS, 2012). Unfortunately, the 133 families that were living there in 2011 weren't that organized and surrendered to government pressure to evict the building. Some families moved to Paciência (a neighborhood more than 15 km from the city center), and another group of families is waiting for PMCMV houses while receiving rent assistance. Most families accepted the government's offer of 20 thousand reais and bought a new house in distant areas or in favelas. The building remains empty to this day.

Quilombo das Guerreiras

The squatting entiltled Quilombo das Guerreiras was created when a group of 150 poor people, organized along with social movements, occupied in 2006 a public building that had been empty for 20 years in the port area of Rio de Janeiro. During the 7 years that the group occupied and fought to resist realtors' pressuresof the, several improvements were made by the dwellers in the building, such as a community kitchen, a library, classrooms and other amenities. Besides that, a common way of living was daily created and improved by this group, made up mainly by women.

Planning for the squatting action began in 2005, more than a year before the occupation of the building, with several meetings involving people who were fighting for a house, students and other activists. The group tried to squat

another building in November of 2005, but they were violently evicted by the police a day after the occupation. This first attempt took place in the building

10 Zumbi was the last leader of the Quilombo dos Palmares, a settlement of fugitives slaves.

that, in 2007, would become Manoel Congo squat.

Almost a year later, in October 2006, the group occupied the empty building in the Francisco Bicalho Street, in the core of the port area, years before the project of revitalization Porto Maravilha was launched. Even after the occupation, meetings to discuss the division of labor, different strategies for the struggle and other collective decisions were frequent and helped reinforce a sense of community sense (Bueno, 2008).

During seven years of squatting, Quilombo das Guerreiras faced a lot of threats of eviction, pressure by the media, as well as police violence and pressures from public authorities. These threats of eviction increased when the area became more valuable with the launch in 2009 of the Porto Maravilha revitalization program.

Along with groups from Morro da Providência and other squats in the port area, and with the support of social movements such as MNLM and CMP, the squatters achieved a victory when the municipality agreed to have a social housing project to receive some of these local dwellers in the area of Porto Maravilha. Named Quilombo da Gamboa, this social housing project is part of the program PMCMV and is being built collectively by the dwellers, Chiq da Silva and Bento Rubião association.

Despite that victory, the families were finally evicted during the first semester of 2014 and the building was sold to the multimillionaire Donald Trump, who intends to build 5 buildings of 150 m in height called Trump Towers. This project will cost over 6 billion reais (1.5 billion euros) and is expected to become among the bigger enterprises within the so-called BRIC (Brasil, Russia, India and China) countries.

The buildings were expected to be finished in 2017. In the meantime, the former residents of Quilombo das Guerreiras are waiting for new houses and 400 reais rent assistance, which doesn't allow them to afford any rent in the surrounding area.

Manoel Congo

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, the Manoel Congo squat - organized by the MNLM -

is considered by many researchers and activists as a great example to follow. The story begins in 2007, when, after two attempts, 42 families successfully squatted a building of the INSS that had been abandoned and empty for 11 years. Since then this group of 112 people have instituted a struggle for permanence in the building, against several eviction attempts (Mello, 2014). It was a struggle with many years of negotiation and submission to government bureaucracies, but two dates of the struggle can be highlighted: in 2010, the State purchased the building by the State - as the law does not allow public property to be donated, the squatters won the Concession of the Right of Use; in 2014, there began rehabilitation works, through PMCMV-E funding.

With the combinedfight for funding for renovations and the purchase of the property, the MNLM created the Liga Urbana cooperative, based in Manoel Congo squat, in order to generate income and employment for families. This project began when the coordination of the movement perceived that access to decent housing would not be enough to take the families out of poverty and social segregation. The cooperative has, for now, sectors devoted to construction, food, crafts, sewing and aesthetics; and seeks to build an alternative to the capitalist model through self-management, labor relations and production that are centered on the human being, solidarity and the collective appropriation of surplus value.

Based on the successful experience of Manoel Congo, MNLM already has three other squats in the state of Rio de Janeiro, one in the state's capital. Nowadays, the squats Mariana Crioula (in Rio de Janeiro, to be explored next) and November 9th (in Volta Redonda) have renovation projects and a redevelopment plan that have been approved by PMCMV-E, while Solano Trindade squat (in Duque de Caxias) has developed its own project[11].

Mariana Crioula

After four years of organizing and struggle for institutional funding for housing, in December 2011, about 80 families – organized by the MNLM – squatted a federal property in the District of Gamboa, in the port area of the city. This is

11 Mariana Crioula and Manoel Congo were slaves and they led the largest rebellion at Paraíba's Valley (where were the major coffee plantations during the 19th century). Solano Trindade was a black poet and November 9th is known as the "Volta Redonda's Massacre", when the army killed three workers during a strike.

an area that, as mentioned before, suffers from the process of “revitalization” from a urban operation that is completely changing the face of the location. The property consists of an old shed with two floors and a younger shed with one floor. Over three years, the squatters and the MNLM have been struggling to purchase the property and searching for funding for improvements and renovation.

Finally, in 2014, PMCMV-E approved a 4 million reais (approximately 1 million euros) for the old shed’s restoration and the construction of a new building. Thus, the space will have two blocks: at the younger shed, a building with 5 floors and 48 residential units will be constructed, and the old shed will have 3 floors and 12 apartments. In addition, the project includes common areas like Espaço Criarte (a space for kids and teens), a restaurant, an auditorium/lodging space, a cloakroom, a common area and 2 rooms for Liga Urbana cooperative’s activities.

Currently, only eight families are living there, the other 52 families are in favelas or rented houses, awaiting the start of construction. In order to cheapen the work, some of it will be done through “mutirão” (a task force) - when future households will work - and with workers of the Liga Urbana cooperative - where some future residents work for lower wages than those offered by companies.

The project has already been approved by PMCMV-E. However, due to the large bureaucracies in the program, the work has not yet begun. All aspects of design and construction are being discussed in assemblies, where all families are supposed to have at least one member present. The biggest challenge now is to keep families interested and involved in the project. Meetings take place every two weeks - varying between weekdays and weekends - but the number of people attending is small, most being those who live in the property. This is trouble for MNLM, since the project’s idea involves self-management. This means families should make all the decisions, as the type of floor that will be used for what sort of activities needs to be decided by the cooperative as a whole.

Interestingly, Mariana Crioula is located in the middle of Porto Maravilha’s area and just a few blocks from Morro da Providência. So, why were they able to stay there? We can assume that it is a consequence of MNLM’s highly effective organizing and of the importance in the scenario of housing struggles.

Conclusions

We believe that the expelling of poor people and the alternative ways of creating housing, such as squats and favelas, are part of the same process. Either as a form of organized resistance--through movements struggling for housing and other collective organizations-- or by means of individual initiatives, the urban poor have found ways to use vacant spaces on which neither government nor real estate market has any interest. They have thereby somehow managed to ensure a right to housing and permanence in the urban landscape.

Although the priorities of the government seem to go in directions that are different from citizens' needs, the struggle that has been taking place for decades, led by social movements, has achieved some victories. The process of squatting is not always organized by a movement, but the presence and strength of these social movements is extremely important to make for dwellers' cohesion and to articulate dwellers' demands. Equally important is organizing dwellers in associations or other forms of collectives, so that they are able to continue the process of self-management, improving and reinventing their forms of living together. We can name important social movements that are constantly fighting for these cause and that have been helping to build a social consciousness for the people involved, not only the dwellers but also students and other people that are interest in this situation.

However, the squatting movement in Brazil is not always preceded by an organized movement. Nevertheless, we believe that even individual or collective initiatives without clear and explicit ideology, presuppose the idea of another way to relate to housing and the system, and therefore count as political action. More than a preconceived ideological action, we see in squats in Rio de Janeiro as a field of experimentation, resistance and fortification of other forms of relating and dealing with urban space.

In Brazil, the lack of effective public policies addressing access to housing, the huge social inequalities and a huge portion of the population living with barely any basic citizenship rights, the need for housing is a daily emergency. Needs come, in most cases, before any political thought. Squats often do not appear as a choice, but as an alternative found where there are not many other options. It is not, therefore, a choice by a collective life for another way of living, It is often initially to deal with a basic need for shelter, for being closer to work or family.

However the marginality of these areas in relation to rules imposed in our society makes it necessary to create new rules every day. And collective life ends up becoming necessary, and no less conflictual. Ideals of solidarity, autonomy, freedom and community are built from the process of social exclusion.

Therefore, the process of squatting can not only provide a viable solution for the housing issue for most dwellers, but it can also subvert the capitalistic logic of the production of the city, thereby empowering citizens, putting in their hands the decisions regarding where and how to live. It's important then, that planners?, wider society and universities support these processes in order to create conditions for dialogue, knowledge exchange and to build collectively other forms of living that are healthy, safe, beautiful and made by and for their inhabitants.

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▶The battle of Mainzer Strasse, November 1990 (Berlin), Umbruch Bildarchiv

“Das ist unser Haus...” Squatting in Germany from 1970 to the present (2018)

by azozomox

Squatting in Germany, as well as struggles against private property, have a long tradition. In 1796, the Societé des égaux (Conspiracy of the Equals), with Sylvain Maréchal, François-Noël Babeuf and others in their Manifeste des Égaux, demanded the abolition of private property. In 1840 Pierre Proudhon wrote “Property is theft” and thousands and thousands of nameless people since then throughout the centuries have struggled for the same goal: a classless society free of domination and power.

In 1872, in response to a dreadful housing shortage, people without homes put up 21 shacks without permission in Berlin. The greatest shanty town was the Freistaat Barackia on Cottbusser Tor (district Kreuzberg) with around 160 families. By the end of the year 1872, all 21 shantytowns had been evicted, but some were met with great resistance. The eviction of six barracks and one shoemaker, who could no longer pay his rent, sparked the famous „Riots of Blumenstraße.“ The street battles lasted for days, with people using flowerpots, stones, and barricades to resist the approaching police.

One hundred years later, at the beginning of the 1970s, a new squatting period emerged in the wake of the worldwide 1968 movements: the movements against the American-war in Vietnam, the woman/lesbian/gay uprising, national liberation movements (from Angola to Mozambique), riots and revolts in Paris, Prague, Beograd, Tokyo and Mexico-City, the Black Panthers and Black Power movement in America ,and finally the globally experienced cultural revolution with drugs, music and communes. “Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.” Activists were creating a new sense of life.

▶Battle of Mainzerstrasse, November 12-14 1990 in Berlin: Resisting eviction, Umbruch Bildarchiv

In West Germany the squatting movement was influenced from everything occurring elsewhere, but also had a distinctly German context. West German youth sought to break with their own parents' generation of Nazis and challenged the still-remaining Nazis, who held exalted positions in society. The various squatting movements that spread through West Germany differed from one another, from place to place and time to time, in their intensity and their cycles. The strength of the movement was primarily concentrated in greater cities and metropoles like West Berlin, Hamburg, Köln (Cologne), Frankfurt/ Main, Hannover, and München (Munich), and from 1989/90, following the unification of the two German states, also Potsdam, Leipzig, Dresden, Rostock and East Berlin.

Some places had just one house occupied, while others had many. The most active cities include Potsdam, which had more than 40 squats after 1989, Hamburg with over 50, and Berlin (East and West), with over 650 since the

▶KuKuCK,squatted house in West-Berlin, Anhalter Strasse 7
1981-1984, here took place the squatting council, Umbruch Bildarchiv

beginning of the seventies. Altogether, Germany has been home to more than 1000 squats and over a hundred squatted wagon places (caravans, trailers, trucks etc.).

Squatters vary greatly and express a broad diversity within the frame of anti-authoritarian, emancipationist ideas and politics, and they reflect the influence and interrelation with other social, cultural and political movements. Amongst the squatters we find people with different class backgrounds and political tendencies (anarchist, anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist, autonomous, anti-fascist, environmentalist), including people of color, migrants, cosmopolitans, refugees, creative artists, workers and more, as well as autonomist wimmin and dykes, radical queer and trans people, gays and drag queens/kings.

Probably the first overt occupation in post-war West Germany took place in the summer of 1969in West Berlin, when students squatted the Wilhelm Wesekamm House, a Catholic dormitory in Suarezstraße 15–17 to run and self-

organise the place independently. The squat was evicted only weeks later, on September 8, 1969, by 500 police officers.

It was followed in the year 1970 by the political squats in West-Germany in the aftermath of the 1968 revolt and took place in Köln on April 10th in the Roßstraße 16, in Berlin symbolically on May 1, of a vacant factory building in Königshorster Straße 1–9[1], in Frankfurt/Main on September 19th in the Eppsteinerstraße 47 and in München on October 17th in the Denningerstraße. This first wave created a large movement of independent and autonomist youth centers around the country with up to 200 occupied or self - managed places. Additionally, a large squatting scene emerged in Frankfurt/Main, fighting for cheap housing and resisting speculation and the demolition of buildings. The city had around 20 squats from 1970-1974, including squats by immigrants and women only. It was the greatest movement against housing-speculation, rent increase and gentrification, gaining widespread support, mobilizing thousands of people, and organizing large demonstration with more than 10.000 persons. On occasion, squatters would engage in heavy street clashes with the police, including Grüneburgweg 113 (1971), Kettenhofweg 51 (1973) and Bockenheimer Landstraße (1974). But the movement slowly declined, and by the end of 1974 the last squat was evicted.

Alongside the Frankfurt/Main squatting movement, Italian, Kurdish/Turkish, Greek, Spanish and Yugoslavian migrant workers organized large rent strikes. Suffering under lousy living conditions and no longer willing to pay exorbitant rents, in their first public announced strike at Ulmenstraße 20 in 1971, they declared that they would not pay more than 10% of their income for rent. At its peak, 1500 migrants participated in the rent strike. Groups like Lotta Continua or Unione Inquilini also supported and help organize the strike. Over time, the strikers extended their initial limited criticism on the housing condition towards a broader criticism on general living conditions: against piecework in the factory, the unacceptable housing conditions of their residential homes, the lack of kindergartens for migrants etc. At the same time, in 1972, a major strike by migrant workers against the companies OPEL and VDM in Rüsselsheim took place near Frankfurt. The migrant workers and migrant tenants, who were often the same persons, combined and linked the struggles in the factories for better

1 When the Hoffman Comic Theater organised an open theatre performance, that led to the squatting by students and young workers, spectators and activists after demands for leisure rooms and spaces for working youth in the satellite town of Märkisches Viertel.

▶ On the roof of Danckelmannstrasse, West-Berlin (evicted 1983), Wolfgang Sünderhauf, Umbruch Bildarchiv

working conditions with the housing struggles. Thus, at the first big migrant demonstration in Frankfurt/Main, you could find posters and banners not only against the landlords and house owners but also against the bosses in the factories ("Fiat-Opel-Autobianchi dei padroni siamo stanchi"). Despite this political momentum, over 90% of the 140 trials over non-payment of rent were lost, and the movement gradually lost power and declined.

Meanwhile, in Hamburg, a squat in Eckhofstraße 39, occupied only six weeks, suffered very harsh and significant state repression, when it was evicted on May 23rd 1973. Hundreds of policemen, special units armed with machine guns, forcefully removed 70 people chained inside the house. The house was immediately demolished. Later, 33 of them were charged with criminal investigation proceedings according to the anti-terrorist paragraph §129 (support of a criminal organization), and some squatters were sentenced from several weeks and months to up to one year in prison.

The second big wave of the squatting movement started at the beginning of the eighties when different political, social and sub-cultural movements – punks, autonomen, wimmin and dykes, eco-movement, anti-nuclear-struggles, the movement against the runway 18 in Frankfurt/Main –erupted and interacted. Together, they created the conditions for an explosion of a new movement - "the hunger(desire) for an different life" - with its own subculture, alternative economy, collective companies/cooperatives and organized structures of resistance.

During this period around 400 houses were squatted in more than 74 cities throughout West Germany, with the highest number of squats (around 170 at a time and 250 squatting actions in total) in West Berlin. In West Berlin, with about 5000 people living in the squats, a large movement grew, holding large demonstrations of 15.000 to 20.000 people and gaining widespread support from university professors, artists, some union chapters, parishes, writers and public figures. At the movement's peak, on September 22nd, 1981 during protests against the evictions of 8 squats earlier in the morning, a squatter, Klaus-Jürgen Rattey was chased by the police under a public bus, run over and dragged 40 meters. He died on the spot It was the first death inside the movement. On the same night, a demonstration of 10.000 people ended in heavy clashes and confrontations with the police and several groups attacked more than 50 targets like banks, police stations and offices of home builders.

The West Berlin senate and the state prosecutors used several different laws (use of violence, promoting violence, resisting arrest, inciting a riot etc.), including the anti-terrorist law §129 (forming a criminal organization) to punish and crack down on the squatting movement. From December 12th 1980 to October 20th 1982, 7.809 preliminary proceedings were carried out, 1409 arrests made, 172 arrest warrants issued under §129,93, which led to numerous prison sentences, including 18 prison sentences without parole. Facing increased repression, squatters divided into several factions over the question of negotiations, among other issues. As the movement slowly declined, the state played the factions against each other. Ultimately, 100 squats were legalized, and when the last eviction in 1984, the movement had ended.

While Berlin was the most active city, squatters were occupying buildings across Germany. One of the most famous squats in the country, the Hafenstraße in Hamburg, was squatted in 1981 and eventually grew to having around 100

▶ Eviction of a squat on September 22th, 1981 (West-Berlin)
Micheal Kipp, Umbruch Bildarchiv

people living there in several houses. By 1987, however, it was at the edge of eviction. All contracts were canceled (only parts of the houses were squatted), and the police were ready to move in. But the squatters had built up solidarity within the neighborhood of St.Pauli. They organized several demonstrations of several thousand people and enjoyed far reaching support, from unions to football fans, students to artists.

In November 1987, tensions grew when the inhabitants put up barbed wire on the roof and installed metal barriers in many staircases inside the houses. With several thousand police, already gathered nearby, waiting for the eviction order, they took to their pirate radio station (Radio Hafenstraße) to mobilize their supporters, declaring they would defend their homes by (almost) any means necessary. After erecting barricades around the houses, the squatters themselves eventually removed them. They ultimately agreed to sign a contract, and the city did not evict. Today the Hafenstraße, in the eighties a symbol of autonomous and anti-imperialist strength and a reference point of militant struggle, exists as a legalized housing cooperative.

Large squatting movement also existed in many other cities like Freiburg, Köln, Düsseldorf and Hannover. Freiburg, a city with a population of 200.000, experienced big riots and large demonstrations of 10.000-20.000 people at the beginning of the eighties, when the police evicted two well-known squats, Dreisameck and Schwarzwaldhof. Other well-known squats in West Germany include Sprengel in Hannover, Kiefernstraße in Düsseldorf or the Heusnerviertel in Bochum (evicted).

▶ demonstration after the death of Klaus Jürgen Rattey September 22th, 1981 in West-Berlin, Peter Homann, Umbruch Bildarchiv

▶ Demonstration after the death of Klaus Jürgen Rattey 1981 (the banners says: Murderer Lummer, (the senate of the interior) Murderer Neue Heimat (housing company), Peter Homann, Umbruch Bildarchiv

The third significant wave of squats coincided with the fall of the wall and the unification process of the two German states in 1989/90. This time the squatting wave extended mostly into the (former) East-German State DDR (GDR), with strongholds in Leipzig, Potsdam, Dresden, Rostock and Weimar. The gradual collapse of the East German state created a vacuum in the legal system, which presented the perfect preconditions to appropriate vacant houses en masse for all those willing to squat. In East-Berlin, 130 houses were occupied before the magistrate of East Berlin issued a decree not to tolerate any more occupations after July 24th 1990.

Even though the majority of squats in East-Berlin, organized in the squatting council B-RAT, were willing to negotiate contracts for all, the preliminary talks with the municipal authorities were canceled in October 1990. One month later, in November 1990, the 11 squats in the Mainzerstraße 2-11 were evicted, but only after 200 squatters and around 500-1000 supporters resisted for two days, building barricades, digging deep holes in the streets with bulldozers, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, and using slingshots and flare guns against the

police. Coming from all over Germany, some 3000 police officers utilized water cannons, police tanks, heavy teargas, bullets (at least in one reported case), helicopters and special combat units, resulting in numerous injuries and 417 arrests.

Although the 11 squats were lost, the combination of the fierce resistance and the critical media coverage, which exposed the first huge operation and adoption of West German police in East Berlin after the unification, resulted in two considerable outcomes: First, one of the partners in the Berlin government, the Alternative Liste, quit the alliance over disagreements with the decision to evict the squatters, effectively ending the coalition. Secondly, roundtables between squatters, politicians and mediators on the local district level were institutionalized and led ultimately to the legalization of most squats in former East Berlin.

With 35 squats in a city of 120.000 people, Potsdam was called the “capital of the squatters.” Unfortunately, only a very few squats have been legalized, and most were evicted. Leipzig provided another squatter, stronghold, especially in the district of Connewitz, where several places were taken. During the 1st World Festival of Squatters in Leipzig, which took place from the 24th to 26th of April, 1998, 120 squats – a world record – were occupied, but all were evicted within 24 hours.

Today in 2018, squatting is more difficult. Most squats do not last long and get evicted much sooner.

In Berlin, Leipzig or München there exists the so-called “24-hour policy”, where a house usually gets evicted within that time. In the past, the authorities have mainly employed two strategies: They offered contracts for some squats and evicted the rest, but this guideline differs from place to place and depends on different political circumstances. In Berlin, around 35% of the 651 squats since the early seventies have been legalized. But legalization does not necessarily protect the once-squatted houses from evictions at a later time. This is illustrated in numerous cases : Liebigstraße 14 which was squatted in 1990, legalized in 1992, and evicted in 2011. Brunnenstraße 183 (squatted and legalized 1993, evicted 2009) or the famous art-squat Tacheles (occupied in 1990- evicted finally in 2012) - all in Berlin, the house Steffi and after relocation, Ex-Steffi in Karlsruhe (squatted and legalized 1990, evicted 2006), or the social center

Soziales Zentrum in Norderstedt (squatted and legalized 1995, evicted in 2005). The squat Hasi in Hafenstrasse 7 in Halle, occupied in January 2016, had a short term agreement and is now facing eviction again (April 2018).

Only a few squats without any contracts and no payment of any rent have survived for a longer period. The Marchstraße/Einsteinufer in Berlin existed from 1989 to 1996, the occupied factory Topf und Söhne in Erfurt from 2001 - 2009. Still remaining examples include the Gartenstraße 19 in Freiburg since 2010, and the AU (Autonomous Cultural Center and Living Project) in Frankfurt/Main, squatted in 1981. Also the Rote Flora in Hamburg has, since the occupation in 1989, not acquired any legal status nor contract. In a statement "Flora bleibt unverträglich (Flora stays incompatible/quarrelsome)" issued to the press in 2001, they wrote:

"We will not be evicted voluntarily, neither administer negotiations about a legalization of the project." (...) Primarily important for us are not the walls of the building but the Rote Flora as a political idea and a resistive project, where we can transform our desire for radical social change in political interventions".

Probably the longest still existing squatted place in Berlin is the TeePeeLand, occupied since 2012, alongside the river Spree, where about 15 people with 10 different passports live in self-constructed shacks and tee pees(tipis). And the Rigaer Straße 94, squatted in 1990 and legalized in 1992, squatted for many years the ground floor of their project, where you could find the public political space Kadterschmiede and the youthclub. This occupation had resulted in several evictions (last eviction June 2016), reoccupations (last reoccupation July 2016), police interventions, and many confrontations in the last 15 years. The courtcase over the legality of the eviction is ongoing in 2018.

Although squatting seems more difficult in general, squatting still continues to be done in all German cities and in some cases has resulted in contracts ensuring longer existence. In 2009, the predominately artist squatted houses in Gängeviertel in Hamburg received a contract as well the Autonome Zentrum in Köln (2010), the Libertäre Zentrum in Magdeburg (2010) after a failed occupation in 2009, the wagonplace Zomia in 2012 after occupation and relocation in 2012. One striking example is the grannies of Stille Straße 10 in Berlin Pankow, probably the oldest squatters in Germany, in 2012, a group of pensioners (300 retirees all together) aged 67 to 96, squatted their senior

center and after more than 111 days of squatting and several activities and widespread support, signed a long term option for a contract. More recent examples include a squatted house in Bremen, Altes Sportamt in Auf dem Peterswerder 44, occupied in 2015, gained a contract in 2017 .The Zülpicher Strasse 290 in Köln was occupied in 2016 , with the goal to provide apartment for refugees instead of living in inhuman state-controlled refugee camps with hundreds and thousands. Ultimately, the city agreed to use the space to provide apartments for refugees. In November 2015, the OM10 in Oberen Maschstraße 10 in Göttingen was squatted and in the spring 2017 the squatters bought it themselves. Currently, together with refugees, they run a social center and share the living space.

In this context - a new phenomenon observed in this period is the increasing participation of marginalised and discriminated-against minorities like people of colour, migrants, refugees, homeless people, and empowered street kids. Some examples of this new type of squatting include the Refugee Strike-House, which included an International Women Space, in an occupied school in Ohlauerstraße 12 in Berlin, squatted in December 2012 and ultimately, existed 6 years before being finally evicted on 11th January 2018 and the Refugee Protest Camp, which squatted the Kreuzberg square Oranienplatz from September 2012 until its eviction in April 2014. Other examples of this trend are the Eisfabrik occupied by homeless people from Bulgaria (evicted in December 2013), Cuvry Brache (evicted in September 2014) raised by homeless people, migrants and dropouts, and the Gecekondu from the neighbourhood initiative Kotti & Co., organised mainly by tenants originally from Turkey/Kurdistan (although many are German citizens).

Through their visibility and public attention, these squatters also criticise and question racism, capitalism, exclusion and intolerance. Furthermore, the wagon place Kanal changed their composition of inhabitants from predominantly white and German people to mostly refugees and migrants, black people, people of colour and Rrom_nja (Romnja*), from different political, social and class backgrounds who live there now.

Wagon places conquer the cities

Wagon-places emerged in the eighties, first 1981 in West Berlin, and today we can count around 200 in all Germany. The size and legal status of those

wagon places vary, from some hundred to several thousand square meters. Some might face eviction, others have oral agreements, temporal, short term or long term contracts or lease agreements; some places have bought their piece of land. Concerning the often uncertain situation and depending on urban planning and gentrification developments, many wagon places have moved around a couple times inside the cities. One wagon place in Köln in the nineties was evicted and relocated eleven times. After the participation of many wagon place representatives at the International Squatting Meeting in Hamburg - Hafenstraße in 1990, the networking and level of organization among each other grew. In 1993 they organized a three month caravan-tour through Germany with their wagons, tractors and trucks with around 100 people protesting against displacement and expulsion and promoting their own philosophy of life.

Berlin, with around 20 places, along with Hamburg and Freiburg, serve as vital convergence centers of the wagon-scene. After the fall of the wall, several new places arose spontaneously on the former death strip, the no-man's land, between the wall of East and West-Berlin. All but one site, Lohmühle, have been evicted, with all the wagonplaces evicted and overrun by urban development plans, including the Kanal (until 2016 named Schwarzer Kanal), relocated three times, or the East-Side (evicted in 1997) which was comprised of several hundred people living there, one of the largest of this type in Germany.

The wagonplace Bambule in Hamburg was evicted after nine years in 2002, despite widespread support and solidarity within their neighborhood. After the eviction, up to 10.000 people demonstrated against the politics of the Senator of the Interior, hardliner Schill: "Schill has to go" (Schill muß weg) was one of the slogans among others ("Randale, Bambule, Hamburger Schule" or "Gegen die Hetze, gegen Gesetze, für mehr Bauwagenplätze"). Solidarity grew rapidly and even artists and musicians like Udo Lindenberg and Die Ärzte expressed sympathy for the evicted wagonplace inhabitants.

Squatting in East-Germany

Although it is not very well known, thousands of flats and also houses were squatted in East-Germany, predominately in Leipzig, Berlin, Jena, Halle and Rostock from the late sixties to the collapse of the country in 1989, even though squatting in the east had quite a different character. The occupations that ensued took place for the need of a flat, which was not possible to get assigned

and secondly out of political consideration to create free spaces for a different way of life. The shortage of housing was probably the biggest reason to act. The occupations were not visible to the outside in order to avoid detection by the state authorities. Economic reasons did not matter, because in East-Germany rents were very low and everybody could afford to pay them. Although new flats were constructed, the number of flats in old buildings were diminished.

In addition, due to the fact that the demolition of houses was expensive - many houses, closed by the construction supervision agency, stood empty for years and characterized many cities in the country. Estimates place the number of abandoned apartments between 250.000 and 400.000 in all of East Germany. Reliable numbers of all squatted flats does not exist, but we can state for the city of East Berlin, while in 1979 1200 occupied apartments were listed by the authorities, 8 years later, in 1987, the numbers grew and 1270 squatted entities were counted for one district Prenzlauer Berg alone. All together we can assume several thousand flats were squatted in East Berlin. Rostock also had around 700 squatted apartments at the end of the eighties.

Finally, the appropriation of entire houses by political collectives, projects, initiatives and groups, who were part of the opposition or wanted to live an alternative and communal life also occurred but to a much lesser degree. They used the spaces for exhibitions, concerts (from rock to punk), political talks and events, theaters, galleries, bars, cafes, or anti-authoritarian children's nursery.

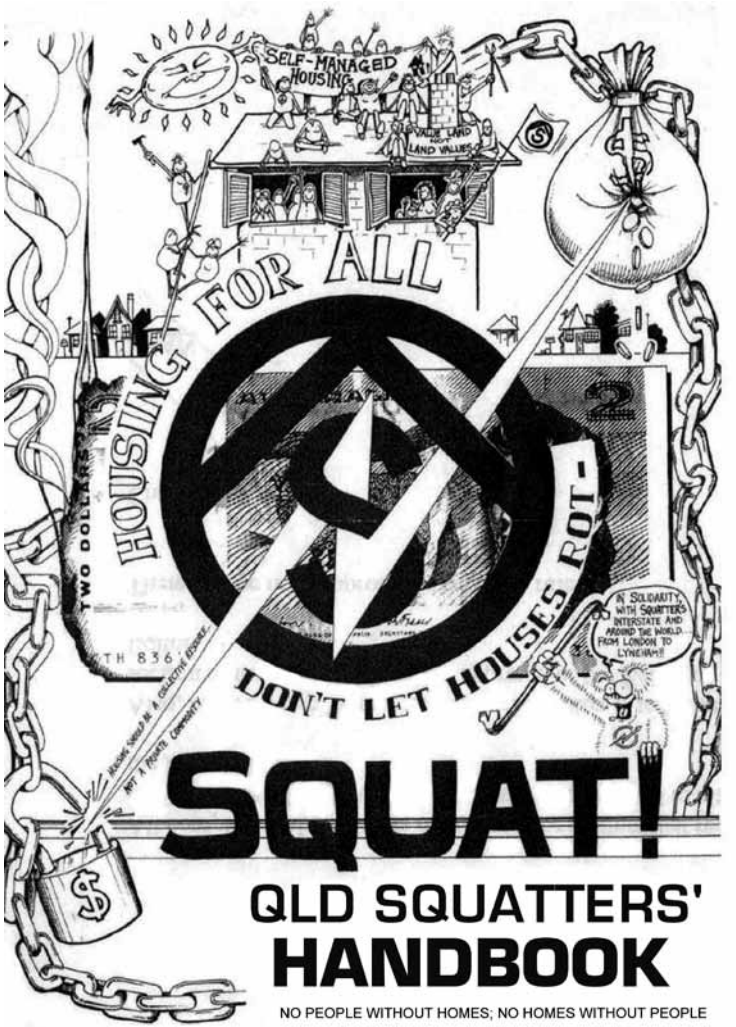
Probably the first occupation took place in Halle in 1967 in Kleine Marktstraße 3, which was also used as a book club and reading group. In several different squatted flats in Halle an anti-authoritarian group of 15-30 people were meeting until 1973 when an informer who infiltrated the group led to their destruction and the conviction of two members for subversive politics, receiving a four and a five years prison sentence each.

Known squatted house projects, communal and political spaces existed in Leipzig in the Brausestarße 20, Neudorfgasse 16 or Dufourstraße 34, in Rostock in the Wollenweberstraße 50, in Jena in the Quergasse 12 or in Zwätzengasse 7, in East-Berlin in Rykestarße 27, Mühsamstraße 63, Dunckerstarße 21, Lychener Straße 61 or in Fehrbelliner Straße 5, which has been occupied since the seventies and preserved as an official squat in the new squatting movement when the wall came down. In this aspect the new squatting

wave in 1989/90 was for many East Germans, who participated in it, the continuation of squatting apartments and buildings in East-Germany.

further information:

- http://newyorck.net/texte/ Some texts about squatting in germany in different languages.
- http://www.berlin-besetzt.de/ Map of the history of the Berlin squatting movements in a digital and interactive way.



▶Queensland squatters handbook cover reusing a 1980s graphic by Hinze

A Short History of Australian Squatting

by Iain McIntyre

When the nation now known as Australia was claimed by Britain in 1770, and invaded eight years later, it was done so under the false premise that the country was Terra Nullius, a "land belonging to no one." Given that no treaty with the land's First Nations has ever been struck, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty never ceded, it could be said that all Australians of non-Indigenous background have been squatting ever since.

The traditional understanding of the word 'squatter' in Australia denotes those early settlers who went beyond the official frontier to seize land before the colonial authorities had decided who they would grant it to. Operating at the front line of invasion these occupiers often encountered stiff resistance, but as the Crown tended to approve their claims retrospectively such risks were offset by the opportunity to acquire prime acreage. As a result a 'Squattocracy' of landowners saw ex-convicts and free emigrants rise to positions of great power in the colony during the nineteenth century establishing empires that, in some cases, continue to see their descendants play a major role in the modern economy.

Indigenous dispossession led to the creation of Australia's first homeless communities as the original owners of the land, if not confined to reserves and religious missions, were forced to live subject to regular eviction, on the fringes of European settlements. Transient and precariously employed labour, in the form of sheep shearers and other rural workers, had long been a feature of Australian society, but their numbers spiralled during the economic collapse of the 1890s. During this time many 'swagmen' survived by camping in the bush and travelling from town to town, usually by foot, whilst families expanded existing shanty towns within the cities.

The first major period of open urban squatting in the twentieth century occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930 as unemployment reached more

than 30%. With little welfare available and nowhere else to go, the homeless constructed new shanty towns, akin to American 'Hoovervilles', on wasteland, rubbish tips and in bushland. Some, such as 'Happy Valley' in Sydney's La Perouse, remained in place for most of the 1930s. Other unemployed people once more took to travelling and camping or squatted abandoned houses. In one case a group of unemployed activists lived and organised out of disused train carriages in Jolimont, Melbourne.

With thousands of people being turfed out of their homes, anti-eviction campaigns sprouted across the country. Often initiated by the Unemployed Workers Movement, an organisation dominated by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), these saw bailiffs chased off properties, real estate offices picketed and vandalised, and furniture dumped outside council and government buildings. In a number of cases recently evicted houses were reoccupied. Such actions regularly resulted in former residents being rehoused and owners abandoning further evictions. In others, such as the 'Battle of Bankstown', police smashed their way into properties to assault, arrest and occasionally shoot occupiers, many of whom later endured heavy jail sentences. Under pressure, state governments around Australia introduced various forms of welfare and rental assistance during the mid-1930s. In some cases tenants were also granted greater rights and opposition to evictions was channelled into legal processes.

Despite some economic improvement by the end of the 1939s, underinvestment in housing continued during World War 2. By 1945 homelessness was once again becoming a major issue and some military veterans' organisations began warning the government that if it did not take immediate steps to alleviate it they would take over disused properties. Inspired by UK squatting action in Brighton and London, some of these groups began compiling lists of empty properties in various areas and in August squatted houses in Sydney and Melbourne. As in Britain these actions led councils and other bodies to attempt to contain such action by improving regulations that allowed people to identify empty houses which owners could then legally be forced to rent out.

Although these concessions initially dampened campaigning, a new wave of squatting occurred in 1946. With hundreds of thousands of men and women demobilised from the military, and major post-war public housing schemes yet to take off, homelessness reached chronic levels. In February long term

shanty town dwellers and others in Brisbane began taking over empty air-force buildings, hospitals and other military owned properties, as well as the old South Brisbane Town Hall, establishing communities which in some cases lasted years. Authorities soon moved to station guards outside disused government properties, but the squatting of former military huts and barracks still occurred in Sydney, Newcastle and elsewhere.

Empty holiday houses, unused apartments, and mansions, one of which housed 53 people in Tasmania, were also occupied in most major towns and cities across Australia during 1946 and 1947. Much of this went unreported and simply involved people moving themselves in. In other cases military veterans' organisations and communists took over properties and then worked with the homeless to allocate housing with the CPA claimed to have housed 130 people in Sydney by September 1946. In many cases the groups of families involved in these actions were eventually either provided with public housing, granted tenancy or given the opportunity, with government finance, to purchase the properties they had occupied.

With major suburban construction and the 'long boom' of the 1950s and 1960s, Australian cities began to sprawl. Squatting dropped out of public sight and the next wave of political activity associated with it would not emerge until the early 1970s. When it did, it was fuelled by the existence of areas featuring large numbers of empty properties. This disuse was caused in part by long term underinvestment in inner city areas – which would later change as government policies encouraged new rounds of speculation and development – as well as by project delays and systemic inefficiency.

Such clusters of disused properties created new opportunities for informal and formal squatting networks to appear, particularly where dwellings were left empty due to contentious property and road building schemes. Fuelled by the radical upswing of the times many of the new campaigns and scenes that emerged would be less related to deprivation and more focused upon the creation of alternative lifestyles, as well as the protection of the urban landscape from unwelcome and inappropriate development.

Possibly the most famous squatting campaign of this era, and the one that did the most to repopularise the practice across the country, was that aimed at protecting houses in Sydney's inner city suburb of Woolloomooloo from

demolition. Long home to a mixture of bohemians, radicals and the hard-up, homes in and around Victoria Street were threatened by investor Frank Theeman's plans to build a massive urban development in 1972. Buying up the area and employing gangsters and police, Theeman aggressively evicted almost all of the street's 400 tenants during April 1973, despite some of them having lived there for more than 40 years. Those remaining won industrial and political backing from the militant NSW Builders Labourers Federation (NSW BLF), who placed a green ban on the project, bringing all work to a halt.

Squatting began on June 10, 1973 and by the end of the year around 100 people, including former tenants, had settled in and begun repairing the properties, many of which had been trashed by Theeman's enforcers. The developer responded with further vandalism and violence to the point where a key activist was kidnapped and a woman killed in a suspicious fire. Hostilities culminated in a massive two day eviction at the beginning of 1974, but the campaign continued. Despite the murder of local journalist and campaigner Juanita Neilson, and the destruction of the NSW BLF by an alliance of property interests, politicians and the union's Federal leadership, Theeman would not finish his project until 1977. Even then, having been forced into making major concessions, he never got to build the project he had originally envisaged.

Squatting meanwhile had spread across Sydney, particularly in Glebe, Darlinghurst and other inner city areas. Reflecting the often radical nature of the movement, Australia's first domestic violence shelter, Elsie, was established by squatters in 1974. Many properties in these suburbs, and later ones in areas such as Pyrmont and Kings Cross, would be squatted on and off into the 1980s, with a minority eventually converted into housing cooperatives and tenancies. The 1980s would also see some large empties turned into communal living, art and social spaces by members of punk, post-punk, and later anarcho-punk and 'feral' scenes.

Properties left empty by road construction and the maladministration of public and military housing also saw squatting campaigns and scenes pop up in other cities during the 1970s. When the suburb of Bowen Hills in Brisbane was threatened by freeway construction in 1972, recently vacated houses were occupied and union bans placed. Regardless of the state government's use of police and scab labour to evict and demolish some homes, the project was eventually cancelled.

"SQUATTERS" GO GAY!

"SQUATTERS" of seven weeks' standing, these residents in former Army hospital huts at Ekibin have broken into social life. Inspired by several birthdays in the past week, they threw this party last night. It was so successful that they plan to have a weekly Saturday party.

▶Brisbane Squatters, September 1946

In Adelaide properties left empty for freeway construction in Brompton were squatted from the early 1970s, with a women's shelter established in one in 1974, before the Bowden/Brompton Community Group was set up to repair properties and oppose evictions. In 1980 a tent city protest was followed by the occupation of around 40 houses around the city. Associated court action and campaigning by the South Australian Squatter's Union eventually won secure accommodation for a number of young people.

The nation's capital, Canberra, also saw squatting in the 1970s and 1980s. This was often organised by housing groups in response to the closure of crisis accommodation. Campaigns carried out in 1974, 1977 and 1980 all forced the government to provide new housing, whilst an Embassy for the Homeless was briefly established in 1984 in the long empty South Vietnamese embassy. The empty Cambodian embassy would also be squatted during the decade.

▶ Bona Vista Mansion Squatters, Melbourne, 1983

Melbourne saw a feminist group publicly squat empty public housing in Carlton in the early 1970s, and freeway construction in 1977 led to occupations and the building of barricades in Collingwood. Australia's longest running squatting organisation, the Squatters Union of Victoria, was established in 1981, and by 1984 had opened over 170 squats and engaged in high-profile occupations of property owned by government departments. As the decade progressed, the group became increasingly anarchist-oriented, establishing a social centre, producing a radio show (which is still going) and publishing 18 issues of its Squat It! zine. The group also produced various guides to squatting, compiled lists of empties, ran an advice phone line, and engaged in public campaigns, particularly during 1987, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. In the 1990s the organisation declined and was supplanted by the Squatters Information Network, which kept the advice line going until 1994.

Maintaining occupation of properties became more difficult in the late 1980s and 1990s as authorities increasingly applied trespassing laws in ways that allowed police to immediately remove squatters, rather than require that property owners use courts to obtain eviction orders. In some states this had always been the case, but with left-wing movements on the wane, and supporters in housing organisations either being defunded or heading in conservative

directions, squatters as a whole were left with less support, and fewer legal options.

Despite this, a depressed housing market meant that a large number of empties, particularly in the inner cities, could still sustain informal squatting scenes. Some of these engaged in public actions, such as a series of high profile squats in Sydney by students in 1993, and resistance against the eviction of Melbourne's Brown Warehouse gig and living space in 1996.

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a new upswing in squatting activism in Sydney, with one group living in a warehouse owned by the Shell corporation before moving into a row of centrally located shopfronts. After a public campaign forced the South Sydney council to grant the occupiers a short-lived caretakers' lease, the Broadway Squats became one of the few public faces of opposition to the 2000 Olympics. Following its eviction, some of those involved went on to initiate the annual Squatfest film festival, open the Midnight Star social centre in suburban Homebush, and engage in a series of public protests.

Such actions, and those of students in Melbourne who squatted a row of university owned properties for housing in 2008, and activists in Perth who opened a small social centre in 2009, were both spurred on and hampered by a rapidly changing property market. The number of easily occupied properties began to dry up in the late 1990s, amidst surging housing and rental prices. Although census records and studies indicate that there are still tens of thousands of empty properties in urban areas, many are subject to patrols by security guards, located in secured complexes, or otherwise difficult to access or live in.

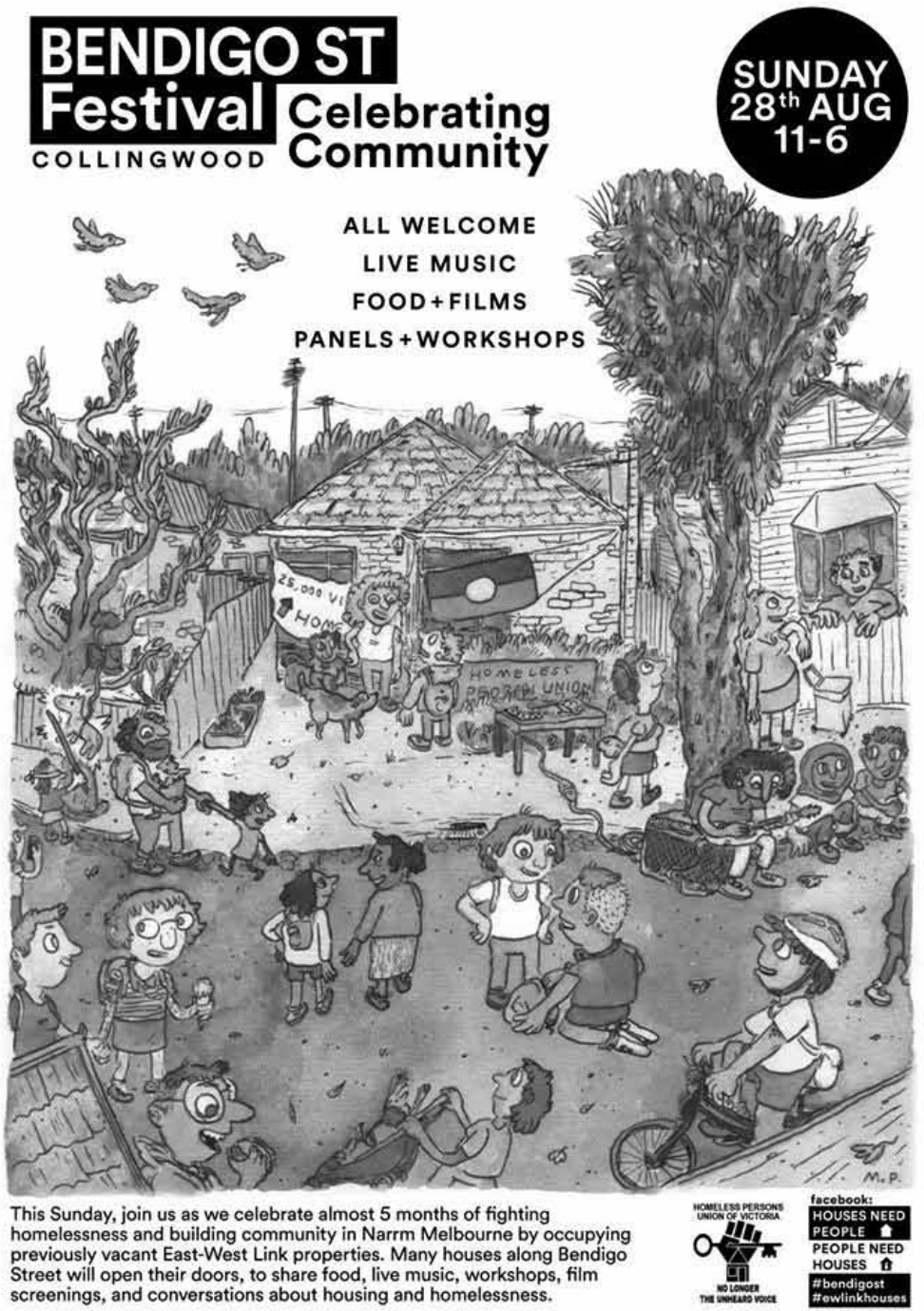
With public housing shrinking, rents continuing to rise and homelessness expanding squatting activity has persisted into the 2010s. Informal networks continue to share information, with one group of friends in Adelaide listing empties for one another via Google Maps in recent years. Groups producing new squatters' guides and holding actions focused on housing issues, have also emerged, including the Brisbane Solidarity Network and Melbourne's (now defunct) City Is Ours. Cafes, gig spaces and communal living spaces, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, continue to be set up members of punk, anarchist and radical scenes for periods ranging from a day to months. In some cases these have been legalised, in others they have become more publicly

known due to eviction resistance. The Australian wing of the Occupy movement saw city squares and other central locations taken over in most states in 2011. Activists in Melbourne shifted their encampments for months whilst squatters allied with the movement took over empty buildings in Sydney.

In 2016 the largest and most high profile squatting campaign of the decade (so far) took place in Melbourne. Houses left empty, after a proposed road building project was defeated through picketing and other forms of campaigning, were occupied by the Homeless Persons Union of Victoria (HPUVIC) and supporters. Around 15 properties were squatted over a period of seven months and a First Nations embassy set up. Following eviction resistance and successful court action some of the residents were rehoused by the state government, which was also forced into promising extra funding to address homelessness.

For more information about squats, recent and long past, visit: australianmuseumofsquatting.org

To hear news about direct action and squatting in Australia, stream the long running SUWA (Squatters and Unwaged Airwaves) program via www.3cr.org.au/suwa and the Roominations show via www.3cr.org.au/roominations



►Bendigo St Festival Poster, 2016

Squatting in Greece:
An Open Case with Closed Doors

by Nick Souzas

"Hotbeds of lawlessness"

Since December 2012, representatives of the Greek authorities have stated that they are confronted with a very crucial social problem, the so-called "hotbeds of lawlessness". According to this political discourse, individuals that collectively decide to occupy abandoned public buildings in order to turn them into autonomous political spaces are responsible for the destruction of public property and extremely dangerous for social cohesion in this country.

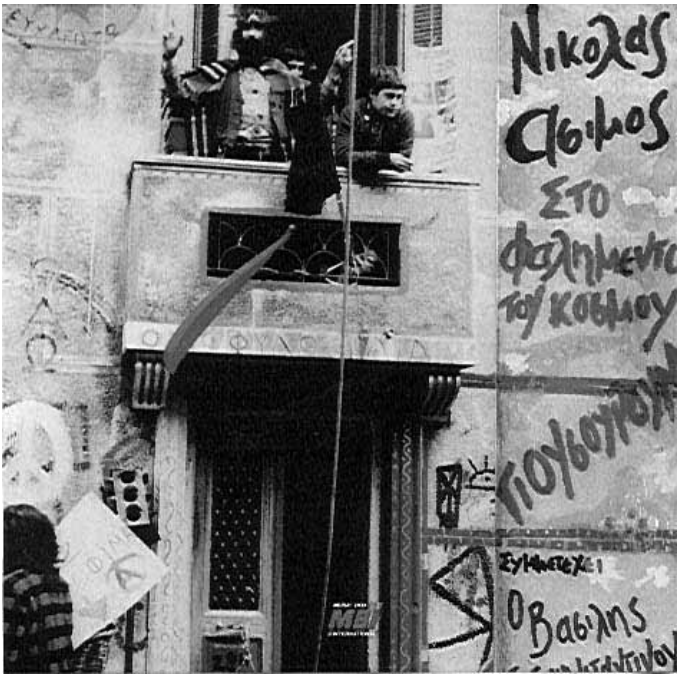
This representation of squatters as "marginal" or even "anti-social criminals" reached its peak on 20-12-2012, when police forces barged into the emblematic squat "Villa Amalias" - a 23-year-old social centre near the centre of Athens with great symbolic significance to the movements of social antagonism. Although the evidence the police found was insignificant, the squat was evicted and 8 people were arrested. Its main evidence was a large number of empty beer bottles and a few millilitres of "flammable material", the combination of which were considered as materials for the construction of Molotov-cocktails. Despite the fact that "Villa Amalias" used to host numerous concerts and other counter-cultural events (where significant quantities of beer were consumed), and also a printing press (which requires cleaning liquids that are "flammable"), the dominant discourse about "hotbeds of lawlessness" was eventually decisive for the future of the squat. Some days later (9-1-2013), the successful effort of re-squatting the guarded building was attacked by the police special forces in only two hours (and a few hours later, the nearby squat "Skaramanga" was also evicted).

Not a housing movement, a political movement

At this point, it should be made clear that this article deals with political squats in Greece, which should be seen mainly as integral parts of the anarchist/

anti-authoritarian “scene”. In contrast to other European countries, political squatters in Greece never managed to form a massive housing movement. Despite the high rent prices and the lack of qualitative housing standards, people in Greece never considered squatting as a realistic solution to their accommodation problems, except for several homeless individuals, immigrants and gypsies, who could be described as “non-political” squatters. It is a fact though that the grand majority of people in Greece always chose to cope with their housing problems in other -less risky- ways.

It is quite characteristic that a lot of young -or even not so young- natives prefer to live with their parents. Apart from the financial crisis, this phenomenon is also based on certain cultural dimensions of the Greek mentality and especially on the crucial role of the nuclear family in Greek society. Moreover, due to the dictatorship (1967-1974) -the colonels’ regime widely known as ‘junta’-, the grand majority of Greek students and workers lost the chance to actively participate in what is usually called “the global 1968”. In other words, the rebellious spirit of this period did not have immediate effects in Greece.



▶1. Greek anarchist troubadour Nikolas Asimos (1949-1988) n the balcony of the squat “Valtetsiou 42” (Athens, Exarcheia), in which he was actively involved (cover photo of one of his music albums)

1973-1981: Early background

In fact, the first libertarian/anti-authoritarian activities in modern Greece appeared in the uprising against the “junta” that broke out in the Polytechnic School of Athens on November 1973. During the last years of the dictatorship, and especially after it, independent publishing houses started to translate important foreign books into Greek, introducing the theoretical work of revolutionary collectives such as “Situationist International”, the “Yippies” and “Socialism or Barbarism”. At the same time, activists visited European squats and shared their experiences through political magazines. Under these influences, the gradual development of a new conception of politics, that put forward the “revolution of everyday life” and somehow formed the theoretical background for the emergence of squats in Greece, started to become noticeable. In 1979, as an act of protest against an education bill, Greek students occupied several universities, spreading the practice of occupying across the country.

1981-1998: The first “waves”

In October of 1981, a few days after the first electoral victory of the Socialist Party (“PA.SO.K.”) -which was a big deal for the Greek post-dictatorship society-, a first wave of squats came to light. Three empty public buildings were occupied in Athens and two in Thessaloniki (the second largest city in the country). However, these squats only lasted a few weeks, mainly due to lack of any previous experiences. State oppression caused frustration to those who might have maintained high expectations for a tolerant socialist government. Therefore the whole squatting activity was “postponed” for some years.

As years pass by, a new political subject emerged in the streets of Greece, playing an important role in events of great political importance (antifascist demonstrations, reclaiming urban space through collective action, etc). A mixture of anarchists, anti-authoritarians, autonomists and libertarian communists seemed to constitute a social antagonistic movement, which tried to move beyond the boundaries of the traditional Left. Through non-hierarchical, horizontal general assemblies and an anti-institutional/anti-systemic political stance, this social movement differentiated from the vertical strict structures of the socialist and communist parties. This social movement rejected the orthodox culture of political organizations where self-determination is restricted,

and showed a preference for diffused networks where people act according to their desires. This new subjectivity seemed to prefer the occupation of empty buildings -where activists can share their everyday life and take political initiatives freely- than the creation of formal political offices, where organization may eventually lead to power concentration.

So, in 1985, a second wave of squats emerged in Athens and Thessaloniki. This new wave of squatters attempted to avoid mistakes of the past and indeed some of them managed to keep their places occupied for years. It is characteristic that the oldest squat in Greece can be considered as a part of this second wave. Beginning in April 1988, "Lelas Karagianni" is already over 25 years old and still very active in social struggles.

However, the "big bang" took place in 1989. The period from the last months of 1989 until the first months of 1990 is known as "the hot winter of squats". New squats that emerged both in Athens and Thessaloniki tried to co-operate with each other and to organize events together. "Villa Amalias" was part of this wave.

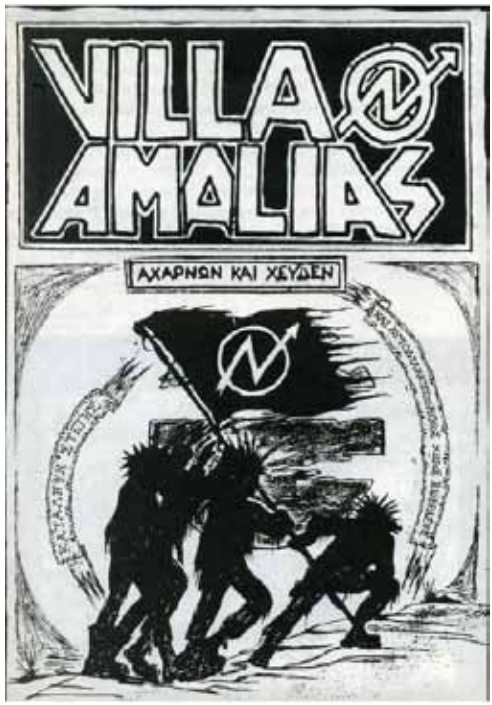
▶"Lelas Karagianni" Squat

Actually, this squat used to be one of the most famous self-managed venues for punk gigs in Europe and one of the basic factors for the expansion of the do-it-yourself counterculture in Greece.

In total, from 1981 to the end of the 20th century, only about thirty political squats emerged in Greece. But it must be noticed that all of them were/are radical projects that chose to operate out of and against the dominant institutional framework. Practically, this means that all these squats were/are illegal. None of them even tried to negotiate with the state or with municipal or academic authorities -who are usually the legal owners of the occupied buildings- consisting a specific political stance on the matter.

More specifically, when derelict public buildings are occupied and become open social centres, the aim seems to be to prove that the horizontal self-organization of the squatters works better than the vertical bureaucratic organization of the state. Squatters attempt to self-manage their needs and desires "here-and-now" in order to prove that the idea of self-organization is feasible in practice. In other words, squats want to be "prefigurations" of the pursued generalized self-management of social relations.

▶Let's take the empty houses. Poster of the "hot winter of squats"



▶"Villa Amalias" squat's first brochure

1999-2008: Spreading across the country

This radical political proposition seemed to spread like a virus in Greek society after the emergence of the Global Justice Movement (Seattle, 1999). In June 2003, protests against the EU summit in Thessaloniki signaled the dynamic appearance of the antagonistic movement in the public sphere, after several years of underground, latent procedures that took place in the daily activities of several "rhizomes", such as squats and rented self-managed places (which are called "stekia", namely "hangouts"), or even occupied places inside the universities (which function as permanent autonomous spaces).

▶12. Happiness becomes subversive when it is collective. Poster for the 4-year anniversary of "Black Cat" squat (Thessaloniki, 1999-nowadays)

This was also the first time that new squats emerged in cities other than Athens and Thessaloniki, such as "Evangelismos" (Heraclion, 2002), "Matsaggou" (Volos, 2002), "Vyronos 3" (Kavala, 2004) and "Rosa Nera" (Chania, 2004). At the same time two important squats emerged in Thessaloniki ("Terra Incognita" and "Yfanet", which is one of the biggest squats internationally - almost 20,000m²).

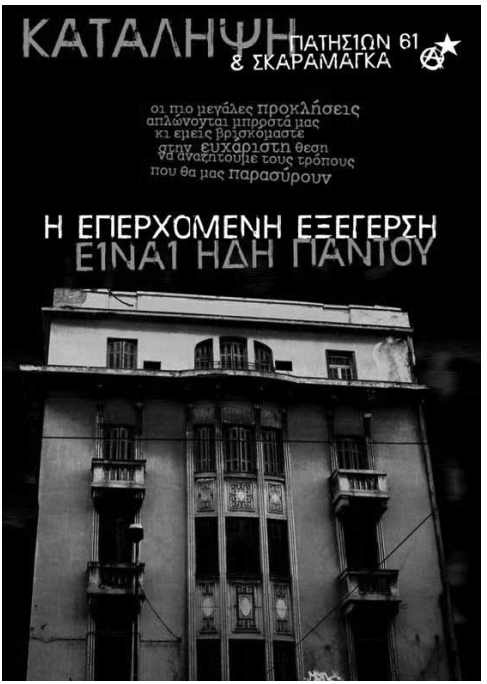
The total number of squats in Greece remains small, but it is a fact that all of them try to co-operate horizontally as a network, outside the mainstream political landscape. It is quite characteristic that all of them agree to some basic principles, such as the strictly anti-hierarchical, anti-commercial and anti-media stance. Practically, it means that every brand new squat, "hangout" or other similar project that operates under these principles (direct democracy, non-profit, against mass media) is considered a part of this loose network.

From squats to revolt and vice versa

The revolt of December 2008 can be seen, to a certain degree, as a product of the political and counter-cultural work of this network and of the antagonistic movement in general. It must be noted that after the murder of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police, riots broke out first in places where there had been previously experiences in radical collective action. Grigoropoulos was murdered in Exarcheia, which is an area in the center of the capital that is often considered as an "autonomous black-red zone" due to the political activity of several radical groups. The riots spread immediately from this emblematic neighborhood to other Greek cities where there were active squats or "hangouts" and consequently similar political experiences. Thus, it could be argued that the revolt of December was to a great extent an "anarchist" revolt. Besides, one of its major effects is that a lot of people started to self-organize in non-hierarchical general assemblies. In a way, the continuous political activities inside squats spread like a virus for a few days in occupied city halls and other public buildings across the country (including the offices of the country's main labour union, the "General Confederation of Greek Workers").

During and after the revolt, new squats and "hangouts" emerged in many neighbourhoods of the larger cities -and in many smaller towns as well. The legacy of the "December revolt" includes -among others- the occupation of two parks in Athens. On 26-1-2009, in the corner of Kyprou and Patission streets - very close to the "Lelas Karagianni" squat- a bunch of neighbours occupied a small park, in order to protect it against the decision of the Mayor of Athens to turn it into a parking lot. On 7-3-2009, in Exarcheia, just a few meters from the spot where Grigoropoulos was murdered three months earlier, an ex-parking lot was turned into the "Self-Organized Navarinou Park". These projects are quite different from the previous ones, since it is the first time in Greece that there are literally no walls between the squatters and the passers-by.

▶The occupied offices of the country's main labor union, the "General Confederation of Greek Workers" (Athens, December 2008)



▶The upcoming revolt is already everywhere. "Skaramanga" squat (Athens, 2009-2013)

Hotbeds of solidarity

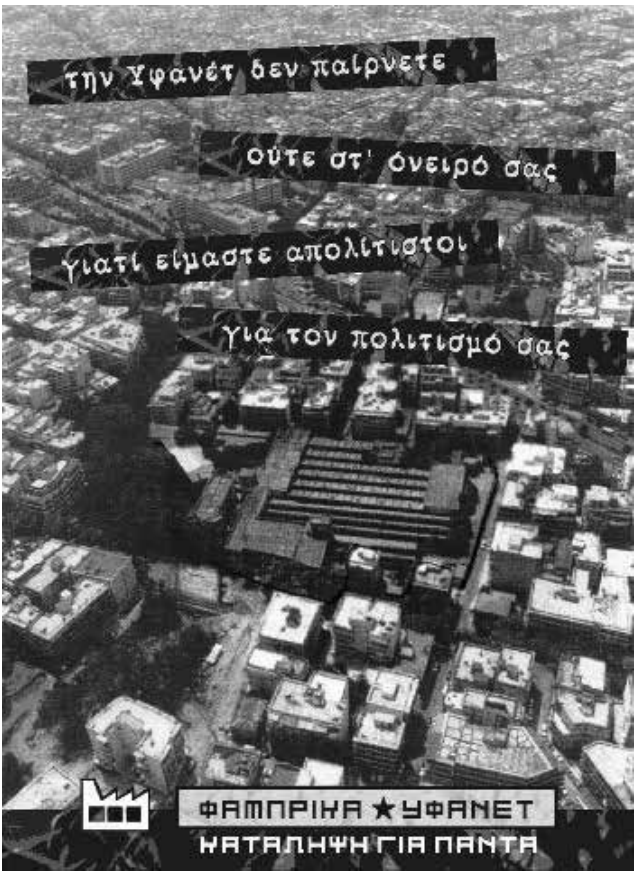
Squats in Greece seem to contribute significantly to the formation of radical political identities and squatters claim that this is the real reason that the state and the mass media (re)produce the stereotypical conception of squats as "hotbeds of lawlessness". This stereotype distorts the actual contribution of squats in Greek society which is the strengthening of a radical way of "doing politics" from below. Squatters are portrayed as destructors of public property while, on the contrary, they restore abandoned public buildings (which otherwise would surely collapse) and turn them into open social centres. In the same way, they are represented as anti-social while, on the contrary, they often contribute remarkably to the preservation of social cohesion of entire neighbourhoods. For example, the squats "Villa Amalias" and "Skaramanga" were the most important obstacles to the expansion of fascist attacks in areas where lots of immigrants live and work.

As of 2013, the basic argument for the oppression of the squats is that squatters and neo-nazis of the "Golden Dawn" are two sides of a coin -"violence". This "two extremes theory" dominates the mainstream political discourse. Even the former employees of the public television network who had occupied the headquarters of the public broadcaster ("ERT") to protest against their dismissals, were represented as "illegal squatters" and were considered as part of the supposedly dangerous and threatening "left extreme pole" of this theory.

This grim political background may explain why people in Greece hesitate to cope with their accommodation problems by squatting empty buildings. Amid crisis, social problems such as homelessness become deeper and radical actions such as squatting are suppressed on the spot, probably to discourage potential social turmoil.

A good example of the above is the case of the short-lived squat "Epiviosi" (meaning "Survival") right in the "heart" of Thessaloniki. In October 2011, an immigrant from Bulgaria along with a pensioner occupied an abandoned ex-hospital and turned it into an open place for the city homeless. The whole project ended very soon though, since the legal owner of the building asked the police to invade. It is remarkable that the owner -which is said to be entangled with the abuse of public funds for the restoration of the building- is a catholic monastery ironically called "Sisters of Mercy", which decided to throw back in the streets about 30 people (among them an 8-year-old girl with her parents) on 12-12-2011. This squat was quite significant, since it was the first case in Greece where homeless people decided to occupy a building and make it part of a broader social movement. It could be argued that such projects -which create networks of solidarity between different social groups in the midst of the financial crisis- could open new horizons, if the police wouldn't react immediately in every similar case.

One such occasion is the evacuation of Villa Amalias after it was re-squatted on the 9-1-2014. Despite the plethora of political actions that took place in solidarity with the squatters -including the biggest demonstration of the anarchist/antiauthoritarian 'scene' in Greece (12.000 participants)- the police evacuated squats in several cities around the country, including the legendary "Parartima" squat in the center of Patras (the third biggest city in Greece).



▶Air-photo of "Yfanet" squat

However, it is a fact that the whole conception of self-organization is not restricted to the microcosm of squats anymore. It could be argued that -especially after December 2008- this political practice has spread to a great part of Greek society. D.I.Y. places and collectives can be seen almost everywhere, even in smaller cities and towns, where the antagonistic movement had never been active. However, it is also a period of growing state oppression against social movements in general and it is a fact that the very existence of the squats is under stake. It is still to be seen if the consequences of the financial crisis will stand as an obstacle to squatting or if they will serve as motivation for new squats and new conceptions of radical politics to come.

Athens, January 2014

Penal Archipelagoes, Incarcerated Immigrants and Squats

by Sutapa Chattopadhyay[1]

Background

At the outset I mention that this article is not a narrative on my ideological underpinnings or geographic situatedness but explores the link across migration and squatting as it is undeniable that such an analysis is almost completely missing in popular or academic writings. More than three decades, squatted Social Centres in Europe have prominently protested the repressive state-capitalist policies and politics of social exclusion that have grown in some countries in Northern and Southern Europe, which diffused to the Americas. Squatted Social Centres belong to the history of the radical left, in particular to the anarchist and autonomist tradition – self-management, direct action, horizontality, mutual aid and solidarity to reclaim spaces denied under the capitalist regimes remain at its core. Squatting as an action, a collective political tool and a mechanism to collaborate and build solidarity networks has allowed squatters and activists to directly challenge the legitimacy of immigration law enforcement and to question the dubious connections between fighting terrorism and detaining/deporting clandestine migrants. A brief summary on my identity and political/geographical standing might help my readers to understand why I argue for greater prominence for radical solidarity and autonomous organizing in countering exclusionary immigration policies and how I have reached this analysis of the clandestine migrant situation in the garrisoned European Union (EU) and settler North America.

I grew up in a blend of tight-knit Hindu-Muslim neighborhood in Kolkata, situated in the eastern part of India. The name Kolkata derived from the Bangla name Kalisetra meaning the ground of goddess Kali, though this derivation is not devoid of controversies. Kolkata was one of the first projects under the British

1 Sutapa Chattopadhyay is affiliated to Maastricht University (School of Governance) and United Nations University (UNU-Merit) in the Netherlands.

metropolitan military. The three villages Gobindapur, Sutanuti and Kalikata were completely razed to build a fortified metropolitan-industrial base by the British settlers. The city is known for its awe-inspiring history, opulent art and culture, chaos, traffic-blocks, distinctive cuisine, anarchic urban growth, but its revolutionary character intrigues me. For me, Kolkata fondly remains as a locus for creative anti-colonial insurgence, notorious worker unions, and anti-capitalist struggles such as the Naxalbari Andolon. which evolved as horizontally organized guerrilla armed struggle to redistribute lands to landless peasants and indigenous people which swept from Siliguri in the Northern frontier of India to Southern India. The revolts inspiringly depict the solidarity of youthful urban intelligentsia, peasant and indigenous militancy, which countered class hegemony and violent accumulation of the wealthy. My everyday life was shaped by witnessing my father's discomforts on the deceitful and ambiguous communist state politics and my mother's extreme tolerance responding to my father's work-related commitments. In addition, at my Irish Catholic school, the profound yet volatile debates on women's equal status and expression had an impact too. Later on, while studying in Mumbai and Bangalore, I became acutely aware of women's rights, patriarchy, discipline and the body. Seemingly minor episodes from childhood had a remarkable impact in my mind, which created an intensive desire to understand the play of power but also what possible outlets are there to vent-out. My coming to American academia, in 2002, for my doctoral studies on indigenous eco-resistance against mega dams[2] served as a platform to challenge patriarchal traditions but regardless of my persistent efforts to get involved with radical organizing as a migrant non-white woman I remained (and remain) a radical outcast, and my invisibility (or ultra-visibility) was obtrusive; I was neither the right color nor the right gender, and had yet to confirm my place in the western radical spaces. Roughly three years back, I came across some disturbing academic and non-academic articles on the Indian Hindu fundamentalist anti-immigrant policy known as Operation Push-back,[3] aiming to rid major Indian cities of their Bangladeshi 'clandestine' immigrant squatter dwellers. Almost simultaneously I followed popular media representations of Bangladeshi clandestine immigrants in Italy and Spain. When the alarming

2 The scant attention to global southern indigenous issues in andocentric and anglophonic academy and my own nationalistic feelings propelled me to work on indigenous movements that evolved countering top-down and ecologically destructive development.

3 Ramachandran. S (2003) Operation Pushback": Sangh Parivar, State, Slums And Surreptitious Bangladeshis In New Delhi. Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography 23 (3): 311-332.

status of immigrants was on my radar, in 2012, I happened to attend a series of lectures and field surveys organized by the Squatting Europe Kollective (SqEK) at an annual geography conference at New York. Since then I have followed the trail of various Anarchist and Marxist Social Centres, to understand if autonomous organizations can really work towards building clandestine migrant identities and self-determination and lead to the betterment of the migrants' socio-economic-political conditions. Two months after the SqEK meet, I visited several Social Centres in Madrid and came in contact with some middle-aged, male, clandestine Bangladeshi migrants, through the support of Madrid-based squatter scholar activists from SqEK collective. The migrant narratives on their trajectories from Bangladesh to Spain introduced me to a host of brutal realities on the immigrant situation in the West.

'Threadbare' Bodies and Penal States

Liberalizing immigration significantly masks restrictive features in policies while immigration laws ostensibly intend to prevent migration, however sustaining migration by secretly keeping the status of classed and gendered migrants illegal[4]. Therefore, illegal migrants work, attend schools, contribute to social and economic goods yet stay in absolute anonymity. Besides this, there are other prevailing social and political debates on illegal migrants demonstrating that immigrant communities as a whole stand as 'threats' to host communities and unless the flow of migrants, especially illegal migrants, are stopped affluent nations' fiscal health would be negatively impacted. Most academics choose to stay away from terms like 'illegal', I prefer to use the term in order to clarify the ambiguous and mundane display of legality and illegality and the racist-sexist cataloging of people without legitimate documents to visit, stay or work in their respective host countries as illegal, irregular, clandestine, or undocumented[5]. Furthermore, illegal migrant populations are recurrently projected as animals, weeds, commodities, aliens, criminals or wastes. Myths, metaphors and metonymies often color the language describing migrants and state the prosaic, connecting one semantic domain to another while disparaging migrants and marking the popular discourses on anti-immigrant and migrant-phobic sentiments of general populations. Immigrants are also feared as polluting the

4 DeGenova. N. 2006. The everyday civil war: The migrant working men within and against capital. Ethnography. 7 (2): 243-67.

5 Anderson B and Ruhs M (2010) Researching Illegality and Labour Migration. Population, Place and Space 16: 175-179.

purity of western nation-states when neither Europe nor North American settler states can make claims to ethnic purity. Although affluent societies cannot economically stand without the unskilled or semi-skilled immigrant workforce, their statuses are kept illegitimate with expensive and painful regularization processes so migrant labourers can be easily used, cheapened, disposed and deported[6]. To support the aforementioned and forthcoming discussions, I will intermittently follow-up with the migrant narratives collected from Madrid, throughout the text:

> Q. How much do you earn and is it enough for your everyday expenses?
>
> A. Only enough to survive! Food and accommodation are expensive and I save very little to send to my family in Bangladesh). This two bedroom apartment is currently shared by 16 middle –aged men, all of us are paper-less. Unless papers are done, I cannot visit my family, if I leave cannot come back to Europe and my visa to any place outside Bangladesh will be denied. I probably cannot even secure a good job in my country. You know, when I was detained at the Melilla detention centre, my father died but my family members could not contact me. They did not even know if I was living or dead.
>
> Without papers if I work and the owner is caught by the civil police, he has to pay €18,000 as penalty, some years back it was €10,000 hence no one wants to hire us. All the Bangladeshis or the migrants from other countries who you see working at grocery shops or restaurants have residency status or work permits and some of them might have work visa from Bangladesh or got such visas after coming to Madrid, or arrived to Europe many years back when laws were flexible *(male respondent; 26 years; Madrid: Spain; Interviewed May 28, 2012).*

Our democratically elected governments should deal with any societal problems by offering sets of strategies and interventions, but the way power and knowledge[7] functions, it obliges us to conform as obedient subjects, so our choices and actions are neutralized. Western capitalist democratic society

6 Bauder, H. 2003. “Brain Abuse”, or the Devaluation of Immigrant Labour in Canada. Antipode. 699-717.

7 Foucault, M. 1979. Discipline and Publish: the Birth of the Prison, New York: Random House.

not only denies human capacity for creative and autonomous abilities, freedom and expressions but snares its subjects in 'negative freedom' so its citizens unreflectively agree to repressive forms of the government and rule and at the same time stay hostage to market-driven pursuits of accumulation and ideologies of individualism. Consequently the western media, besides representing narratives on solidarity across western cities after the 9/11, 7/7, 3/7 attacks, revealed a horizontal spread of fear and vulnerability from the 'dangerous foreigner' crying out to keep the 'unruly' chaos out. To explain this deadlock, I present this example: the following day of 7/7 London attacks, angry protesters in the streets of Rome hailed Siamo tutti Londinesi (We are all Londoners); similar message was proclaimed by French protesters after 9/11 attacks, "We are all Americans now", displayed on the front cover of the French LeMonde. The western media romanticizes immigrants as the 'white man's burden' but the horrors of border crossing seldom catches the media's attention, similarly we rarely see any news on the continuous sanction of monies for securitization and militarization of borders, border patrols to execute immigration raids, growth of prisons, increased detention and deportation, and gendered harassment of illegal migrants, all of which has wrongly heightened since the terrorist attacks.

Largely to fight global terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security has a massive budget of $46 billion (US); the budget for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) has nearly doubled from $5.8 billion (2003) to $10.1 (2008) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was increased from $3.2 billion (2003) to $5 billion (2008). The increased budget for ICE alone in 2008 doubled the entire Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) budget in 1996[8]. While the EU has 'modernized' its immigration policy, enclosing its borders in terms of accumulating wealth stocks with a selective-entry system based on immigrant 'skills' and 'knowledge', and competencies in contributing to the national economic wellbeing completely side-track labour shortages in certain sectors of the economy. Development aid to the non-EU developing and less developed nations is defined in terms of agreements to take back clandestine border-crossers. The defense policy of the EU is apparently willing to make its external borders more secure by criminalizing the everyday lives of non-citizens, refugees and asylum seekers. Unfortunately, immigrant deaths, which vary in reports from a few hundred to thousands, are subliminally seen

8 Golash-Boza T (2009) The Immigration Industrial Complex: Why We Enforce Immigration Policies Destined to Fail. Sociology Compass 3(2): 295-309.

as 'collateral damage' in the fight against illegal immigration[9]. Ironically, popular statistics repeatedly outline that there are 12 million clandestine immigrants in the US but I doubt if most of us are aware that currently two million people are locked up in US prisons, 70 percent of the imprisoned people are non-white, or that the growing prison population contains disproportionate amounts of black women and Native American prisoners. Roughly five million people including those prisoners on probation and parole are directly under the surveillance of the criminal justice system, but instead of reporting this. mainstream media stories suggest that black mothers on welfare are reproducing criminal children[10].

Incidentally, the term Immigrant-Industrial-complex is coined after Prison-Industrial-complex, joining together militarization of border, terrorism and crime, and the social construction of immigrant-phobia[11]. For example, the Spanish government has responded to pressure from the EU with the gradual fortification of the North African exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from 1990 onwards. Those who are arrested on the basis of illegal entry are first detained for a maximum of three days. If their national origin cannot be determined, an expulsion process is initiated: they are interned for 40 days (in Italy it is 60 days and in Greece it is 90 days), and if their nationality remains unknown or if the country of origin or transit does not readmit them during this period, they are released. The authorities cannot send them out of the country but the expulsion order keeps their stay illegal and prevents them from taking up any legal employment. During 2002 and 2003 only about a quarter of all expulsions were carried out, the remaining 66,000 immigrants were released from detention centres with an expulsion order that was not executable – modern day clandestine migrants are neither sacrificed nor killed, as they are not inside or outside the jurisdiction of state laws[12]. SIVE is a system of external vigilance that is operated by la Guardia Civil. It is a technologically advanced structure for detecting and intercepting paternas (boats) and other small vessels, which consists of a system of fixed and mobile detection devices (radars, video and infrared cameras) that can identify small vessels at a distance of 10 km and estimate the number of people on

9 Houtum, H. van 2003. Borders of Comfort: Ambivalences in Spatial Economic Bordering Processes in and by the European Union. Regional and Federal Studies 12: 37-58.

10 Davis, A. 1998. Masked Racism- Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex. http://colorlines.com/archives/1998/09/masked_racism_reflections_on_the_prison_industrial_complex.html

11 See Golash-Boza,2009.

12 Agamben, G. 1998. Homo Sacer, Stanford UP.

board at a distance of 5 km. At present, SIVE uses advanced radar technology that proved its efficacy in the 2001-2 war in Afghanistan; it can detect vessels up to 25 km offshore, giving la Guardia Civil at least three hours to prepare before the arrival of a paterna. In the past, paternas were fishing boats, now they are painted in dark colors to make them less visible. They are often less seaworthy and little more than inflatable rubber boats (zodiacs) that permit human smugglers to increase the number of passengers on each journey and benefit from economies of scale. Vast numbers of migrant deaths at sea are due to drowning, if they cannot swim, or get caught by currents. In front of la Guardia Civil, immigrants have fallen into the water and drowned within seconds or become hypothermic after sitting still for 15 hours or more. They can also suffocate when exposed to toxic gas if the boat fuel comes into contact with seawater[13].

Q. How was your journey to Spain?

A. I came to Libya with a job contract and a work permit from Bangladesh. My work was to turn on and off a power-generator. After doing this for several months, I approached a Bangladeshi engineer and expressed my wish to work as a building constructor. I worked for a month under a Korean boss, at a construction site, and I also did well in my work. In the beginning, I earned 450 Diner, after a year there was an increment of 200 Diner, so it was 45,000 Bangladeshi currency (taka). After working for 11 months I was laid-off as the company downsized. The place where I stayed, a person put me in touch with a Bangladeshi (dalal) broker who introduced me to a broker from Ghana. They said if I could give 1,000,000 Bangladeshi taka (€10,000) then they would do my paperwork to migrate to Spain. It's a long story how we reached Morocco. … We travelled 17 hours to reach a place in the Algerian border from Tripoli and for three days in the heat of the desert without proper food, water and transport to the Moroccan border.

After the Indian broker bargained and fixed prices on us, we were told one day that we were leaving for Morocco. Eleven of us queued-up and walked, before dark in public. Many people like us who we were crossing the border were already waiting at spot where we were taken. I assume

13 Carling J (2007) Migration Control and Migrant Fatalities at the Spanish-African Border. International Migration Review 41 (2): 316–343.

that the brokers had fixed the police, may be they did as we were not hidden any more. There was in fact a police security with us. After an hour or two we were handed to the Moroccan broker. Many times, it felt that our bodies were objects for sale – for crossing one border to another, the brokers bargained, fixed price and sold us like commodities. Our journey to the sea where the boats were waiting was appalling. … Although we were thinking that we were close to the sea we were not, we walked all night and then we reached the shore. After waiting for two days, on the third day we were asked to remove everything from our bodies. We could not carry bags or extra clothes, even our documents were taken away, now we were without our identities. When I first saw the rubber boat, I was scared of drowning, but had no choice. You know, even if any one had given me a big sum of money I would not have boarded that boat or taken the risks but it was too late to decide! I was so naïve that I had no clue that I was being trafficked or that the passage to Spain would be so horrific …

It was late night and time was short and hence the brokers shoved us in the boats as quickly as they could. These boats probably had a capacity to carry only 10 or 12 people but 78 of us were squeezed in the boat like animals. The boat started late night. I guess it ran for 12 hours, around noon it blasted! Ten of us fell in the water, we emptied the oil container from the boat. The main purpose was to stay afloat.
After floating for nearly six to seven hours, completely fatigued and almost unconscious, we spotted a ship and showed hand signals. We even swam close to the ship hoping that the people from the ship will spot us and take us on board. The people from the ship saw us but did nothing, the ship passed by and again came back, although it did not take us on board, my hunch is that they informed the Spanish border patrol. Within half hour, Spanish speed boats came and lifted all those who were in the water but those on the boat were taken back to Morocco. A small group of us were brought to a camp, called Melilla. The city of Melilla has a small population and most of the local people are engaged in petty jobs. I gradually came to know that Melilla was a detention centre. Before this episode of my life, I had never seen a prison nor did I know the meaning of detention centres. All I knew is that if the police finds out who I am, where I am from, I will be deported to Bangladesh. After staying there for 40 days I was send to Madrid and I

still don't know why? *(male respondent, 26 years; Madrid: Spain; Interviewed May 26, 2012)*.

'Deportability' is a hostile way to sanction state-sponsored militarization of borders. Restrictive laws exclude, discipline and detain[14]. Although represented by usages such as illegal, most times the income-generating activities or daily activities of migrants are not illegal or criminal, rather they are challenged to accept difficult trajectories crossing borders. Subsequently they are banned from living a normal life, which shows that often laws are illegitimate not socially-excluded migrants.

> Q. What do you sell? When you sell the goods in the streets, don't you fear that the police can confiscate the goods? Have you ever been caught?
>
> A. We buy our products from Asian wholesalers, such as soft drinks, flowers, sunglasses, plastic toys, excreta. Yes it has happened many times, the police have taken our goods and charged heavy fines. For that reason, we carry goods worth ğl0 - 15 if it is taken by the cops then we don't endure huge losses. And also if we carry less, it's not heavy but easy to move around. If the cops catch us, they charge us a penalty of €150 - 200 for commodities worth ğl0-15. Sometimes we are kept in the prison all night or for a day. Many times we pay high penalties before our release. This happens if we are caught by the patrolling state cops. If we are taken to the prison, our finger prints are taken, sometimes public prosecutors come by to release us. When we ask the police, why do you trouble us in this way, with a chuckle they say: "that's the nature of our job". We have a difficult everyday life in the EU space, also the passage to Spain was dreadful, and we cannot go back to our country as many of us have endured huge loans to get to Europe. Most of us came with short visas, or work contracts, or through other European countries and some of us have become illegal over time as our permits expired – the only reason for coming to Europe was to earn a better life for our families back home but unless we are regularized or get some kind of work permit we continue to stay in perpetual fear *(male respondent, 40 years, Madrid: Spain; Interviewed May 28, 2012)*.

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14 De Genova. 2002. The Migrant Illegality and Deportability in everyday life. Annual Review Anthropology. 31: 419-447.

Borders[15] are lines, constructs, frontiers, barriers, mazes, sieves, fortresses or gates used to keep the immigrant 'underclasses' out. Divisionary borders are not random or unambiguous, nor are countries cherry-picked but are selective. For instance, the composition of a 'white' Schengen list and 'black' Schengen list illustrates that most black-list countries in Europe have some colonial/ imperial connections, whereas the white-list countries are the settler states and European nation-states, this construction of the black- and white-list has to do with racialization, segregation and marginalization of a large part of the world by birth, race, gender, class and skill[16]. In addition borders were drawn by colonial settlers for the benefit of resource use and accumulation while some writers state that borders are sketched on human bodies for the exploitation of their labour. Further if western nations' interventions in illegitimate wars, resource depletion/accumulation, environmental destruction and economic depression of poorer nations are consciously accepted, then why should the Western countries' halt the mobility of people from precarious locations.

Squatting – Migration Connection

In this background, I confirm that squatter activists and Social Centres can align with clandestine immigrants to stay away from the hegemonic polity since there are no alternatives to reform capitalist initiatives other than autonomously establishing the reality that the minority people can fight against 'other-ization', containment, exclusion and the rapid militarization of borders. Urban social movements are meaningless in isolation to the background of social change or justice but uniquely establish gender-egalitarian society that does not exclude people 'by birth' but rightfully include them as global citizens.

Squats can provide spaces where activists belonging to different social movements and political ideologies interact, co-exist and work together because the important political element in squatting is the rich combination of different types of squats in terms of their activities. Some squats are occupied, some are non-squatted Social Centres while some previously occupied squats are legalized. Heterogenous groups, like squatters, migrants, visitors and locals, who

15 Bauder, H. 2011. Toward a Critical Geography of the Border: Engaging the Dialectic of Practice and Meaning, Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 101:5, 1126-1139.

16 vanHoutum H (2010) Human blacklisting: the global apartheid of the EU's external border regime. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. 28: 957-976.

share similar anti-capitalist eco-friendly concerns, strategies and ideologies in using run-down or unused spaces work in solidarity[17]. Therefore, squatted Social Centres stand on collective principles of horizontality and direct-democracy, self-management, non-bureaucratic regulation, and spontaneous militant resistance – it is the productiveness and the diffusion of power from-below that is useful. Consider for instance the Zapatistas or Naxalitie uprisings, de-colonization movements of native and immigrant groups (like Sans Papiers, No One is Illegal, No Borders, Sanctuary City), militant student particularisms, or other counter-capitalism/globalization struggles like G8, Seattle-99 or current No-Tav protests.

Recalling my experiences with Social Centre activities and migrant narratives, I suggest that Social Centres could serve as a way to gain migrant autonomy because:

1. The radicalism and autonomy of the solidarity squatting movement is creative and persistent in accepting new circles of people especially those who are socially and economically deprived and excluded by the mainstream society.

2. Squatting is a collective political mechanism for rightless and paperless people so they can claim for their rights and access to basic needs. In addition, they occupy and squat spaces to oppose the dominant oppressive trends. Squatting validates their political situatedness and public visibility in the neoliberal West. Take for example the wave of protests by clandestine immigrants that swept through France in the late 1990s and continued unabated for four years. Immigrants who participated in this mobilization called themselves the 'sans papiers', literally those without papers, and demanded that they were granted legal residence and work permits.

3. Solidarity can be pursued when squatter activists or other immigrant rights and justice organizations actively collaborate to resist anti-immigrant politics, deportation, capital punishments or detention.

4. Squatted Social Centres can serve as a network or a platform where clandestine migrants can excel their creativity through making and selling food, stage theatres or plays, carry out active discussions on politics and policies and also take language lessons.

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17 Martinez, M. 2007. The Squatters' Movement: Urban Counter-Culture and Alter-Globalization Dynamics. South European Society and Politics 12(3): 379 – 398.

Q. How are you involved with the Social Centres?

A. We organize plays in Bangla with Spanish translation, to familiarize the local people here with our culture. During such activities, we also make Bengali snacks and sell them, the monies that are earned from this helps towards procuring ingredients and the maintenance of the Social Centre. It is fun to see that the youth groups really like the bright colored dresses, songs, dances and food. At least this way we find some solace with the local people, though we cannot quite claim that we feel integrated. There are some Social Centres that provide Spanish language classes and educate us on immigration policies, which helps *(male respondent, 37 years; Madrid: Spain; Interviewed May 28, 2012).*

5. Most Social Centres re-cycle, re-use, share resources and promote low-cost living in an environmentally sustainable manner, through these practices a new meaning, user value and alternative living-style is added to the squatted spaces which encourages economically vulnerable people to experiment outside of the capitalist/commodified/consumerist mainstream exploitative culture.

At the Tabacalera Social Centre, what I like is the span of activities. Here, heterogeneous groups (squatters, migrants, local people) can use their creativity or skills in making use of the space – to grow vegetables, hold art exhibitions, take dance lessons, practice music and engage in bike and sewing workshops. It also has a canteen where food is sold at a cheaper price *(male respondent, 37 years; Madrid: Spain; Interviewed May 28, 2012).*

6. Squatting can be passive or active protest and a form of social disobedience/ non-cooperation against the unfair distribution of wealth, exploitation of resources, material or natural, which challenges unfair state politics and policies and supports a (gender) egalitarian-environmentally sustainable society.

The complex approaches, activities and connections of the squatted Social Centres are in alliance with traditional class struggles, workers or students or women's movements geared towards reclaiming rights, social space, and their collective denial of hegemony. "Social Centres are not 'ghettos' but horizontally self-managed and creatively produced spaces, they counter capitalism,

totalitarianism, authoritarianism, or dominant practices of rule"[18].

Standing at the interface of augmented western militaristic interventionism, incarceration of the marginalized, robust neo-liberal capitalist initiatives and global ecological de-generative development projects it is vital to put in practice horizontal and gender-egalitarian practices such as squatting in order to halt rapid immigrant apartheid in first world nation-states.

18 Mudu, P. 2004. Resisting and Challenging Neoliberalism: The Development of Italian Social Centres, Antipode. 36(5): 917–941.

▶ Flyer for a demonstration in front of the tribunal. The slogan states: Jullie Wetten Niet de Onze: 'Your laws are not our laws', source: Indymedia.nl

“You can’t evict an idea” - The Criminalisation of the Squatting Movement in the Netherlands

by Deanna Dadusc

They are not afraid of our bricks,
they are afraid of our willingness to throw them

In the Netherlands, the 2010 criminalisation of squatting emerged in the context of changing forms of political, economic and moral organisation of the city, where gentrification, the protection of private property rights and capital investments was fostered at the costs of housing rights and socially-oriented uses of space. At the time of criminalisation Amsterdam, in line with most of European cities, was subject to corporatisation and so-called ‘urban revitalisation’ increasingly turning urban spaces into commodities, leading to higher rents, the demolition of social housing and its replacement with unaffordable apartments. Yet, the discourses which emerged around the criminalisation of squatting placed the discussion away from the urban problems related to the neoliberal reorganisation of urban spaces, and addressed squatting as the problem to be solved.

The main discourses used by political parties and the media to promote criminalisation are summarised in the so-called Black Book of squatting (Zwartboek Kraken) published by the liberal party VVD (Woud 2008). Here, squatting is framed as an immoral action against private property rights, and squatters are addressed as violent criminals and foreigners who pose a threat to public order and to Dutch democratic values (Dadusc and Dee 2014). Squatting was framed as an enmity toward the values of Dutch neoliberalism rather than political activism. According to this morality, changing the law regulating squatting would be necessary to protect the security of the local communities from violent enemies, to contain undesired presences and to prevent any threat to moral values and ‘decency’.

Moreover, in this context housing is here framed as a commodity that only 'good hard working citizens' can deserve, rather than as a basic need. Concepts such as laziness, and deserving suggest a morality of good conduct and good citizenship based on values of work and of productivity. What is criminalised here is not simply the fact that squatters do not work and do not pay rent, but their very unwillingness to work and to pay rent. Squatters are framed as lazy cheaters. Here, the ethic of refusal of labour, in favour of political action focused on creating alternatives to capitalist and neoliberal modes of life, is not addressed as a political action and as a different ethic, but as a moral monstrosity.

A new morality over the use of space encouraged by corporations and the tourist industry, required the conditions for modes of life and of conduct along the lines of 'home, work, leisure', and where the nomad, the homeless, and the squatter are eventually defined as immoral and illegal, confined within specific spaces or forced into the sedentary existence. The criminalisation of squatting, in this context, is part of a multitude of technologies for security and public order established to ensure a smooth process of gentrification and to prevent any form of resistance to the modes of urban dispossession.

Wet of Geen Wet, Kraken Gaat Door!

The law criminalising squatting (Art 138) is under the title of "crimes against public order", not against private property, hence granting the police the power to intervene without previous complaint by the property owner, and without previous authorisation by the Public Prosecutor. Article 551a states that in case of suspicion of the crime of squatting every policeman can enter into a house without a warrant, arrest those present in the house and remove all their belongings. In other words, the aim of the law was to give the police free hand in evicting any building immediately, without any notice, and without the need of any evidence that the crime of squatting had actually been committed.

The first part of the Act states that anyone who enters or stays in an empty building will be accused of squatting. Furthermore, if two or more people commit the act of squatting, the punishment may be one third higher. This last aspect deserves attention, as what is at stake is the criminalisation of a social movement, which is by definition characterized by collective action.

The second part of the act entails a new regulation of vacancy. This led to the increasing involvement of private corporations and security companies in the distribution of housing: namely property guardianship (commonly known as anti-squatting). Anti-squatters, or property guardians, are explicitly hired as security guards, but the practice is promoted as a form of temporary housing; yet, they do not receive any salary as security guards, nor they any tenancy right while paying 'administration fees at up to 400 €/month.

Despite these conditions, according to the Bond Precaire Woonvormen[1], in the Netherlands there are between 20.000 and 50.000 anti-squatters[2]. This is an international trend that is not only understudied, but also underestimated: indeed, this practice does not simply affect squatters' capacity to occupy a building, as the name would suggest, but it represents the ultimate erosion of housing rights and an extreme form of labour exploitation of those in urgent need of housing.

The punitive power of this criminal law is not expressed much through convictions for the crime of squatting. Those arrested during occupations are charged for not showing an ID, for resistance to police orders or disturbance of public order, rather than for squatting: rather quick and cheap evictions and identification of squatters figure as one of the main priorities of this law. In particular, criminalisation enabled 330 evictions just in the first two years, leading to the spatial confinement of the few squats left, easy to control and geographically segregated, 'kettled' (contained in a small space).

In this way, the police monitor the squatters' population, creating both individualized and group profiling, recording the political backgrounds and the connections between groups. The priority was to gather information about individuals and groups as a means of control not only of their activities, but also on the risks they are suspected to pose to the public order. Thus, the aim of the police is not to convict squatters but to manage them, to channel and contain squatters within a controlling gaze: namely, to make them governable.

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1 http://www.bondprecairewoonvormen.nl

2 http://bondprecairewoonvormen.nl/2013/10/master-scriptie-de-precaire-situatie-van-anti-kraak-door-warren-van-hoof/ ; http://www.mugweb.nl/nieuws/9247/

Whatever they say squatting will stay

The criminalisation of squatting did not constitute a smooth processes, but a contested dynamics: the convergence of disparate and diverse practices of resistance destabilised the smooth operation of the law, hindered its application and interfered with its power. These resistances countered the modes of government enacted through criminalisation by subverting its discourses, its juridical aspects, the power conferred to the police as well by opposing evictions.

All over The Netherlands groups of squatters actively resisted criminalising discourses and practices (see: Dadusc and Dee 2014) by organising campaigns, demonstrations, and direct actions. Banners stating 'Mede mogelijk gemaakt door de Kraakbeweging' ('Made possible by the squatting movement'[3]) were hung at every (current and former) squatted building[4] to show the extensive impact of squatting in Amsterdam cultural landspace. Moreover, demonstrations and direct actions were organised in Den Hague, Utrecht and Amsterdam, and they were often violently repressed. Just the day before the new law was to be approved, hundreds of people slept on the Dam Square in Amsterdam to show the levels of homelessness that the new law would provoke.

Starting with the demonstrations that took place on the 1st of October 2010 and 2011, the police began performing a new attitude toward squatters, including preventive use of violence, preventive arrests and immediate evictions. The use of violence by the police is often framed as a proportional response to the danger and threats expressed by the squatters. Yet, preventive interventions are not related to actual concerns for security and threats to the public order, but are motivated by the desire to stop any form of resistance to authority. Preventive arrests and violence seem to perform an intervention to address the 'moral danger' entailed by these very modes of thinking and of feeling toward authority, rather than an actual threat to public order.

Yet, arrests and police violence are often followed by a direct response by squatters and supporters. Indeed it is not uncommon that direct action is

3 http://www.krakengaatdoor.nl/node/21.html

4 Find pictures of all the buildings hanging the banner here: https://www.indymedia.nl/nl/2006/06/36908.shtml

▶ October 1st 2010, Demostration against the squatting ban
Author: Alex Kemman

taken in solidarity with those who are held in police custody. Mobilising noise demonstrations in front of the police station or detention centre, graffiti on the streets, smashing police cars, or throwing paint bombs against police stations are common counter-actions to police uses and abuses of authority. These counter-actions do not pass unnoticed on the police side and they have important repercussions on the way the police organise their tactics and strategies.

When a house on Simon Stevinstraat was squatted in 2012, the police violently attacked the squatters and evicted the house (Simon Stevinstraat Video, 2012.)[5]. This episode of police violence was filmed from several perspectives. The videos produced by the squatters hit mainstream media and created a political scandal[6]. Moreover, the squatters filed complaints against one of the

5 See the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAspMYXBgvo and See: ("Kraker toont wonden, politie reageert," 2012) http://www.at5.nl/artikelen/81134/kraker-toont-wonden-politie-reageert&usg=ALkJrhioK7YRgYU0y_KwYfQZLfpPNy0kHQ

6 For a summary of the newspapers articles and discussions see: https://www.indymedia.nl/node/4699.

policemen involved[7]. The public reaction provoked by those images forced the Mayor and the chief of the police to reformulate police strategies toward squatters: several restrictions were ordered, establishing that the local police officers should not take any type of initiative toward squatters[8].

The multiple responses of squatters to police intervention, which varied from juridical action to direct actions, managed to affect the power that the Kraakwet conferred to the police. These direct counter-actions by squatters aimed at bringing the message that arrests and police abuse of authority would not pass unnoticed and would not happen without a response. While as soon as the law passed the police immediately made spectacle of their new authority by arresting people and evicting houses, in a few months these tactics were forced to change, to the point that arrests of squatters became an exceptional practice, rather than the norm. Hence, the counter-actions of squatters had a large impact on the way the police organise their strategies and the way the criminal law is exercised.

You cannot evict ideals

Both before and after the introduction of the criminal law, and up until 2013, evictions used to take place by means of the so-called 'eviction wave' (ontruimingsgolf)[9]: eviction waves were meant to evict multiple buildings in one single round, with the use of riot police and a technical team: the Brand- en Traangaseenheid (BraTra). The eviction is a moment of loss, the ending-point of a long process, but it also turned into an event for performing visible resistance. Although the eviction itself cannot be stopped, resistance to eviction is turned into a political statement and a performative action. It becomes the occasion to shout loud a message against urban politics, gentrification, dispossession and corporisation of urban life. Paint bombs, barricades and lock-ons can be used to boycott the police operation by annoying and degrading the police, and subverting their performance of authority. While the police deploy their authority

7 See: http://www.spitsnieuws.nl/binnenland/2012/05/krakers-doen-aangifte-van-politiegeweld

8 My translation from: http://www.at5.nl/artikelen/81327/dit-ziet-er-niet-goed&usg=ALkJrhhWD_0EeXpTlt1oUxL3P-GLhVaxdA and http://www.parool.nl/parool/nl/4/AMSTERDAM/article/detail/3326561/2012/10/04/Pas-op-met-geweld-bij-ontruimen.dhtml

9 For a list of videos of eviction waves see: http://video.squat.net/tag/ontruimingsgolf/

►October 2010, Banner at the squatted space 'De Hallen' (Amsterdam West) stating: 'A city without squatters is like a house without people' Source: Indymedia.nl

and their military-like force, squatters counter them through playful tactics and direct action, using the very presence of the police to stage a spectacular event: this way evictions become a spectacle of authority and resistance to it.

Your laws are not our laws

The law that criminalised squatting presented several shortcomings and some groups decided to form alliances with sympathetic lawyers to resist criminalisation through juridical strategies and initiating a court-case against the state. The Schijnheilig collective (Dutch word for 'hypocritical') conducted a large political mobilisation on juridical grounds. Indeed, on October 2nd 2010, just after the new law passed, Schijnheilig, and many other squats in the city, received an eviction order for the squatted building on the Passeerdersgracht 123.

To defend the squat, and to resist the Kraakwet more broadly, the collecive initiated a court-case against the state. They argued that, in first place, the new law constituted a violation of the rights to housing established both by the

▶ November 2010, Squatters' campaign addressing the politics of criminalisation and identification. Activists perform an identification procedure and hold a sign stating "I am also a criminal". Performed at the squatted social centre Schijnheileg, Source: http://hardhoofd.com/2010/11/08/ik-ben-ook-crimineel/

Dutch constitution and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR): indeed, the Kraakwet led to evictions enforced without judicial review, leaving the case to the discretion of the police. In second place, it has been argued that the law violated the right to due trial: the Dutch Constitution states that people should not lose their home before a decision of the judge; therefore with the Kraakwet squatters are considered guilty of the crime of squatting, not merely suspects, without a court proving their guiltiness.

On October 29th, 2010, the judge of the Court of The Hague rejected these claims (LJN BO2919 and LJN BO2936)[10] but the squatters appealed. Eventually, on November 8th, 2010, the Supreme Court of The Hague banned the eviction of eight squats in Amsterdam, The Hague and Leeuwarden, that were planned on the next day. The court indeed declared that eviction is a

10 http://uitspraken.rechtspraak.nl/#ljn/BO29

▶January 2015, Eviction of the squatted building on Pieter Vlamingstraat, January 2015. The Riot Police water canon is aiming at an occupant who is throwing paint bombs to the police. The Banner states 'Masters of Gentrification: De Key, XXX, ING': respectively, the housing corporation that owns the building (De Key), the symbol of the Amsterdam municipality (XXX) and the Dutch national bank (ING) which was financing the renovation project, Source: Indymedia.nl

violation of housing rights, and that although squatting is a crime, the new law offers no basis for immediate eviction. The court ruled that, to avoid conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights, evictions have to be announced in advance so that the squatters have the opportunity to start a court case to defend themselves, letting a judge review the case. The Public Prosecutor then established that squats would receive a written notification announcing that evictions would take place within eight weeks, and that the residents had the right to start a court case to object the eviction.

These sentences prevented the police from (legally) executing arbitrary evictions and undermined the Kraakwet, as the core of this law was that squats can be evicted without court intervention (LJN BO3682). This partial victory was received with enthusiasm and the slogan previously used in demonstrations against the new law 'Jullie wetten niet de onze' (Your laws are not our laws) was turned into the sarcastic slogan 'Jullie wetten soms de onze' (Sometimes your laws are our laws).

Conclusions

Although the law itself had not been abolished, these multiple, often scattered webs of resistance to criminalisation actively challenged and resisted the process of criminalisation. Their power lay in the capacity to combine a multiplicity of diverse points of subversion of criminalisation, creating cracks in its operation. The convergence of these disparate and diverse practices of resistance destabilised the smooth operation of the law, hindered its application and interfered with its power: the police have lost the authority to evict squatters, judges became more careful in their application of the law, and almost nobody has been convicted for the crime of squatting.

These resistances might not stop the eviction of a specific squat, but made it possible to challenge criminalisation and police power. Despite the constant evictions of squats and the harassment by the police, the process of criminalisation has failed to disrupt the politics of squatting and the possibility to open autonomous spaces. Squatters kept on engaging with multiple, unpredictable and un-controllable modes of action and resistance that criminalisation is not able to capture.

▶San Basilio, Roma 1973

Le occupazioni per la casa e per i centri sociali in Italia – Squatting for housing and Social Centers in Italy

by Eliseo Fucolti

Currently, the Italian squatting movement is freely articulated into various networks that not only include the traditional anarchist and post-autonomist tendencies but also various local collectives of heterogeneous left-wing origins. Foreign migrants are also involved, in particular in squatting for housing in large cities.

Squatting for Social Centers

"Social Center" is a kind of label that covers a vast range of experiences that are very different from each other. Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito (CSOA) means Self-managed Squatted Social Center. Self-managed Squatted Social Center are spaces, often but not exclusively urban, occupied by a collective of people who use it directly to allow any creative form outside commercial and speculative business and acting independently of any external political supervision. Social Centers have a radical left political orientation and a relevant part of them is related to post-autonomists or anarchists practices. Self-management involves self-organization in the repudiation of fascism, racism, sexism, social hierarchies and all forms of oppression.

In Europe, the Italian history is probably the longest experience of squatting to create Centri Sociali, that is the Italian expression for Social Centers. This experience has involved hundreds of long-term occupations along 40 years (see Figure 4 that shows all the experiences of Social Centers that developed in the last 30 years) and suggests many reflections on how to resist capitalist development and dominant neoliberal policies. Currently more than one hundred Centri Sociali are active all over Italy and hundreds were evicted or ended their political story. Some Social Centers are very large, including various collectives, and hosts events with thousand of people (for example Forte Prenestino in

Roma (Rome) is in a castle from the 19th century, Leoncavallo in Milano and Rivolta in Marghera are in former factories), but the majorities are in medium size buildings such as market halls (e.g. Xm24 in Bologna), schools (e.g. El Paso in Torino (Turin) or repair shops (e.g. Terra di Nessuno in Genova). It is almost a century that Italy is suffering under reactionary national governments. From 1922 the fascists installed a dictatorship that lasted for 20 years, and after the war the country ended up with a Christian Democracy government for more than 40 years, and then it entered the Berlusconi age that is lasting for more than 20 years. This just to give a very brief idea of how the reactionary forces are organized and the need to counter-organize strong forms of resistance to them.

Keywords

Three main keywords are fundamental to the experience of Centri Sociali:

1) Centro Sociale (Social Center)
2) Occupazione (Squatting)
3) Autogestione (Self-management)

1) The expression “Social Center” underlies the attempt to produce open, liberated, alternative spaces in opposition to private, close, guarded commercial or state controlled spaces. Squatting is the fundamental action that gives abandoned areas back to people.

2) Squatted buildings include abandoned schools, hospitals, churches, factories, theaters, military fortress, farms etc. Squatting opens a confrontation with authorities that can lead to eviction, tolerance or legalization.

3) There is not a single way to organize self-managed activities and the debates among the various Social Centers is always open. Generally, Social Centers are organized through regular weekly meetings. But, running large buildings where dozens of collectives work is rather different than carrying out activities in small premises. In Milano the Social Center Leoncavallo (now a self-proclaimed SPA that is a self-managed public space) is located in 10 000 m² of a former printing industry, in Roma Forte Prenestino occupies a former military fortress extended over approximately 100 000 m². Nevertheless, many Social Centers manage small spaces between 300 and 500 m².

The list of activities proposed by Social Centers is huge and they are offered usually for free or with a small donation. In brief, they offer a wide range of courses covering music, photography, dancing, yoga and martial arts, filmmaking and provide services such as libraries, legal advice, theatre, dancing halls, gyms, hacklabs, bookshops etc.

Money for activities is collected through voluntary contributions made by people attending them or through fundraising organized with regular activities such as restaurants and wine bars, or special events, such as concerts, art exhibitions; in few cases some cooperatives were set up and crowdfunding has also been used.

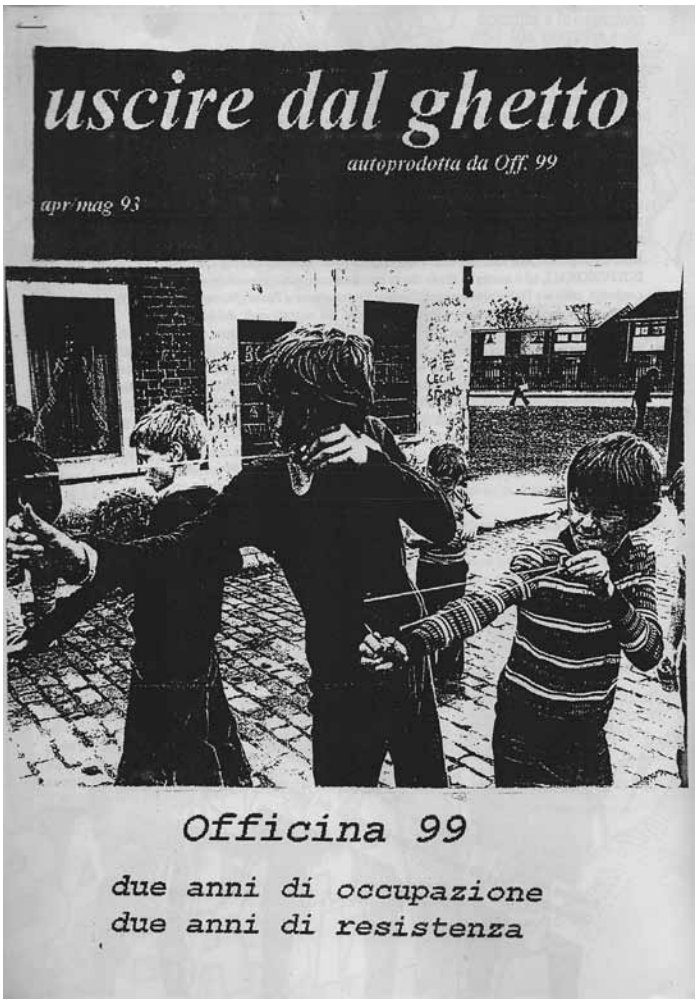
▶ Forte Prenestino, Rome, 1986

The practice of Social Centers was realized in the 1980s after a long cycle of struggles that started at the end of the 1960s and terminated at the end of the 1970s. For example, in 1976, the short season of squatting of the Circoli del Proletariato Giovanile (Young Proletarians' Circles) in Milano and Roma anticipated the development of Social Centers. The whole radical left efforts, the Autonomist struggles, the feminist ideas that circulated in the 1970s, were brutally repressed at the end of that period, but they survived and were transformed in the 1980s by a new generation of people, activists, punks, proletarians, students, etc.. Squatting for Social Centers meant reclaiming denied rights without delegating other people. You do not expect the future to be changed by someone else, or wait for the context to change. You take your action to do what you desire and need within a refusal of oppressive practices.

So in the middle of the 1980s – when the Italian situation was terrible, because all the movements in the 1970s were crushed by repression – the idea of creating new Social Centers was debated. Several collectives survived the 1970s, among them it is worth mentioning the free Radios of the movement: Radio Popolare, Radio Onda d'Urto in Milano, Radio Onda Rossa, Radio Proletaria and Radio Città Futura, in Roma, Radio Sherwood in Padova (Padua), Radio Kappa, Radio città in Bologna were the most famous examples.

At that time there was the need to literally break the political isolation that followed the 1970s downfall, by building some kind of liberated spaces in which people could self-manage themselves. Since the beginning these spaces offered a chance for something new, because very different people gathered together generating new ideas and projects self-managing squatted spaces. So self-management (autogestione), became the keyword. This means that you have to organize with other people, you have to take decisions with others, not based on the fact that there is someone else taking a decision for you and you have to just obey; it is a process completely different from the usual hierarchies of daily life. You have to organize struggles, you have to clean the space, you have to argue, you have to help, you have to discuss things, you have fun; it's a completely different idea of democracy.

It's nothing completely new. But in the 1980s it was new the fact that in different cities there were Social Centers, that could host not only local people's activities but also people travelling, students arriving, bands playing, artists performing. A discontinuity with the past experience was marked by the activity of young



▶1993, Naples: Officina 99

people that did not know the past experiences of the Italian autonomists and radical left groups. In this discontinuity we can register the important role that was taken by Social Centers in big cities that represented a model to be replicated also in small towns.

In the mid 1980s the need to set up Social Centers circulated quite quickly. In Milan, Conchetta and Leoncavallo Social Centers were squatted since the 1970s, and in Roma Forte Prenestino and Sisto V, started offering innovative events related not only to opposition to nuclear weapons or heroin diffusion but also to punk and raggamuffin, cyberpunk and graffiti. The idea and practice

of taking abandoned buildings also circulated quickly. Capitalism is producing abandoned spaces in our cities, and abandonment is exploited for speculative reasons.

But it can also be exploited to oppose speculation. Eventually, you can take schools, castles, factories, churches, theatres – the whole range of architecture catalogues of buildings, that were available after being abandoned. There was a big wave of squatting in 1986, '87, '88 and most of Social Centers adopted the same symbol, a flash of lightning that breaks through a circle and networked according to similar orientation, for example anarchists, autonomists, marxists, environmentalists.

The most famous Social Centers outside Roma and Milano, where more than 30 places were squatted, were El Paso in Torino (Turin), Indiano in Firenze (Florence), Officina in Genova (Genoa), Eta Beta in Napoli (Naples), Esperia in Catania, Pedro in Padova (Padua), Macchianera in Pisa and so on. Approximately 100 Centri Sociali were self-managed in a few years. These places were kind of "ghettoes" or "reserves" for radical people for a while.

The "ghettoes" phase was successful for three or four years, but then there was the need to break the "ghettoes", to go out, communicate with the rest of the people and organizing other kinds of activities. The chance to do so was given after the end of the national 1990 university movement, so-called "la Pantera". In the 1990s the Social Centers open to the rest of society. In the 1980s and 1990s Social Centers represented not only the "exit strategy" for the autonomists from the 1970s but also a new generation of anarchist struggles and grass-roots mobilizations.

Social Centers have tried to experiment with social alternatives in many aspects of our life. Music and art in general, are probably the most famous part of their work, but there are many other aspects now that are covered by social experiments and practices. The Social Centers in Italy have changed since the beginning. In a few cities they were evicted, in a few cities there were new squats. The Social Centers constituted the backbone of the alterglobalization movement that coalesced in Genova in 2001 and supported the season of the Social forum.

More recently Social Centers sustained the NOTAV movement fighting against

the high-speed useless train project in Piemonte, supported the NOMUOS movement against the construction of new US army installations in Sicily, helped to fight the privatization of water, were able to attacking the detention centers where illegalized immigrants are segregated, promoted “agriculture of proximity” (e.g. the “Genuino Clandestino” network that includes “campiaperti”, GermogliaTO, Mercato Brado, Movimento Terre, Seminterrati, “terra/Terra”, Terre Forti, TERREinMOTO and other projects) and regular “Critical mass” (ciemme in Italian) cycling events.

The instrumental use of crisis to impose policies of sacrifice open new possibilities for occupation and re-appropriation of disused properties, abandoned land and public squares. For example, in 2011, the Nuovo Cinema Palazzo was squatted (and is still working) followed by the Teatro Valle, occupied in the center of Roma, offering not only a rich programme of performances but also a reflection on the protection of the “commons”. After 2011, the occupation of spaces to run theatres has generated new and original experiences in Catania (Teatro Coppola), Napoli (La Balena), Palermo (Cantieri Culturali della Zisa and Teatro Garibaldi), Pisa (Teatro Ernesto Rossi) and Venezia (Venice) (Teatro Marinoni and Magazzini del Sale).

Now, in Social Centers, there are four generations of people, and this makes the Italian experience also quite relevant and very challenging particularly when you have inter-generational exchange of ideas, languages and hopes. Social Centers represent the society, at least most of its classes. Not the upper classes, but the low income classes are there. Different languages are used, for example from migrants or from queer practices and people that are 15 years old have to deal with people in their 70s or 60s. So they are not just representing angry youth or marginal people but also vast sectors of society that are oppressed.

Squatting for housing

To complete the picture, it is fundamental to mention the long-lasting existence of a large squatting for housing movement in all Italian big cities. In several cities, squatting for housing movements have an older history than Social Centers. For example, as early as 1963 “baraccati” (shanty town occupants) squatted hundreds of empty council homes of the public housing association IACP (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) in the districts of Trullo, San Basilio and Tufello. In Roma, around 62,.000 people were living at the end of the sixties in

shanty towns. Similarly in other big Italian cities, such as Milano, Napoli, Torino and Bari the struggles for housing reorganized. After 1968, in connection to the discussions that were accompanying the new housing law a season of struggles and squatting followed. Evevn a general strike for the right to housing was successfully carried out on 19 November 1969The PCI (Partito Comunista Italianoi/Italian Communist Party) and its associated organizations for the right to housing, e.g. the tenant union UNIA (Unione Nazionale Inquilini Assegnatari) started changing their strategy that has previously relied on occupations and left this radical form to the new left organizations such as Avanguardia Operaia (active between 1968 and 1978), Lotta Continua (active between 1969-1976), and Potere Operaio (active between 1968-1973). In one case at the end of October 1971, the UNIA organized one mass squatting event. 3,300 flats were squatted during one night by 10.000 shanty town residents, which were evicted or left the squats after one day. As a result the city authorities promised to provide 6,000 flats that were never provided.

The end of the new left movements and the development of Autonomia (active after 1973 for a decade) fostered a new cycle of occupations after 1973. For example in Rome hundreds of families occupied flats in San Basilio and and in Magliana. In 1974, 4000 flats had been squatted by around 15.000 people (mostly families) which were supported by different solidarity-networks with thousands of supporters. Often squatting actions were followed by heavy confrontations with the police and rent strikes were practiced in many cities. .

Rome: The struggles in the popular neighborhood of San Basilio and the death of Fabrizio Ceruso

One of the peak of the 1970s squatting struggles took place at the beginning of September 1974 in Rome when the police tried to evict the squatted apartments in the borgata (in the 30ies constructed residential blocks for the predominantly working class in the outskirts of Roma) of San Basilio. The squatting families and many people of the neighborhood defended the occupied apartments with barricades, Molotov cocktails, stones and marbles shot from slingshots while the Carabinieri (militarized police) police used tear gas and violence. The resistance had to deal with a high level of repression and confrontation.

On the 8th of September the police killed Fabrizio Ceruso with a shot in the chest during clashes in Via Fiuminata. Fabrizio Cheruso, who died on the way

to the hospital, was a 19 year old precarious waiter and activist of the group Comitato Proletario (part of Autonomia Operaia) in the district Tivoli, and who was supporting the housing struggle in San Basilio. After his death became known the rage exploded - all street lights were smashed and at around 10pm the same night some people responded with guns to the police which resulted in several injured policemen with gunshot wounds. The following day a demonstration gathered around 10,000 – 15,000 people behind the front Banner "Compagno Ceruso sarai vendicato" (Comrade Caruso you will be avenged) in Roma. Finally the police had to retreat from evicting people in San Basilio, the struggle was successful, the squats were defended, but the victory had a very high price.

On the 12th of September Fabrizio Ceruso was buried. The funeral car with his coffin, accompanied by a convoy followed by hundreds of vehicles, entered in San Basilio and drove in complete silence through the streets while hundreds of red cloves were thrown from the windows and balconies. When the hearse stopped at the place where Fabrizio Ceruso was murdered, his father got out of the car to kiss the photo of his son someone had placed there, while hundreds of bystanders rose their fists and intoned the Internazionale. The death of Fabrizio Ceruso and the fierce resistance in the borgata of San Basilio will remind always in the collective memory and narrative of the housing struggles not only of Roma but in all of Italy. And those struggles of the 1960s and 1970s have played a significant role to understand the historical and political context of present squatting and housing activities.

Today regional and urban disparities compose an heterogeneous national situation, but squatting for housing movements have created a national network called "Abitare nella crisi" since 2010. This network includes various practices and movements, such as movimenti per l'abitare a Roma, Magnammece o' pesone in Napoli (Neaples), Prendocasa in Cosenza, Social Log in Bologna, il movimento di lotta per la casa in Firenze (Florence), l'Associazione Inquilini Abitanti (As.i.a.) in Milano, or Comitati antisfratto (anti-evictions committes) in Brescia and Cremona, sportelli per il diritto alla casa (right to housing desks) in Bergamo and Brescia, and groups in Asti, Genova (Genoa), Monza and other cities. Just to give an example, in Roma the mobilization of "Coordinamento di Lotta per la Casa", Blocchi Precari Metropolitani and "Action" ensure a place to live for thousands of people. On 6 December 2012, 6 April 2013, 6 April 2014, the Movimenti per il diritto all'abitare (a joint venture of the three above-

mentioned groups) organised a series of occupations that involved around 2,000 people taking respectively eight, ten and six buildings to reclaim the right to inhabit, to oppose the privatisation of public housing, and ask the allocation of funds for public housing.

Over the the last ten years the movements for the right to housing have come to redefine the organized squatting of hundreds of apartments in the largest Italian cities as being about the more general diritto all'abitare (right to inhabit the city), not as mere right to housing.

Legal Framework

In Italy the occupation of a property of others (even if dilapidated) is an illegal act ruled by the art. 633 of penal code: invasion of land or buildings (invasione di terreni o immobili). Squatters are also charged with theft of energy (gas or electricity). Since 1985, more than 500 Social Centers operated all across Italy, many were evicted but many others are still run by various collectives. In 2014, The national government decided to criminalize squatters by passing the Decree 47 (28 march). According to the decree 47 "Anyone who illegally occupies a house without title cannot apply for residence permits or connection to public facilities related to the property itself and acts issued in violation of this prohibition are null for all legal effects."

Chronology

Since the 1970s, in Italy, squatting abandoned buildings to set up social activities has been practiced by the radical left movements. In the 1970s squatting was part of a large social movement opposing the reactionary policies carried by the Christian Democracy party. The Social Centers in the 1970s have represented an experience mainly limited to Milan, and few other cases in Bologna or Rome. Since the mid of the 1980s the experience of Social Centers spread out all over Italy with four different phases.

Period	Phase	Main places and examples
1975-1984	First generation of squatting linked to the movement of the 1970s and the Autonomia movement	Milano (Leoncavallo, Fabbrikone, Fornace)
1985-1989	Second generation punks, anarchists, post-autonomists	Bologna (l'Isola), Catania (Experia), Firenze (Indiano), Genova (Officina), Jesi (TNT), Milano (Cox18), Napoli (Eta Beta), Padova (Pedro), Palermo (Montevergini), Pisa (Macchia Nera), Roma (Forte Prenestino) Torino (El Paso)
1990-1999	Third generation following the movement of students in universities at the beginning of year 1990	Cosenza (Gramna), Falconara Marittima (Kontatto), Livorno (Godzilla), Milano (la Pergola), Napoli (Officina99), Roma (Corto Circuito, ex Snia Viscosa)
2000 – 2010	Fourth generation linked to alterglobalization movement and increase of squatting for housing	Bologna (Bartleby), Genova (Pinelli), Milano (Casa Loca, Vittoria), Reggio Calabria (Angela Cartella), Roma (Acrobax, Ateneo, Esc, Metropoliz)
2011 -	New wave of squatting for housing, of squatting theaters and student houses	Cagliari (Sa Domu) Catania (Liotru), Milano (Lambretta, SpAzIo LiBeRo ToRtUgA), Neaples (Je So' Pazzo, L'Asilo), Roma (Alexis, Cagne Sciolte, Communia)

Music

Social Centers have supported and encouraged musical creativity. Many bands that are linked to Social Centers have became popular, for example: 99posse, Africa Unite, Alma Megretta, Assalti Frontali, Banda Bassotti, Bisca, Bloody Riot, Brutopop, Casino Royal, Colle der Fomento, Franti, Kina, Nuovi Briganti, One Love Hi Pawa, Piombo A Tempo, Radici nel cemento, Sangue Misto, Subsonica, Sud Sound System, Ustmamò.

As mentioned, as well as Centri Sociali and houses, a dozen theaters have been squatted after 2007 to produce artistic performances in abandoned spaces.

Resources (in English, French and Italian) for those wishing to learn more:

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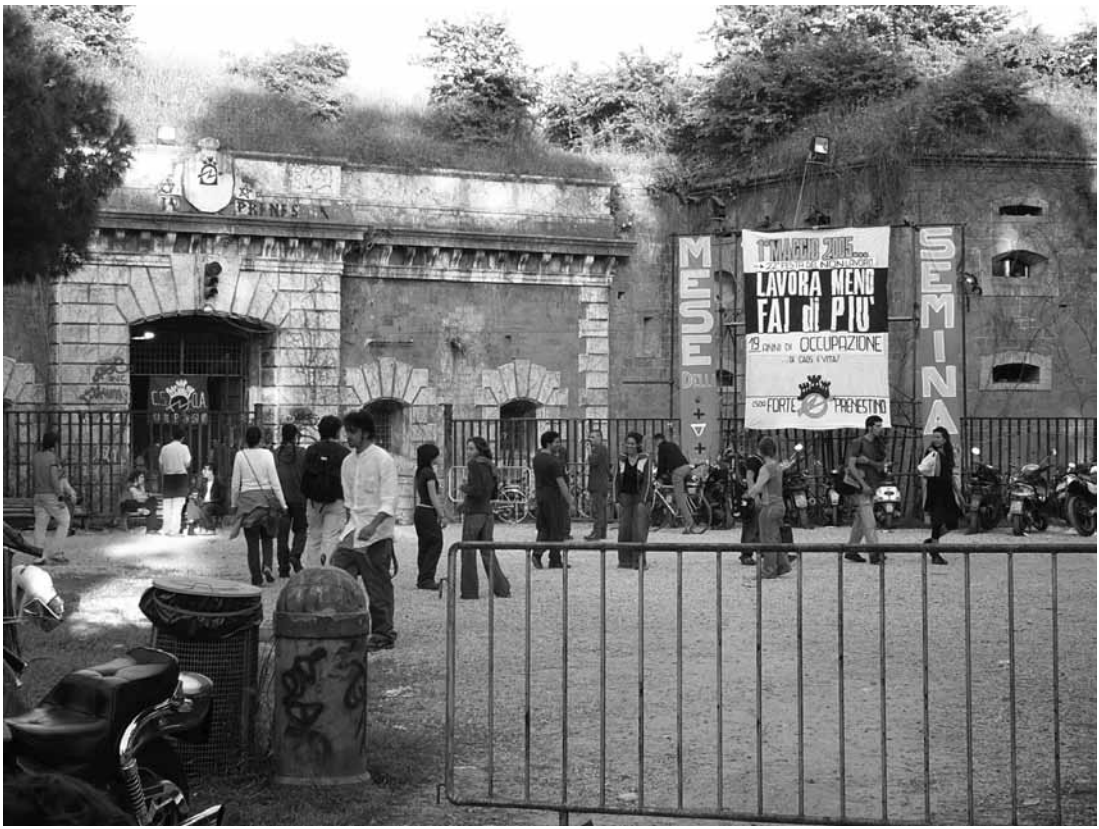


▶Forte Prenestino, Rome: 2005

The most significant note to add for consideration is that it is possible, even in a country that is so reactionary as Italy, to build experiences that are outside the whole idea of having a very conservative society following capitalistic dogmas and the Vatican rules. Problems and challenges are always lurking just around the corner. In squatted spaces, it is also difficult to address leaderism patterns, discrimination against women or migrants, defend from fascists and police, organize time and space considering all the different individual desires, and address all the subtle existing class distinctions. But, this experience is an attempt that communicates the fact that it is possible to resist outside profit and oppressive laws that are governing, or try to govern every sphere of our life, from breathing the air to producing culture and food. This is the main message from the Italian experience.

Italian Social Centres: conflictual political actors beyond the liberated spaces

by Gianni Piazza
(University of Catania)

The squatting of Social Centres in Italy started in the mid-70s, spread throughout the country between the mid-80s and the early 90s, and is lasting until now, at the end of 10s of the new millennium. Most of them are at the same time "liberated spaces" and "conflictual political actors". They are empty and unused large buildings occupied by groups of radical/antagonist left activists mainly not for housing, but in order to self-manage political, social and countercultural activities, practicing non-hierarchical and participatory modes of relationships. In this way, these spaces are "liberated" from capitalistic mainstream values, norms and state authorities' control. In addition they – or rather their militants – are also conflictual political actors, whose repertoire of actions includes other unconventional and disruptive forms beyond squatting, as civil disobedience, symbolic protests, pickets, road and railway blockades, such raids in institutional offices, unauthorized demonstrations, sometimes ending in clashes with police, etc. Social centres are places where the activists organize and promote political and social conflicts and protest campaigns, addressed outside the squatted spaces, in the neighbourhoods, in the cities and beyond. In fact, their range of action is multilevel, local, national and global. They are urban protest actors, because they are usually spatially localized in the city centres or in the peripheral/working class districts of the towns, involved in denouncing the rarity of space of sociability outside of commercial circuits and campaigning against market-oriented renewal and urban property speculation. However, their range of action is often extra-local that is, regional, national and transnational, above all when they cooperate with other social movement organizations. The issues they face and the struggles they support are both local (for social spaces and services, for housing, against urban renewal, etc.), although always set in global framework, and extra-local (alter-globalization, for migrants' rights, against racism, repression, militarization, war, etc.). If at

the beginning of the new millennium, the Italian Social Centres' activists have contributed significantly to the alter-global and No War movements, in the following years they have participated as crucial actors in the most relevant social movements and mobilizations: the student and university movements in defence of public education and against neo-liberal reforms (the Anomalous Wave); the mobilizations in protection of the "commons", as the movement against the privatization of water and the Locally Unwanted Land Uses movements (No TAV in Val di Susa and No Messina Bridge against large public works, No Dal Molin and No Muos against US military bases in Veneto and in Sicily, etc.), largely contributing to transform these movements from local (NIMBY - Not In My Back Yard) to global (NOPE - Not On the Planet Earth); the anti-austerity movements against national and EU government policies. In the last years, the social centres activists have organized and supported the struggles for housing, for income and against precariousness, against fascism and racism, sustaining migrants and workers struggles. Even if very recently, fewer social centres are occupied, their militants have spread the squatting practices pluralizing and diversifying the goals and uses. In the last thirty years, there has not been and there is no significant radical/antagonist left movement in Italy without the crucial activism and militancy of the Social Centres.

Squatting in France : Poverty, Housing Movement and Counterculture

by Thomas Aguilera, Florence Bouillon, Baptiste Colin, Cécile Péchu

Introduction

Squatting in France is strongly linked to the Housing Movement since the 19th century. It arose as a phenomenon in parallel to the development of housing policies and State control. Nowadays we can identify a diversity of goals, resources and level of institutionalisation. Despite the fact that several attempts were made to criminalize squatting in the last few years, squatting still does not constitute an offence in France. As civil litigation, it falls under the jurisdiction of the magistrate's court. Apart from smash and grab or break-in, which are difficult to establish, squatters therefore only risk eviction.

In most cases, judges do not grand extensions before the eviction and except in some particular situations (negotiations with public authorities, absence of the owner), squats have a typical life expectancy of a few months.

1. Squatting Movement and Housing Rights: squatting as a tool

1.1. The very beginning: against owners and for the visibility of housing problems

After the Paris Commune (1871) and with the influence of socialist (including anarchist) revolutionary ideas, more and more renters' committees emerged and began to protest against housing conditions and rent prices. For example, the Ligue des antipropriétaires, or des antiproprios (League of the Anti-Owners) was created in 1886 and organised removals during the night for not paying the quarterly rent. Few years later, an anarchist worker, Georges Cochon gave a second birth to the rent protests.

He contributed to renew the repertoire of action and began to organize collective and public (visible) removals (at that time in 1911, he was General

Secretary of a Renters' Syndicate favorable to direct action and general strike). After a personal implication in the protest, G.Cochon experienced the occupations of symbolic places to make the problem public (1912-1913). One of the slogans was: 'let's attack empty buildings!'. At that time the term used is not 'squats' but 'move-ins'. As a matter of fact, it appears to be more used as a form of protest and as a tool to formulate public denunciation on social matters. Cochon succeeded in spreading the idea of problem of housing and, by proposing concrete solutions through direct actions. He appeared as the precursor of modern strategies and methods of squatting based on the use of media and of the law, which are then developed during the end of the 1940s.

After the Second World War, squatting was re-imported and actualised in French society. Furthermore, the word used to talk about this phenomenon is the English modern word "squat", and actors are considered as "squatters" (this designation is still actual but it sometimes rejected by squatters, who use other expressions: note that squats do not fit in any juridical category, squatting is called 'occupation without right nor title'). Even if the term comes from Old French, the squatters of 1945 got inspired by UK squatters. They tried to legitimate squatting with an ordinance passed by the provisory French Government. The latter authorised the requisition of empty buildings to solve the housing problems in the context of the end of the war. These actions were organized by catholic workers' organizations.

The major one is the Mouvement Populaire des Familles (Families' Popular Movement). About 20 cities experienced squatting, but it occurred mainly in Marseilles and Angers. In 1946 these squatters are proud to assume that there are "more squatters than in the UK".

One of the slogans was: 'Legal if you can, illegal if you need, only the result counts'. After a peak level in the years 1945-1948 and, apart from the Emmaüs communities of the Abbé Pierre (an unconventional priest) in 1955-1956 the characteristics of squatting and above all the discourse around it changed at the beginning of the 1970s, even if this form of squatting (supported by a head structure managing the opening, the selection of the squatters, the public and media discourse) continues until now.

1.2. The media logic of squatting: DAL and Jeudi Noir

At the beginning of the seventies (1970-1972), the Maoist organization Secours Rouge, inspired by the Italian Operaist Movement, squatted to obtain rehousing of squatters. Again, at the end of the 1980s, the same kind of movement developed. It aimed at using squat as a tool for relocating squatters.

The Comités des Mal-Logés (CML / Committee of badly/poorly housed people) was founded in Paris in a context of serious shortage of affordable housing. The activists occupied around 40 social apartments in Paris and suburbs. They rehoused mainly African Sub-Saharan families. However, the CML divided into two groups, from which Droit au Logement (DAL /Right to Housing) was born in September 1990, firstly as an association, then as a national federation in 1998. DAL is using diverse modes of action: juridical assistance, protests, camps, sit-in, public square occupations and squats.

After a media squatting occupation in December 1994 in the core of Paris (rue du Dragon) and in the context of the presidential campaign, the ordinance of requisition was slightly re-employed by the government, and they were numerous convergences with the struggles of the 'people without' (work, housing, documents). The activists mainly selected and squatted private buildings owned by institutional investors. In opposition to the CML, DAL has always been trying to get support from officials, personalities and cultural organizations. It has adopted the media strategy as Jeudi Noir with which they often associate. Nevertheless, unlike Jeudi Noir, DAL wants to preserve its full autonomy in relation to political parties and officials and it is forbidden to be member of any political party to join the bord of DAL association.

►Organize yourself to fight. Fight to win

DROIT AU LOGEMENT

▶ Ou si nour et blanc

The Jeudi Noir collective (JN) was born in 2006 in order to emphasize and make visible the question of bad housing in Paris. The core of its action is 'media logic'. JN uses squatting as one action among others. JN activists have occupied more than 15 main buildings during the last 5 years in Paris.
The activists use the squat as a tool to put the housing problem on the policy and media agenda.

Two features clearly distinguish them from the other squatters in Paris. First, they mainly squat private buildings (owned by banks and private investors) that have been vacant for a long period (average of 9 years) and in rich districts in order to legitimate the occupation. Second, the leaders of the collective have more resources (financial, social and political) in comparison to other type of squatters in Paris and have quite good relationship with officials and representatives who usually support them.

2. Squatting as an alternative to the street

The core of squatting is to get a house, or at least a roof to avoid sleeping in the street. Most of the squats are invisible, not only in France, everywhere in Europe. They are invisible because they do not attract the attention from policy makers, academics, medias and activists, on one hand; on the other hand, because their inhabitants are precarious people who want to stay in the shadow in the city. They just occupy small apartments or abandoned buildings in order to survive and have a roof.

2.1. “Invisible” and precarious squats

In the Ile-de-France Region, we estimate that there are more than 2000 squats of this type. Most of them are located in the poorest zone (Seine-Saint-Denis, North of Paris). It is almost impossible to locate them because they are very spontaneous and ephemeral. Those ‘poverty squats’ are occupied by precarious individuals or families who are not able to find a house (because of the housing market conditions) and who are looking for a roof in an emergency situation. They may be poor migrants, undocumented people, economically excluded, drug users, marginal people … The inhabitants of squats are as diverse as are the various faces of contemporary poverty.

Squats often constitutes one solution among other precarious routes and homes (homeless shelters, accommodation by family relations, furnished hotels, etc.). This situation is often lived in a painful way, because it means to live in a material and in a moral discomfort, but it is also seen as a possible emancipation of all kinds of rejected supervisions (educators, parents…). Squatting is difficult and insecure, but also allows a shape of autonomy. Besides, we can note that half of these squats are managed by organized traffickers who open vacant apartments, change the lock and sell fake leases to families.

2.2. Squatting for recognition

Beyond the survival strategy and the immediate needs of a roof, squatting can be used as a tool for recognition for migrants, precarious workers and undocumented people, beyond the demand of getting a house to survive. For example, the squat of Rue Baudelique (18th district of Paris) which hosted between September 2009 and August 2010 more than 3000 undocumented and immigrant workers (25 different nationalities). It was a huge building of 6000 m2 owned by the General Public Insurance Agency. The squat was organized by a collective working for undocumented people in Ile de France (the CSP 75 / Coordination des sans-papiers – Coordination of undocumented People) which aim was to put the Prefect under pressure to give documents to the squatters. The squats was at the same time a tool to push public actors to accelerate the procedure (by building a disturbing situation) and to get a roof for homeless people. In that sense, squatting was an illegal way to enter into the legality. 300 of them were regularized and got documents but the squat was finally evicted.

3. Counter-cultural and political motivated Squatting

Through May 1968, as in other European countries, a new use of squat spreads in France. These squats advocate for a collective and communitarian utopia in a strong opposition to the capitalist system. They propose to cultivate neighborhood relationships, while offering cultural spaces and alternative places.

3.1. Alternative squats and urban resistance: the legacy of the eighties

Along the 1970s and 1980s many squats were ideologically linked to the communitarian, hippie, autonomous, punk and students movements. They were strongly inspired and influenced by movements and events occurring in the Netherlands and in West Germany.

These squats largely contributed to the birth of the so-called alternative movement, including its cultural aspects like the alternative French rock (for example bands like Bérurier Noir), offering the opportunity of opening spaces to a larger community with few economic resources.

The first attempts, of collective campaigns with different social movements in network and with squatters from other groups, cities and countries were emerging at that time. They were trying to bring people together in order to claim, to develop political experiment and to protest in front of authorities.

The goal was to get recognition and tolerance. In order to get support from the neighborhood and to face urban policies, the squatters often developed their own media and communication tools (press and fanzines), They also developed an expertise position (including juridical) on urban and squatting issues.

In parallel, since the 1970s, squatters are involved in actions against urban renewal and gentrification. Since the 2000s, some squatters participate to municipal projects. They claim for a full participation of inhabitants, neighbors and want to avoid top-down decisions.

▶ Portes ouvertes de la Chapelle (April 2013)
Opening Doors in La Chapelle (resisting to urban projects in the18th district of Paris)

3.2. Art and squats

One specific aspect of squatting in France (and above all in Paris) is the importance of artists. As a matter of fact, it is quite impossible to find affordable workshops in Paris, one of the densest and most expensive cities of Europe. Squatting becomes a solution to get a place to work (and live). But more than a place for cultural production, squats are presented as social experiences of self-management, horizontal organization and collective decision. Art is involved in a strong social life in the neighborhood: squatters open the place for exhibitions, art classes/courses, parties, meetings. They contribute to de-sectorialise social and cultural activities ('we want to make culture outside the Museum'). Cultural productions and social activities are involved in networks and some events are organized at the city scale (example of the FOU festival in Paris). FOU stands for Festival des ouvertures utiles: Festival of useful openings. 'Fou' means also crazy.

Since the election of the first socialist mayor in 2001 in Paris, local public actors are rather tolerant towards these kinds of squats. Indeed, squatters are a kind of substitute to public policy failures. They are considered as potential collaborators, when they don't develop a radical social critique and are not active as a political social movement. Furthermore, they provide local cultural activities that the municipality is not able to propose. Then, officials prefer to build strong relationships of confidence with the squatters rather than to repress them. Some squats provide even social services.

This toleration becomes concrete when the Municipality gives agreements to the squatters: they set up a precarious lease (a legal contract) that allows them to stay in the building for a determined and limited period (generally between 1 and 3 years) and for a small rent. Besides, this contract determines the conditions of the occupation: number of people, opening or closing of the building, events, security norms. The situation of squats in France is specific in the sense that it shows a strong antagonism between so called "artists' squats" and "political squats". The latter blame the former for compromising with the system, and for favoring the criminalisation of the subversive squats by collaborating with the authorities. If we observe numerous movements of solidarity and actions, as well as similar issues and concerns, among "political" and "poverty squats", collective accounts between "political" and "artists' squats" appears to be uncommon.

3.3. The Autonomous squats in France

At the end of the seventies, some Autonomous squats appeared, inspired by the Italian Movement of 1977, mostly in Paris (20e and 13e districts), but also in Strasbourg and Montpellier, an experience extended by the anarcho-autonomous squats of the beginning of the 1980s in Paris. Nowadays, these radical squats host people and activities which are close to the Spanish or Italian social centers.

They refuse the commodification of resources, to negotiate with authorities, owners and the police, they have a strong ideology based on the destruction of ownership, on self-management, on collective and direct action. Moreover, the activists globally reject Art as a 'bourgeois' activity even if they organize many cultural events. Such squats are found in Grenoble, Lyon, Toulouse, Dijon, Bagnolet, Montreuil.

Conclusion: Squatting as a European Movement?

Squatting is not an isolated practice. Squatters move, transfer experiences, ideas and debates. They develop and structure networks on the long term, at different scales. It can be at the neighborhood level: they cooperate with neighbors. They organize events or help to build a social life and to activate collective movements. It can be larger, at the city or national level, or at the European level. French squatters participated in and sometimes initiated such networks since the early 1980s, at the beginning thought as a counter-cultural and political alternative.

The network Intersquat was founded during the 2000s, following a previous network called Interface. Nowadays, the network is managed by artists and is still active, even if radical activists left it. On an other side , DAL is member of the Habitat international coalition since 1997, and many squatters take part to the World and European Social Forums, as well as to the antiglobalisation protests.

▶Banc Expropriat, Barcelona

Squatting in the Wake of the Economic Crisis in Spain: The Right to Housing as a Social Movement[1] "Sí se puede, pero no quieren"

by Julia Lledin

The PAH is the most famous Spanish social movement of recent years, known not only in Spain but also abroad. Arising in a long-term economic crisis, the housing movement in Spain is massive, comprised not only of the PAH, but also the housing working groups born from 15M local assemblies[2]. Using methods and patterns favored by social movements, especially squatting, the movement has generated a deep change in the social imaginary about squatting, direct action and civil disobedience.

The 15M Movement arose in the middle of the economic crisis that began in 2008. After a big demonstration on 15 May 2011, a wave of protests spread throughout the country. Spain was immersed in a social and political struggle. Thousands of people went to the squares and streets, and camps were set up in many cities. There were mass assemblies, working groups, political art, talks, workshops, and music. The streets were more active and creative than they'd been in years and solidarity was everywhere, with people who needed help arriving every day to the square.

In Madrid, one month after the 15M began, on the 11th of June people were

1 This article was originally wrote in 2015; during these years, some changes have occured in Spain, like the emergence of Podemos, the corruptions scandals, the strengthening of right/conservative political parties or the approval of the so called Ley Mordaza (Gag Law), with deeply restricted social mobilization. Neverthenless, the article reflect a specific social movement in a specific historical movement in Spain, so, it the description and conclusions are still availables. Some coments have been added to reflect these changes.

2 Nowadays, there are also some left wings political parties, like Podemos or IU, involved in this social fights.

called to stop the eviction of a family in the neighborhood of Tetuán. They created a human barrier. It was the first victory in the struggle against evictions in the city. This demonstration was organized by a then unknown organization called Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH); a group born in 2009 in Barcelona. PAH came from the strong movement demanding decent housing called V de vivienda (like “H for housing”) that had groups in many regions of the country. After the huge mobilizations demanding decent housing in 2006 and 2007, the Barcelona group started to transform themselves into a structured group, connecting with others and creating a discourse of economic, social and political analysis, and a strong critique of the system. The PAH was born.
The economic crisis in Spain had its biggest effect in the unemployment rates. The building sector had been the base of the economic model since the ‘90s, and the prices of housing, as in many other countries, had risen steadily for two decades – about 180% between 1996 and 2006.

In 2008, with the bursting of the housing bubble, an important part of the population, directly or indirectly linked to this economic sector, lost their jobs. In 2007, 13.3% of the active population were building workers. By 2013 it was only 5.8%. Unemployment grew from 8.57% in 2007 to 25.77% in 2012; with a slight decrease to 23.57% in 2014. Nowadays (February 2018), after an apparent “economic recovery” during last years unemployment remains on 16.5% of the active population

It became impossible for many families to pay the high mortgages they had taken on some months or years before (usually with pay periods of 50 years). With the average wage in 2014 at 1.000 €/month, the average Spaniard paid 51% for their mortgage. In the case of public houses, 71% if one is in the market for a new house, and 67% for a house older than two years (in the case of couples this payment is divided).

When a person loses their job, failure to pay results in an eviction process. At first most families just left their homes and moved in with relatives. But some just didn´t want to leave, and began to organize to stop the evictions. When the 15M started, they found the mass movement they needed to confront the power of the banks. At that moment PAH was still a young movement with many people who had no activist political experience. But there were also some who had a long experience in Spanish social movements, as well as many immigrants who had participated in social movements in their countries of origin. They provided

other activist experiences and repertories of collective action, especially people from Latin America (Ecuador, Bolivia or Argentina). So, the PAH's own repertory of actions was built from many different perspectives and changed during the confluence of PAH and 15M.

The PAH has not been the only housing movement in Spain during this period. The different assemblies of the neighborhoods and villages created from the 15M General Assembly in July 2011 organized through working groups like communication, employment, migration and housing. After a time these working groups began to work as autonomous collectives, not linked to the local assemblies. Some of the strongest housing groups in Madrid are in like Tetuán, Lavapiés and Vallecas, three of the most popular (i.e., working class) neighborhoods with a tradition of struggle and social organization. Despite the differences between them, the PAH and the housing groups have worked together on many actions and campaigns. Despite proposing different solutions, they organized collectively.

The historical housing movement has had many milestones. In recent years, there was not only the V de vivienda movement, but also local experiences like Cañada Real in Madrid, a shanty settlement built in the 1970s by Spanish and foreign migrants who were excluded from the city. During recent years the barrio has been organizing a collective response to evictions and the demolition of houses. Throughout the country, the squatting movement has been strongly supported by social centres throughout the decade of the '90s. Important centres include the Laboratorios in Madrid (four different squats in the early 2000s), Kukutza in Bilbao (three different squats from 1996 through 2011), and la Kasa de la Muntanya in Barcelona (squatted since 1989).

In recent years many of these other groups have finally joined with the PAH, becoming local groups of the platform. In Madrid the housing working groups of Vallecas and Centre (a confluence of the local groups from different neighborhoods of the city centre) have integrated with the PAH with an open structure, based on horizontalism and autonomy. National meetings coordinate and prepare common strategies, like that in the northern Spanish city of Gijón in March 2015.

At first the action program was mostly focused on a reactive strategy geared to stopping evictions legally and through direct actions, but progressively PAH

▶Obra Social, Madrid

groups have initiated a program with positive proposals, based mostly in direct actions, posing real solutions to social problems, and not simply responding to the Spanish institutions.In the years after 2011, the PAH and the housing movement in Spain has not so much innovated as added up many experiences and the acquired knowledge of many other movements developed in the country and abroad. It has set aside the frequent prejudices of Spanish social movements as well as those of the non-politicized population that usually make demands of institutions, but does not use direct action. In this sense, the housing groups work nowadays on different levels.

They try to negotiate a restructuring of debts with the banks, accompanying the person/family all along the way, including the legal process. They studied the mortgages laws (Decree of 8th February 1946, Lae 2/1981 and Law 41/2007, Law 1/2000, of 7th January, of Civil procedure; also the Loyal Decree-law 27/2012, about urgent measures to reinforce protections for mortgage debtors), and found in those laws some solutions for people.

The legal front of the housing movement received some important resolutions from the Court of Justice of the European Union, like the one of 14March 2013 that declared some clauses of the law of civil procedure 1/2000, of 7 January, those regulating the eviction procedure, were abusive and violate the Directive 93/13/CEE of the EU Council, of 5th April 1993, concerning consumer protections. This decision resolved the case of Mohamed Aziz, who was evicted in Cañada Real. In the same way, the CJEU determined in July 2014 that the last reform of the mortgage law was contrary to European law (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Directive 93/13).

When that didn't work (neither the Government, nor banks or judges execute these decisions) PAH utilized other tactics to transform the system. The first campaign started on November 2010. It included civil disobedience and passive resistance. The "#Stopdesahucios" (stopevictions) coordinated people through alerts posted to social networks (especially Twitter) to stop all evictions in the country. When an eviction was planned the address, date and hour of the meeting point was announced, the situation of the person or family threatened was explained, and they start a pacific resistence aiming to stop the eviction. During this resistance moment, people on the scene negotiate with the judicial commission to delay the eviction in order to have time to look for other solutions. Usually it´s only to postpone it and some weeks or months later the problem is back. Even so, in four years the campaign has stopped 1.663 evictions throughout the country.

Stopping an eviction is an important victory of the collective organizing for action. Seeing the judicial commission and the police going without executing evictions gives the people a big energy boost for the next step. Still, when the eviction is executed and the person/family are forced into the street, what to do then? In 2012 a new strategy emerged in the PAH and 15M´s housing groups: squatting. Since the 1980s there has been a history of squatting in many Spanish cities, but the new wave differs from the traditional squatting movement

in Spain. First, they don´t use the word “okupación”, with k, identifying with the most political wings of the movement, but instead use “ocupación” (occupation) or “realojo” (relocation). Also this campaign was called “obra social” (welfare work), a reference to the “social work” of the savings banks. It was a collective direct action answer to the lack of political solutions from institutions.

Squatting empty houses practically realizes the right to housing and covers the basic needs of the people. From the first Obra Social building in Catalunya – 15-O building, taken the same day as the Hotel Madrid in Madrid, during a global action day -- they have squatted 64 buildings and relocated 2.500 people. The method is also different from the traditional way of squatting. If it has been mostly a clandestine “night activity”, now they do it as a massive action, with many people during the day, publicly, with uncovered faces. Who is living in the building can be recognized, which makes the squat legally a crime in Spain. This public aspect of the action has also the purpose of starting a negotiating process with the owner of the building, always a bank, in order to obtain an agreement for a social rent. A well known instance of this new form of squatting is the “Corralas” in Andalucia, in the south of Spain. The word “corrala” denotes a kind of traditional building with many small apartments and common spaces like bathrooms or a yard, which make for a high level of collective living. The use of this name references the shared communal life that occurs also in the squats. The best known is Corrala Utopía in Sevilla, evicted in April of 2014.

Campaign have started also with the aim of transforming the current laws of Spain. First, they started a campaign to establish the “dation in payment”. Mortgage debt in Spain doesn´t end when the person unable to pay has to give their house to the bank. Even then this person must pay the original debt with the bank. This law is clearly abusive. If you have to forfeit your home because of the debt you can’t pay, this action should end the contract. The housing groups started to demand that the law be changed with a modification proposal in the Congress (presented by PAH and the Observatori DESC), but it was rejected by both major parties, the PP and PSOE. Then the PAH and other housing groups initiated a different approach called “escrache”. A meeting was set and many people arrived at the home or work place of some politician, bank official, etc, pointing to them as one of those culpable for the housing situation in Spain. Their faces were posted on the streets, and demonstrators waved signs with two circles, one green for the positive, one red for the negative in the statements: “sí se puede, pero no quieren” (yes they can, but they don´t want

to"). This strategy was considered by the police and the politicians as a violation of the right to privacy. They felt intimidated; and sued people of the "escrache". In fact, nowadays, after the approval of the new Citizen-safety code, popularly called as Ley Mordaza/Gag rule, in 2015, this kind of action became illegal.

Escrache was one of the most visible political actions of the social movements in recent years. Many people were engaged, and the actions were shown in the mainstream media. A majority of the population perceived them as legitimate, understanding that the activists are right to demand that politicians legislate and provide solutions to people's problems.

The PAH and the other housing groups through their recent work in this field have changed the social imaginary around the squatting movement. First, new places have been squatted openly, and clearly visible. Unlike the traditional patterns of the movement, they publicize the squat from the first moment and develop a communicative strategy.

The squatting movement in Spain has lacked a strategy of this kind for many reasons: First, for reasons of security, because of penal and political prosecution; but also because the horizontal discourse maintained by activists in a movement without leadership precludes speakers who could talk with the media. These new groups have speakers. Even if they don´t represent but instead transmit the opinion of the assembly, they do interviews with the media, go on television, and call press conferences. Many have known speakers, like Ada Colau, one-time PAH spokesperson, who became the candidate of the municipalist citizen party, Barcelona en Comù and was elected the first female mayor of Barcelona in May 2015.

Also the kind of people who join the movement are different. For decades, most squatters were young people, many of them university students, who decided to join the movement and live in this way for some years. Most shared a libertarian ideology. The new squatters are middle-aged people, families with many single mothers and workers without university education. Most of them were not politically active before the economic crisis, nor did they have an ideological formation, but are in this situation because they lost their homes.

Some just pass through this new situation seeking to return to their previous one. Others have a complete change of their minds and mentality, and are

converted to anti-capitalist ideas, understanding that the economic crisis is the consequence of the system and that it´s necessary to change it in order to live with dignity. Even if they want to leave the precarious situation of the squatting life (evictions, no electricity or water in some cases) they also don´t want to return to the previous situation working and paying a huge mortgage in order to live.

Because of this change, the public image of squatting in Spain is also changing. Previously, most people thought squatters were anti-system radicals, were sympathetic to urban violence and not respectful of others, also linked with parties and drugs, even though most squats did not correspond to this image. Nowadays the social image that is changing. The heterogeneity of the squatters, and the fact that they are in the mainstream speaking as “normal people” generates some empathy, because anyone can be in that situation.

The society at large understands the reasons for squatting. The housing movement in Spain has achieved an important victory in recent years, overcoming old prejudices and traditional political patterns. The movement has generated changes in social attitudes and practices.

There has been a long movement prior to the PAH which created a political discourse about squatting and the right to housing and also demonstrated important practices of civil disobedience, direct action and autonomous and horizontal organization. This “practical tradition” within the squatting movement and other social movements in the country has been at the core of this latest evolution with the emergence of the PAH and the other working groups.

Without this social movement tradition these groups wouldn’t exist. But the big victory of the PAH and the other housing group has been to achieve a legitimacy for the movement, a recognition of its moral rights and an increased social support.

▶ Oficina Okupa Donostia, 2013

A Short Talk on Squatting in Spain

by Miguel Martínez

I would like to start with a story about a recent eviction that happened in September 2011. It was in the Basque country, in the city of Bilbao in particular. Its name was Kukutza Gaztetxea. The eviction resounded internationally because this squat had lasted for 13 years. Thirteen years is a lot of time. It was the third incarnation, the other ones were just a few days. There is another squat in Barcelona which has been occupied for more than 25 years. It's Kasa de la Muntanya. These are just two examples that squatting is possible and sometimes can last for a long time without being legal.

But of course I agree that the nature of squats in general is a temporary one. It's something that lasts a few days, few weeks, few months, sometimes a few years, but nobody who squats expects to live the rest of their lives in a squat. Sometimes it happens that you have chances, opportunities, to remain, to be legal, to make a deal with the owner, with the municipality, with the state. It doesn't matter. There are too many options. But they are only open once you are squatting, once you are participating in a direct action against private property. So for me this is the main lesson I learned when I was a student, and I joined the movement, and I said: Okay, this is a wonderful political thing. However, I would like to stress a little bit what is "political squatting", and if there is any difference with "social squatting" and other types of squatting.

In the case of Spain, as you know we had a dictatorship for 40 years, and after the dictatorship, during the so called "transition" to democracy in the late '70s, there was a very powerful citizen-neighborhood movement trying to promote change in the political system. Suddenly, in the early '80s a great part of this neighborhood movement disappeared. At that moment young people had not too many radical references to follow, and one of the main movements which started at that period in the mid-'80s was the squatters' movement. But it was not the first time that squatting occurred in Spain. During the transition to democracy, the anarchists' union – there was only one at the moment, CNT;

they split in 1979 into three or four branches - at that moment they decided to squat as a tactic to reclaim their buildings that they couldn't recover after the dictatorship. Because they had a big stock of buildings before the dictatorship, the same or more than other labor unions, but they didn't have the right to recover their estates. So they started to squat. In that case, they only wanted their property back. And that was a good reference for the new generation of urban activists, because they reclaimed squatting as part of this anarchist tradition, but the squatters movement, as the anti-militarists, or the feminist movement, were not or cannot be identified as anarchists only. This is just one of their multiple political traditions and sources.

The thing is that the experiences of the squatters in other European countries – the Netherlands, Germany, and especially in Italy – were the main example for this new generation of people without many political precedents, so they decided to imitate most of the experiences of social centers and political squatting in these countries. Housing was not a real problem at that moment, in the first '80s, but housing was one of the options for squatters. For me, one of my arguments always in trying to understand this history is that social centers were the core stronghold of the movement, of the squatters' movement. Some activists were also squatting houses, some activists never squatted houses. There was also squatting of houses apart from the movement, because squatting houses was also a tradition for some minorities, like the gypsies, for example. But they were organized by themselves. And they have no clear connection with the political squatters. Even sometimes there were fights against both. It depends on the place. So, since the mid-'80s, the movement started to grow, and it acquired a great strength due to the legal situation at that moment which was very favorable to the movement. It was not a crime. It was just a civil offense. So the movement also started close relationships with other social movements, which also were active at that period: the environmental one, the peace movement, the feminist movement, and some of the students movements, of course.

What happened then? In 1995, the so called progressive government of the Socialist Party (PSOE), which was ruling the country from 1982 until 1996, promoted a new penal code. They decided to criminalize radical movements, like the squatters. There were squatted houses and squatted social centers in most of the cities in Spain at that moment, in 1995, but the new penal code was passed, so in 1996 it was made a criminal offense. The curious thing was that,

facing this new repression of the movement, the activists reacted by trying to occupy more and more. And these years, between 1995 and 1998 there was a huge heyday of the squatters' movement in Spain as a reaction against this new criminalization of squatting. The first one of the most famous cases was in Barcelona, the Cine Princesa, which entailed a huge battle against the police in 1996 -and the biggest demonstration ever in Spain defending the squatters. Finally, most of the people were condemned in principal, although they appealed to a superior tribunal, and finally all of them were absolved. In many other cases most squatters are not sentenced to jail, even when the new crime in the law said that you can be sentenced from three to six months in jail. Only in case you have previous sentences, you could be imprisoned. Otherwise you would have to pay a fine -but imprisonment is still possible if you do not pay the fine.

So the new situation was that squatting, even after this criminalization, still was going on. And in some cities, like Barcelona, also increased a lot. Some other cities experienced a decline because the repression was also always a threat. But the important thing is that no "political" squatters went to jail, at least to my knowledge. Maybe there are some few cases which are not too visible, but in general there were several campaigns arguing that it was very strange to consider squatting as a crime, like all the crimes against life, basic rules or basic rights of people. So this debate finally had some effect.

However, the bad news is that most of the squats were evicted anyway. Because in Spain there is a legal procedure, which is called the summary eviction, that means that once the owner goes to the court and asks for the property back, then it is up to the judge whether to order a summary eviction, that means a quick eviction, or to delay the process. Quick evictions, then, in the first days of a squat being publicly known, can occur even before the lawsuit is complete. Sometimes, after the eviction you can also be called to the court to defend your rights. There is no way you are ever going to recover the building or the house. But anyway, in spite of that situation, the case is that we are still putting squatting into practice. Even when you are facing that you can be evicted in two weeks or two days it doesn't matter. I think this is very good news too.

And just to finish this very summary presentation, last May 2011, when the 15M movement gained all of this resonance in the public opinion because the large protests against the cuts, corruption and bailouts of the banks, squatting at the

beginning was a marginal movement, we can say, but after several weeks of this Occupy-like movement, the thing was that some neighborhood assemblies that were initiated at this time started to squat, to squat again, and to squat with new styles of squatting, trying to connect all of their experience as self-organizers promoting direct democracy, and also taking the experience of previous social centers as non-commercial places, and also as struggles against urban speculation and private property and inequality of wealth in general and capitalism. Some of these organizations and assemblies, also joined ongoing social centers. Some of them were helping people to squat houses when they were foreclosed, evicted from their houses because they couldn't pay the mortgage, and some of them even opened new squats. That was another wave of new squatting, particularly in Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Cadiz and many more cities all over Spain. I think this is a very valuable thing because we also experienced during the '90s this conflict about being considered as a ghetto of marginal people, very political, anarchists, autonomists or communists, whatever, but there were also many debates among the squatters in order to open them, in order to be more contaminated with other struggles, other social movements, neighborhoods, etc. And this new movement, the 15M , was also a great opportunity to also achieve this goal. I think it was also very successful and helped to put squatting again at the foreground.

Talk and Debate at the Living Theater, New York City, February 2012. Transcript by Alan Moore.

►Sevilla, 2012

▶Liebig 14 in 2009

Never Rest in Peace! The Eviction and Resistance of Liebig 14 (Berlin)

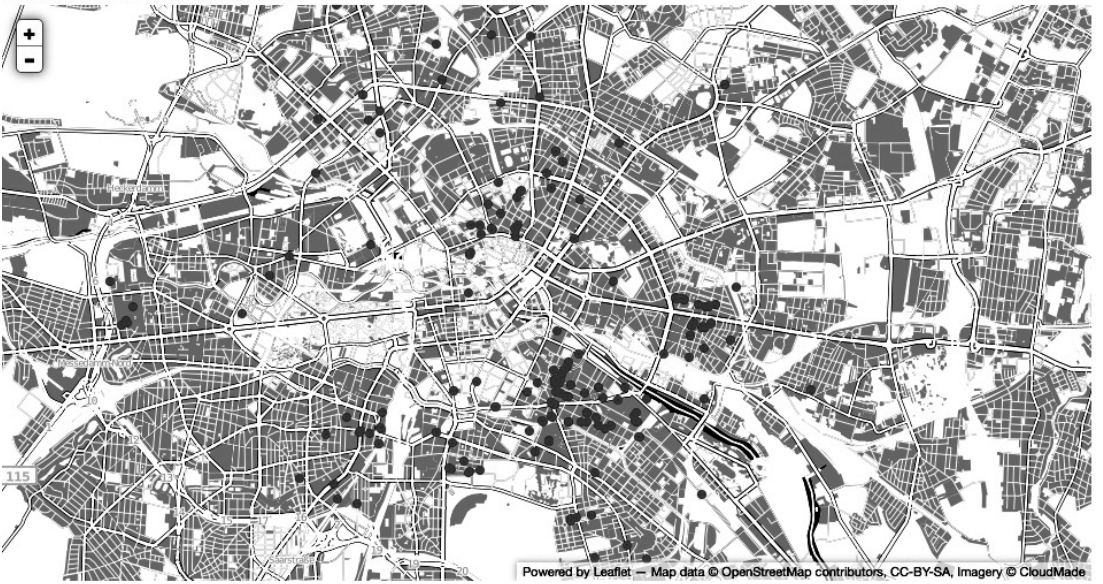
by Lucrezia Lennert

Liebig 14 was a collective house and social centre of around twenty-five people located in the eastern district of Friedrichshain in Berlin. The building was squatted in 1990, legalized several years later, and evicted in 2011. It was located in a neighbourhood which has a high concentration of legalized squats and which continues to be a symbolic and territorial centre of Berlin´s autonomous and radical movements.

In 1990, following the battle of the squatted street Mainzerstrasse and in an effort to pacify a large and militant squatter movement, squatting was made illegal in the former East of Berlin and West Berlin´s "hard line" policy on squatting was applied to the entirety of the now reunified city. The squats at the time were faced with a choice: either be evicted or negotiate rental contracts with the state. The houses which survived the waves of evictions were the ones which legalized, with approximately one third of the squats doing so. Liebig 14 was one of the squatted houses which chose legalization, and in 1992 the collective negotiated a rental contract with a state property holding company.

On the one hand legalization was successful in defeating the squatter movement in that the mass occupation of empty buildings in Berlin came to end. On the other hand however, the radical politics of this movement lived on in the now legalized spaces. Berlin continues to be home to a large and unusually stable radical urban infrastructure which has provided spatial continuity for the development and practice of autonomous, anarchist, feminist, anti-fascist, anti-racist, queer and other forms of subversive politics. But whereas once the squatters fought battles against the state, today Berlin´s collective houses and autonomous cultural and political spaces find themselves increasingly engaged in struggles against private landlords.

Berlin Freiräume



▶ Map of current distribution of "Freiräume", self-organized free spaces, in central Berlin, Map by Jaime Iglehart and Eric Brelsford: www.berlinfreespaces.org.

In the mid-1990s the bankrupt city government began selling off publicly-owned properties in order to make money. Like many other former squats, Liebig 14 was sold on to private landlords. The landlords who bought Liebig 14 were speculative investors who did so with the intention of eventually evicting the collective, renovating and increasing their revenue from the building. In the late 1990s, on the basis of a technical detail that allegedly broke with the rental contracts, the landlords took the Liebig 14 collective to court. After years of legal battles, a judge ruled in favour of the landlords, deciding that the fact that the collective had built a second front door to the house was suitable grounds on which to cancel the rental contracts and evict the collective.

On the 2nd of February 2011, three weeks after receiving an eviction letter, and after years of intense struggle against eviction, the house was lost. 3900 police were mobilized for the eviction and to police the anticipated protests. The inhabitants of Liebig 14 had fully barricaded their house and it took police over five hours to break their way in and seize the building from from the collective. This huge deployment of state forces to evict a house of 25 people is demonstrative of more than a disproportionate deployment of militarized state force in defense of the interests of private property. It can better be understood

▶Liebig 14 inhabitants on their rooftop several days before eviction

as the state´s banal and systematic response to those who resist.

The eviction of Liebig 14 was a double victory for Berlin´s authorities and property developers. A building located in a gentrifying neighbourhood was re-captured into full economic exploitation while at the same time a space of resistance to these processes was attacked and destroyed. But despite ultimately losing the house, for many Liebig 14 has become a symbol in Berlin´s anti-gentrification struggles as well as an example of what collective resistance to eviction can look like.

The house´s struggle also marked one of the strongest moments of collective uprising in Berlin in recent years and Liebig 14 drew an incredible amount of solidarity both in Berlin and internationally. This solidarity took many forms, from protest actions around the world, to neighbours bringing the collective food and offering inhabitants places to stay in the days before eviction, to the thousands of people who would attend the demonstrations organized by the house.

The demonstrations came to a head on the evening after the eviction when about three thousand people took to the streets of Friedrichshain to express their rage at the loss of the house. As the demonstrators made their way up Warschauerstrasse the police blocked off their route with water cannons and armoured vehicles and announced over a loudspeaker that demonstrations in that district of the city would be banned for the rest of the day.

The collective energy was very strong however and protesters responded to the police blockade by dispersing into fast-moving decentralized groups, which by the end of the evening had caused over a million euros of damage to estate agencies, luxury development projects and government buildings in the surrounding areas. This cost, added to the 1.2 million euro cost of the police mobilization for the eviction, has brought political leverage back the old Berlin squatter slogan of “Jede Räumung hat ihren Preis”: every eviction has a price.

Despite waves of evictions and the state´s attempts to pacify through legalization, Berlin´s radical movements continue to build and fight for emancipatory collective spaces in the city. This alternative infrastructure remains widespread, visible and provides a necessary physical basis for local and international networks of resistance. As neoliberal urbanization grows only more violent in its attacks on non-capitalist forms of life, the survival and further propagation of radical spaces - in Berlin and elsewhere - will depend on our capacity to not become reactionary to forces of repression, but rather to continue to act as creators of new worlds and social relations.

More info at www.liebig14.blogsport.de

▶ Eviction of Westersingel 6 in 1986: One egg for the police

A fast look at squatting in Rotterdam

by AMADOK

Squatting in Rotterdam is and always seems to have been uncentralised and fairly chaotic. Whilst there have been public social centres over the years such as Storm, Paardenval, Slaak and the Groene Voltage (to name just a few), most squatting is more underground and based on local networks of affinity, in which people take action to satisfy their needs and don't go around shouting about it. Despite Rotterdam being super ethnically diverse and many different immigrant groups squatting for housing during the peak of the movement in the 1980s, nowadays the scene is very white and middle class, presumably since white privilege helps these squatters to avoid jailtime.

However, it is also true that many music venues, art galleries and atelier spaces have come out of the squat scene. Many housing projects have successfully legalized, with the mighty Poortgebouw surviving still as a legalised housing co-operative on Kop van Zuid, now dwarfed by some of the tallest buildings in the Netherlands. Unlike the rest, the Poortgebouw maintains a radical identity and occasionally has public events.

A map of public squats has over 200 projects listed on it from the 1970s to the present [maps.squat.net]. It would seem that criminalisation back in 2010 has not prevented new places being opened for living even if the scene is shrinking nowadays. Various groups such as motorbikers, punks, ravers, hippies, jazz freaks, speedfreaks, artists, housing activists and environmental protestors have all used squatting as a tactic to achieve short term aims.

Stalled large-scale regeneration/gentrification projects (such as the development of Nieuw Crooswijk in the north east of the city) have provided plenty of opportunities for occupation in the past, but now the renewal plans have been fulfilled and you don't see so many derelict streets any more. The city is full of yuppy glass towers, supermarkets and pop-up art shops. There are few critical discourses, it just seems to be full steam ahead towards consumerbot hell (this short video predicted it all very well https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw7T9dolkmM). The city plan since the 1990s is "to build

on the shoulders of the rich" by excluding people living below a certain wage from property in certain areas. Gentripuncture violently inserts apartments that are unaffordable for most into poor districts. Even worse, the city is now a fashionable tourist "must see." Even more worse, the city recently decided to demolish twenty thousand social housing units, despite the waiting list being years. They did this not because the need for housing has diminished, but rather because the other Randstad cities (Amsterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht) have slightly lower percentages of social housing in the total housing stock (around 45%) and the Rotterdam figure was around 50%. People forced a referendum in which 70% of the vote said drop the plan, but the referendum itself didn't gather enough votes to be legally binding, so the city can carry on with its genius plans.

The history of squatting in Rotterdam is certainly a hidden one, but factors such as the 200 plus projects profiled on the map and the amount of zines produced (such as Buikloop, Bospolder Beerput, Peteroliehaven, Sientje, Trammelant, Rotzooi) demonstrate that a scene has persisted over time and despite the prevalence of anti-squats, the phenomenon carries on.

Currently (end 2017) the only public and open squat is the bicycle repair workshop (dhzwerkplaats.blogspot.nl) but a big building in the north of the city has recently been occupied and who knows, perhaps 2018 will see some interesting times. Or we all move to Leipzig.

Author=AMADOK - https://medium.com/alt-rotterdam/don-t-support-nazi-inspired-apartheid-tourists-boycott-rotterdam-fcc5f014a523

Flyer by Richard Caine for a 1980s party at the Fridge squat on Goudse ►Rijweg in the mid 2000s. The squat was later demolished.


TERRORISTA ÉS QUI ENS CONDEMNA A UNA VIDA DE MISÈRIA
NO QUÍ ES REBEL·LA CONTRA ELLA
Llibertat anarquistes preses

Some Recent Mainstream Media Representations of Squatting in Barcelona

by Group Against Criminalization

The Group Against Criminalization (GAC) is an ephemeral self-managed collective that researches repression and criminalization. This piece summarizes discussions held during an event at Ateneu La Base on May 26th, right after the Squatting Europe Kollective (Sqek) Barcelona meeting. Several talks on criminalization were offered during this public event. Activists from SqEK met people from the Pandora Operation study group and one of the directors of Crònica d'una Esquerda. No continuity of the collective is pursued, we only wish to inspire the creation of similar initiatives, in order to bring different realities together. You can contact us at xino-xano@squat.net, deetc@riseup.net

This article first describes the events that surrounded the attempted eviction of Can Vies, while providing also some context to understand the political importance of the Catalan squatting movement. It then provides a discussion of two different cases that are paradigmatic of how the state and squatters use their influence to shape the okupa identity. These three events are presented in chronological order, allowing us to first describe popular support for Can Vies, then to move on to "Operation Pandora" and then the recent controversies concerned with the release of Ciutat Morta, a film about the 4F case.

#EfecteCanVies

The Can Vies social centre in Barcelona recently made headlines across the world when its eviction led to five consecutive nights of rioting. But the story is much bigger than that.

The City Council planned to demolish the building in order to leave a vacant

lot. This was part of a large urban renewal plan which sees a new underground metro line passing directly next to Can Vies.The picture below, taken from the roof of Can Vies, shows how the new construction actually bends around the social centre! The ground floor room with the naked beams is a half-demolished part of the centre.

Negotiations had been dragging on for years, until they finally broke down. In the last few months Can Vies had organised a huge number of activities to demonstrate peacefully against eviction, including benefit concerts, debates and poster campaigns. It is worth noting that a previous attempt at institutionalising a social centre had not gone well: when Casa del Mig left its building to allow the city to renovate it, it was only permitted to move back into a small office.[12] As the

1 Dee, E.T.C., Debelle Rodrigues, G., 2014. Squatting a new future in Barcelona: Can Vies & El Banc Expropiat de Gràcia. Circus Bazaar.

2 Dee, E.T.C., Debelle Rodrigues, G., 2014. The right to the city: the inspiring free space of Can Vies. Open Democracy.

Revista Argelaga collective observed:

> It is clear that in the affair of Can Vies, the municipal authorities never had any intention of offering alternatives that were not circumscribed within the bounds of the official bureaucracy, and that at every meeting all they did was engage in manipulation and lying, because by proposing an unacceptable space under government control what they really sought to do was to abolish the free space that Can Vies originally constituted.[3]

The existence of a self-organised space appeared to be a threat to the city administration and its mayor, Xavier Trias, eventually ordered the eviction. Despite huge opposition (the squat has the support of more than 200 community associations), the eviction went ahead on Monday, May 26 2014. This immediately triggered protests, in Barcelona and indeed in other cities beyond Catalonia, such as Valencia and Madrid. On May 28 there were demonstrations in no fewer than 46 districts of Barcelona and nearby cities.[4] It is interesting to note that on the very day of the eviction, protesters burnt a vehicle of the Catalan's national television TV3 which was parked near Can Vies and the police tried to break in the offices of La Directa, a widely read cooperative journal. Journalists managed to lock themselves up in time to avoid a ferocious beating.

The riots lasted a week, during which the police used an diverse repertory of action such as blunt force, torture, intimidation, helicopters with strong lights over the city, etc. These measures also included kettling around 200 protesters after Saturday's march, who were denied the protection of lawyers and the presumption of innocence: no cameras or lawyers were allowed inside the siege, where protesters were obliged to dress up as trouble-makers. Allegedly, this was done to allow the police to make a visual identification of criminals, but there was no reason to keep journalists and lawyers out of this massive operation.

The riots were broadly discussed in the media, while the reconstruction was not. When the Council called an end to the eviction plans on May 29, its hand had already been forced by the destruction of demolition equipment, widespread protests and an announcement by Can Vies that the centre's reconstruction

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3 http://libcom.org/library/can-vies-reason-force-barcelona-under-police-rule-argelaga

4 http://en.squat.net/wp-content/uploads/en/2014/05/canviessoli-400x282.jpg

would begin on May 31. That day, Saturday, several work groups started to clear the space and to recover as many bricks as possible. Hundreds of people formed a line 500 metres long to pass bricks to the site and to deposit rubble outside the district hall.

Inevitably, much mainstream media attention focused on the rioting, which the UK Daily Telegraph laughably described as being organised by "a small group of troublemakers."[5] Barcelona had not seen riots last so long since the fall of Franco's regime. Antonio Maestre argues that the supporters of Can Vies were merely acting in self-defence of a centre which had existed for 17 years. He speaks of the "structural violence of the City Government of Barcelona, which, with a despotic and authoritarian attitude, entirely ignored the interests of the residents of the neighbourhood."[6] Further, he argues that "Xavier Trías, the mayor of Barcelona, scorned or ignored the citizens whom he is supposed to serve and instead acted in an arrogant, intransigent and irresponsible manner that provoked a violent reaction because he denied the local residents any other channel of expression or negotiation."[7]

In this case, popular rage was interpreted by Can Vies' spokesperson as the very legitimation of their disobedience. At a press conference which gathered more than 20 television channels and mainstream newspapers, the discourses on violence were explicitly addressed, the spokeperson arguing that violence emanates from the authorities, not the protesters. This confrontational sidestepping of stigmatisation by the media was only made possible by 17 years of work since Can Vies holds an important position in the district of Sants' recent popular history. It was both a place where people studied and a place which brought together influences from other social movements.

On the one hand, people adopted the squatting movement's concern towards self-management and went on to enhance the already existing cooperative sector, while creating strong ties with local struggles. On the other, the local youth were already organised when Can Vies was squatted, as the 20th

5 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/10865311/Squat-demolition-called-off-after-four-nights-of-rioting-in-Barcelona.html

6 http://libcom.org/library/can-vies-violent-protest-only-answer-%E2%80%93-antonio-maestre

7 http://libcom.org/library/can-vies-violent-protest-only-answer-%E2%80%93-antonio-maestre

anniversary of the Sants neighbourhood party shows (this is a popular tradition common to all towns and neighbourhoods of Catalonia). Three years before the creation of Can Vies, young people created this self-managed party which now finances La Burxa and other initiatives of the neighbourhood assembly. La Burxa is a free newspaper produced at Can Vies with a circulation of 4,000 copies. Much more would have to be said about Sants to provide a true picture of the complexity of its history. But what has been said is enough to illustrate that here squatting is not only a goal (the creation of a movement that seizes private property), but also a tool for very wide array of social movements pushing for radical change.[8]

Using Verkami, the squatters launched a crowdfunding request for 70,000 euros and received almost 90,000 euros. The plan for the original amount was for 40,000 to be used for rebuilding and for 30,000 to provide funds for the two groups (Rereguarda en Moviment and Alerta Solidària) which are making the legal defence. In a way, it could be argued that the potential of two different sectors of the squatting movement united. On the one hand, the conflictive power of the 'old school' okupa movement managed to bring the eviction to an halt. On the other hand, the institutional sector of the squatting movement used v2.0 tools to subvert the eviction itself.[9]

Popular support was massive and got even bigger as the rebuilding was announced on Wednesday 27, allowing more people to join in the march knowing that the issue of violence was out of the way. This move has been criticized by insurrectionalists who questioned the decision of Can Vies to publicly bet on the reconstruction. In other words, although Can Vies' discourse was strategically effective to preserve and create a concrete project, it was also a leash on popular rage against wider issues. The stakes were high for Sants' neigbourhood cooperative and radical movements: Can Vies stands out as the only squatted social centre of Sants. Also, it stands right next to the 4000 acres of Can Batllò, a legalized space where neighbours are self-organizing huge communal spaces... Thus, it could be argued that the eviction of Can Vies was an attack against the way of being of a whole neighbourhood and against the

8 Dee, E.T.C., Debelle Rodrigues, G., 2015. Examining mainstream media discourses on the squatters' movements in Barcelona and London, in Interface, vol 7 (1): 117-143 (May 2015).

9 Dee, E.T.C., Debelle Rodrigues, G., 2014b. Squatting a new future in Barcelona: Can Vies & El Banc Expropiat de Gràcia. Circus Bazaar.

right to the city. The protest that gathered between 10.000 and 20.000 people after the reconstruction had started on Saturday morning shows that the actions of the City Hall were widely disapproved of.

Operación Pandora

Social unrest has been criminalised through several changes in the Spanish and Catalan penal codes. A new law has been approved and will severely restrict civil liberties. NGOs, associations and social movements have joined in opposition to these draconian measures which include two new offences that could carry fines of up to €600,000.[10] This is ludicrous since the vast majority of weekly protests around Spain have been peaceful since the start of the crisis in 2008. The struggle over Can Vies that took place in 2014 points to the growing feeling that everyone has a right to the city and reaffirms popular discontent against the authoritarianism of the government. The response from the government came towards the end of 2014, on December 16, when the Spanish "Audiencia Nacional" started a so-called "anti-terrorist" operation in the context of which 11 people were arrested.

The media coverage of Operation Pandora has been studied by several collectives in Barcelona and elsewhere. Here, some of us share preliminary results obtained in the context of one of these groups, although a collective interpretation and writing is yet to be undertaken.[11] Debelle's lexicometric analysis of the first 24 hours of coverage by El País, Ara, El Punt-Avui, La Vanguardia, Nació Digital.cat and Vilaweb showed that the operation itself received double the attention received by the protest which took place the very same afternoon. This sample includes Catalunya's most read journals in terms of internet audience. This exploratory lexicometric analysis also shows that the concrete accusation of having commited "several attacks with explosive devices" is not significantly correlated with any of the mentioned authorities (neither Mossos nor Audiencia Nacional).

A more qualitative analysis conducted by Debelle has confirmed this general trend, as in several cases identical phrases were found in different newspapers

10 https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/libertades/25029-resumen-grafico-lo-viene-con-la-ley-mordaza.htm

11 We're currently writing a zine and thinking of formats to share this information to the wider public, any comments are appreciated!

without mentioning that it was being copied from somewhere else. Still, something that lexicometry did not show were quotes from the lawyers of Kasa de la Muntanya and those from the CUP, who criticized the operation. Only El Mundo, El País and La Voz de Galicia do not reproduce any statement from these two sources. This general trend of relying heavily on institutional information and copy-pasting statements from the autorities had already been found in past research about Catalan newspapers.[12]

Seven people arrested that day were sent to preventive prison and were released only on January 30th, with a bail of 3000€. Kasa de la Muntanya, one of the oldest and most emblematic squats of Barcelona, was raided by the police. The police knocked the door down using great force, a technique that had also been used against Can Vies back in February 2014. In both cases the police had no eviction order, and both squats remain, but the police now have precious information on the building and on the political activity of the CSO. Several agents of the Information Brigade were on the spot, they took computers and phones.[13] No one was arrested.

C. Rojo's agentivity analysis of the news headlines shown that most mainstream media (with the exception of some alternative media such as La Directa) defined social protest agents as deviant, violent and criminal. The 11 arrested persons were represented as negative social actors, which allegedly realized different types of terrorist activities. Also, in headlines, the elites – in this case policemen – were depicted as social actors who obey and enforce the law. However, their violent actions were played down. This journalistic frame is frequently used in the coverage of social protest. Negative coverage of emancipatory social actors weakens the power of social movements and enhances the criminalization of collective action. Moreover, downplaying the negative elite actions legitimizes and reproduces the status quo.[14] In other words, there was little criticism towards Catalan and Spanish elites.

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12 Debelle, G., 2010. Anàlisi crítica del discurs de textos periodístics de la premsa comarcal catalana sobre l'okupació. Master thesis coordinated by Soriano, J., presented at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

13 https://directa.cat/operacio-de-laudiencia-nacional-espanyola-mossos-contra-moviment-llibertari

14 Colorado, C., 2014. Prensa y protesta social. La representación del caso Atenco en La Jornada, PhD Thesis coordinated by van Dijk, T., presented at Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

Several “Ateneus” (the traditional Catalan popular social centres) were also searched in order to find proof of “anarchist terrorism”. The notorious “Pandora Operation” is producing moral demons to frighten the population and legitimize the “gag law”. We note in passing that this is a clear case of how elites co-ordinate efforts against their common enemy. When the people organise to confront the unjust state of affairs, the conflict for example between Catalonia and Spain fades out. Catalan authorities permitted the actions of the Mossos and actually carried out the orders of the “Audiencia Nacional” during the “Pandora Operation”. In other words, most Catalan politicians often spout off about not following orders from the capital Madrid, but this discourse is clearly selective and only applies when the interests of the Catalan elite are in sync with the popular movement for self-determination.

Still, C. Martínez’s preliminary results on the first news produced on “Operation Pandora” in Catalunya’s and Spain’s five most read journals indicate that they framed their coverage of the operation against a “terrorist anarchist organization” in more than two thirds of cases.[15] In this case, direct quoting was used as a technique to preserve the so-called “objective view of the journalist”. Also, in slightly more than half of the pieces, the action is framed by referring to an “okupa colective”, “criminal organization” and “organization of anarchist character”. When describing the goals and means of this “organization”, direct quoting is abandoned, as journalists simply write a story about terrorist attacks and explosive devices. This qualitative analysis sheds some light on how a “problem” was created. Thus, “Operation Pandora” should be seen as an attempt to persecute certain ideas, more than certain people.

On March 31 2015, the police carried out “Piñata Operation”, a new “anti-terrorist” repressive measure.[16] Many squatted social centers and houses were

15 The most read Catalan online journals are Ara, El Punt-Avui, Nació Digital.cat, Vilaweb and La Directa. The top five Spanish journals are El Mundo, El País, El Periódico, La Vanguardia and La Voz de Galícia. During the first 48 hours of coverage these journals published 49 news articles. Ara.cat (Cat) published 9 pieces, Vilaweb (Cat) → 8, Nació Digital.cat → 6, Directa.cat (Cat) → 6, El Punt Avui (Cat) → 4. And, at the Spanish level, La Vanguardia (Cat) did 9 pieces, El País (Cat) → 3, El Periódico (Cas) → 2, El Mundo (Cas) → 1, La Voz de Galicia (Cas) → 1. It should be mentioned that journals outside of catalunya (El País has a Catalan edition) did not grant much importance to “Pandora Operation”.

16 https://en.squat.net/2015/03/30/barcelonagranadamadridpalencia-police-pinata-raids/ and https://es.squat.net/2015/03/30/estado-espanol-operacion-pinata-la-policia-asalta-varios-espacios-okupados/#more-17310

raided in Madrid, Palencia, Barcelona and Granada. There were 39 arrests, of which 15 were accused of being part of an anarchist terrorist organization. The others were charged with resistance, disobedience and squatting. Here too, the operation was ordered by the "Audiencia Nacional", which accused people of being part of an alleged terrorist platform called Coordinated Anarchist Groups (GAC), in turn related with an international group called FAI/FRI. However, in their communiques, the GAC only defended sabotage, without making any reference to traditional terrorist practices such as kidnapping, assassination, explosives, etc.

One should note the semantic implications of calling these operations "Pandora" and "Piñata". On the one hand, the dominant interpretation is likely to be that the police is dealing with the "evils of the world" contained by Pandora's box or that it is struggling against temptation and evil, the "seven deadly sins" of the Piñata. On another hand, we consider that it is much more accurate to consider that the police is actually introducing these figures of evil into the collective imaginary to justify their own existence and the continuance of anti-terrorist laws, now that ETA has abandoned armed activity.

As the Banc Expropiat (a squatted bank in central Barcelona) argues in a recent article, it makes no sense to release terrorists with such low bail of 3000€.[17] But it gets worse. As a result of "Operation Piñata", 5 more persons were put in jail. On June 1, the Audiencia Nacional ordered the release without bail of three of the five people that were still in prison. Apparently, the court reconsidered their decision to keep them in preventive prison, although the charges are stilll being kept against them. All of a sudden, the big bad anarchist monster does not seem that dangerous after all and we are just talking about people who are being accused of trashing banks. It goes without saying that smashing banks is a regular practice during protests in Barcelona. In short, the GAC is being criminalized for stating that they intend to practice sabotage.

It is not the first time that squatting is associated with terrorism in Catalonia, this already happened back in 2001. Then, throughout 2006, a very intense campaign to criminalize squatters took place which was designed avoid a serious discussion on housing rights while providing the public sphere with a scapegoat. The amount of news produced on squatting that year is only comparable to the period of the spectacular explosion of the squatting

17 La Metxa, n°5, Spring 2015

movement, in 1996. Laws penalising allegedly deviant behaviour were introduced in 2006. In Roar Mag, Carlos Delclós records:

> The new byelaws also produced common sights that were unusually charged with a disturbing degree of symbolic violence. One of these was the constant hosing down of pedestrian areas, which sounds harmless enough and even desirable when expressed as a simple city cleaning task. But I will never forget the image of city cleaners being accompanied by police as they sprayed beggars, travelers, and squatter-punks off of the steps of Plaça George Orwell.

Of course squatters were classed as "incívicos" thus making the criminalization of "squatters as cockroaches" very appealing in the eyes of the mainstream media. Squatters elaborated alternative discourses to fight off stigmatization, and also spread this poster around Barcelona:

Several recent studies on the media coverage of squatting in Europe have reached the same conclusion: Since the mid 2000s, squatters have frequently been turned into scapegoats for repressive policies and racist policies.[18]

4F and Ciutat Morta

A crucial story which illustates the power dynamics behind the criminalization of okupas is the 4-F case, in which a local policeman was injured and later fell into a coma after being hit by an object thrown from the window of a squat called Anarkopenya, where a massive party was taking place.

This squat, owned by the City Council, was not related to Barcelona's Squatters Assembly and limited its activity to raves, although some cultural activities were offered when the squat was first opened. In fact, it seems obvious that this exceptional tolerance of the authorities fitted hand in glove with their effort to promote gentrification. Right next to that house, neighbours had been self-managing a huge square, proving that for the inhabitants that the state and the police were not necessary.

18 See Dadusc, D. and Dee, E.T.C. (2015); Dee, E.T.C. and Debelle Rodrigues, G. (2015), Dee, E.T.C. (2013); Manjikian, M. (2013).

Poster: A repulsive alien saying "I hate my daddy" is shown on the front page of a La Vanguardia (the most influencial right-way Catalan newspaper) under the title "squatters eat human flesh"

As the support group for the arrestees stated, Anarko Penya was:

> A mafia-style operation more than an "anarko" squat, the building had been controlled for some years by two or three individuals who had used it to frequently mount huge commercial raves for their own gain. Furthermore, these individuals had little or no contact with political squatters in the area. Despite these mafia-style practices, or maybe specifically BECAUSE of these mafia-style practices, the Council had spent nearly four years turning a blind eye to the ongoing complaints from neighbours fed up with constant problems caused by the raves. How convenient that this same passivity on the part of the Council now allows them to criminalize the more political part of the Barcelona squatting

movement, of which the Anarko Penya formed little part.[19]

The City Council and the police, in view of the impossibility of finding out who had thrown the flowerpot (as inside the house there were hundreds of people),

mounted a case blaming innocent people who were not in the house at the time (and some not even in the vicinity). At the same time as objects fell from the roof, five persons were arrested (three charged with "attempted homicide") and beaten up by the police down on the street. After they had been tortured they were finally taken to receive medical attention under police guard and at the hospital, two more people who simply happened to be there after a bicycle accident were also arrested. All nine appear to have been arrested and mistreated purely because of how they looked rather than due to any evidence of guilt.

The direct consequences of this set up could be described as follows:

Regarding the three men arrested on the street for the crime of looking South American, Álex Cisternas and Juan Pintos were given 2 years in preventive custody and another 2 years in prison with home leave. Rodrigo Lanza spent 4 years in jail. Álex, Rodrigo and Juan were tortured by the police during their detention and in the following days in the cells; their appeal against the tortures never succeeded. Regarding the two people arrested in hospital for the crime of looking queer, Alfredo was convicted but then pardoned and Patricia Heras spent 2 months in prison, until April 26 2011 when she committed suicide.

Two Guardias Urbanos, Víctor Bayona (number 24.751) and Bakari Samyang (number 24.738), were the key witnesses for the convictions of Rodrigo Lanza and Patricia Heras. These two agents have themselves recently been sent to prison for arresting then torturing the son of a diplomat. This judgement made clear that the crime was falsified and that the statement was interfered with, thus challenging the credibility of their declarations as witnesses for the prosecution in the 4-F case. The two agents were condemned for using torture, false testimony and planted evidence.[20]

19 https://web.archive.org/web/20061111053243/http://www.karcelona.revolt.org/4f/en/hechos.html

20 A week before the airing of the Ciutat Morta documentary, these two agents were sent to jail.

A documentary movie called Ciutat Morta was recently released showing the institutional conspiracy behind the case, and was screened on Catalan television in January 2015. It was dedicated to the memory of Patricia.

Further, when the film was screened on television the fragment where the journalist Jesus Rodriguez identifies Víctor Gibanel (Information Chief of Guardia Urbana) as the author of the police reports of the 4-F case were censored by TV3, following an order from the courts. This journalist has been involved in social movements since the heyday of the squatting movement and works for the most famous Catalan cooperative journal, La Directa. This accusation was based on a leaked video of Gibanel's official declaration in the Macedonia case, where he states that he's responsible for all communications from the police departament. Gibanel had been holding that position since the mid-1990s, precisely when the squatters' movement exploded. This position made him responsible for communicating the official version of police interventions in protests and evictions. And it seems that he has not been above falsifying reports to create a narrative of squatters as violent scum.

In a chapter of a book that was self-produced by Terrassa's Squatters Assembly back in the 1990s, Jesus Rodriguez already described and criticized the dependency that journalists feel towards institutions such as the judicial and political systems, the police, etc. It took him and social movements in general had to wait twenty years for this huge corruption scheme to find concrete and scandalous proof of how these institutions unite against squatters. The 4-F case was effectively silenced by institutions, including the mainstream media, for nine years, during which the efforts of a few were frustrated by the very same anti-democratic structures that generated the scandal they were tailing. When it was eventually screened, the docu had one of the highest ratings of TV3.
The public debate on Ciutat Morta definitely plays out in favour of squatters, although the tendency has been to see the police mistreatments as a circumstantial, instead of being a defining structural feature. It also worth mentioning that Juan Pinto, one of the tortured men, has released a statement strongly condemning the film.[21]

Further, the controversial section in which features a hooded figure with a voiceover suggesting that if the "real culprit" who threw the flowerpot came

21 https://es.squat.net/2015/01/26/comunicado-de-juan-pintos-detenidoencarceladocondenado-por-el-montaje-del-4f/#more-17287

forward, then justice could be served, was eventually removed from the second version of the film.

There are concerns regarding the fact that the movie depicts Patricia Heras as a victim, with some regrettable comments in the film that seem to suggest that she was wrongly selected as a deviant and if she was a squatter or a migrant her mistreatment would have been justified. The film creates a narrative about an innocent person that ends up being killed by the system, hence creating a very convincing frame of injustice as a means to provoke a sympathetic reaction from viewers.

Yet, it could be argued that in pursuing this goal, the movie has created a false picture in public debate about the police, torture, politicians and corruption. It is also worth noting that the support group for the arrestees does not feature in the film and is strongly critical of the reduction of a general anti-prison campaign to the victimhood of Patricia.[22]

In response to these criticisms, one might say that the discourse Ciutat Morta creates is successful when judged in terms of effectiveness. The fact that more than half a million watched it on TV should be understood as a sign of the political importance this documentary film already had before being screened. This has far reaching implications in terms of the interpretation of the mass media as political actors. As the documentary Crònica d'una Esquerda[23] mentions, journalists of the mainstreammedia were censored when they tried to get the story out. Still, popular pressure managed to create the opportunity to air Ciutat Morta on mainstream TV and thus to fight the criminalization of certain deviant social identities.

As we have been arguing, the tension has been growing between social movements and the state. The criminalization of protest paradoxically (or not so paradoxically if one takes into account the belligerent nature of the police and the state) brings about more protests. Simultaneously, the recent advances of neoliberal policies ensure that social discontent grows. Thus, neoliberal policies end up being able to justify security expenditures through the very same protests

22 https://es.squat.net/2015/02/02/barcelona-4f-cuando-una-imagen-no-vale-mas-que-mil-palabras/

23 Literally, "Chronicle of a crack". You can find it here: https://directa.cat/video/cronica-duna-esquerda-penetrant-al-sistema-dels-grans-mitjans-de-comunicacio

they generate. It is in this context that the role of Ciutat Morta can be considered as a positive one, as it reached out to people who usually form their opinions based on hegemonic discourses.

As the authors of Crònica d'una Esquerda put it, the power of the mass media has limits and can be overturned on some occasions. These cracks can be found both inside and outside of the media, and represent the crossing the line of what the hierarchical system most desires, that is, complete obedience. These cracks are also in the streets, the neighbourhoods, and are made possible by those who organize and articulate social movements, while generating their own independent media to have the opportunity to make news from a truly critical perspective.[24] In short, people working inside the mass media collaborated with people who do not relate to these institutions to make the airing of Ciutat Morta happen.

Conclusions

The 4-F case shows that criminalization is an easy step for the state and a very difficult thing for social movements to combat. Although it might be preferable for some collectives not to relate to the mass media, both Ciutat Morta and Crònica d'una Esquerda show us evidence that allows for a better understanding of media logic and, maybe, of the tools that popular struggles could use. We have argued that the airing of Ciutat Morta was positive in a sense, but as far as daily struggles are concerned, there might be better options than turning to the mass media. Plus it is also worth noting that there are strong criticisms of the film.

As we mentioned, protesters had no doubts to attack a TV3 van and the police had no doubts to attack journalists from La Directa. These attacks, which followed the eviction of Can Vies, illustrate both distrust of mass media and police concerns regarding independent media. The 4-F case shown that people's distrust of institutions also extends to the police departments which are supposed to protect them. This deep corruption and everyday violence of the state has been revealed, in another episode of people power in Catalonia.

There have been very powerful popular responses to criminalization. During 2006, the media cooperative La Directa was created and is now the fifth most

24 See Kuhn and Rojo(2015)

read online newspaper in Catalonia. This year, 2015, several groups exist and try to fight off criminalization on different fronts while struggling to mobilize people on broader subjects. Still, law-suits pile up due to the many insurrectionist episodes of the last few years. A lot of effort is now being put against repression, as high bails, fines, and sentences keep people in debt, and others, in jail. But, on a positive note, a lot of constructive projects are providing long-term basis for systemic change.

We have taken the time to describe the struggle of Can Vies for its exceptional nature, but it should not be seen as a isolated episode. The example of the Banc Expropiat symbolizes this, as four attempts to evict the social centre have been made, and each time the police called off operations because of the squatters' resistance. In a surprising twist, it was recently made public that the eviction has now been delayed until December 2015 because the Catalan right wing ruling party, CiU, paid the rent (66000€) to Manuel Bravo Solano, the speculator who had previously bought the place from the bank CaixaCatalunya.[25] Stakes are high for the party of new left-wing Mayor Ada Colau, who will be in charge in December, when the place will again be under threat of eviction. In the meantime, El Banc Expropiat is collecting information on this shady deal, while preparing for the bitter times to come.

Still, as we have seen with Operation Pandora, the penalties for being a squatter have evolved from being a "vandal" to be a "terrorist". And criminalization operations come with a cost much higher than the stigmatisation of a certain social identity. The goal of silencing dissent associated with the Spanish gag law is being pursued with much stronger instruments of repression. Although the Spanish and Catalan cases have very specific features, this repressive turn of government is being seen throughout Europe. With the appliance of the gag law new repressive repertories and strategies can be expected. And there is no doubt that Catalan police forces, who are far more equipped and disciplined than the cops of the Spanish state, have still some cards to play, such as a water cannon that remains unused.

During the event that was held at La Base on May 26, there was also the chance to discuss the strategies that followed the criminalization of squatting in North European countries. This leads us to think that comparative work is crucial and

25 https://directa.cat/districte-de-gracia-governat-ciu-va-decidir-pagar-5500-euros-al-mes-pel-lloguer-del-banc-expropiat

that strategic alliances should be reinforced between movements. This does not come without effort and serious reflection about what binds together different movements, but also about what makes them different. As a final word, we would like to encourage the creation of new reading and investigation groups, and to invite you to contact us to share data and other materials about criminalization.

▶15M mural in Casablanca

Social Centers in Madrid

by Alan W. Moore

Madrid has a long tradition of occupied social centers. These squats are not collective houses; usually no one lives there. They have been squatted for cultural provision, political organizing, popular education, and low cost social life. Social center squatting in Madrid has gone through many changes over the years. Recently the practice has been repositioned politically with the rise of post-15M left electoral platforms in numerous Spanish cities called municipalist. Many of these new formations are indebted to social center organizing and include squatter activists. This has put Spanish social centers in the political spotlight in a new way. Especially after the 15M movement of 2011, social centers have evolved beyond the '80s stereotype image of a punky house. Today they are less minoritarian.

Over ten years ago, a meeting of social center activists took place at La Casika, in the town of Móstoles. (Rivero, 2006) La Casika occupies a sprawling old factory building. Started in 1997, it is still there, although routinely threatened with eviction. It's not so far from the large CA2M contemporary art museum, built out of an antique palace in 2008. CA2M does many politically-inflected exhibitions, but the distinction between the two places, each of which plays an important cultural role in Móstoles, is crystal clear.

At that 2006 meeting, activists for the recently evicted CSO El Desguaze in Alcorcón, spoke of their work as a disobedience to the logic of real estate speculation, and to the city administration's leisure and cultural policy. They assumed this was common to all projects then. CSO El Desguaze was a "process," the development of an "alternative culture on the margins of mercantile dynamics," open to the social use of all. Their building, already evicted and demolished, had served as concert hall, cinema, climbing wall, popular dining room and space for talks and workshops.

Others in the meeting were from CSO China Town in Las Rozas, evicted soon after, CSO El Pelikano in Opañel, CSO La Escoba in Lavapiés, Centro El Solar in Estrecho, and CSO El Kabo. All are gone. La Barraka, "local del

pueblo insumiso," begun in the barrio de Moratalaz in 1972, burned down in 2007. Moratalaz today is served by the legal ES (Espacio Sociocultural) La Salamandra.

There is a good deal of research on squatting in Madrid. Online, 15Mpedia.org has a good hyperlinked current list of social centers, including centers active, evicted, and active "pending eviction" (54 active, 40 evicted) in the province of Madrid. Most are in the city. Some are well known, with deep histories, while most are small with local impact.

The best known social centers have been in Madrid city. The Escuela Popular de Prosperidad is a pedagogical initiative that began in a church building in 1973. The people in La Prospe are organized into Collective Learning Groups (GAC), and follow the pedagogy of Paulo Freire who visited the school early on. The building is legalized, and they receive a government subsidy, but claim their autonomy as a volunteer-run assembly-managed project. Their teaching work is "renewed with practice and encourages reflection for action." They have published their history and ideas as a book.

Political education is at the heart of the social center idea. 15Mpedia lists the tiny Ateneo Libertario de Hortaleza, still extant and hyperlinked to a Facebook page. The social center as a political form is often traced to the Italian Autonomist movement of the 1970s, but the Hortaleza center's name references the anarchist tradition of the ateneo libertario. The libertarian athenaeum, as cultural center and site of worker education, dates to the late 19th century and the Modern School movement of Francisco Ferrer. All of these were closed with the fascist victory in 1939. Now their heritage is regularly invoked and their model emulated.

Others on the 15Mpedia list include the well-established Centro Social Seco in Retiro district. Seco was legalized, and relocated to a remote new municipal construction out by the railroad tracks. The book-loving CSA 3 Peces, 3 houses, the Biblio Sol and the Archivo 15M in a small rented space in Lavapiés. They run a bar and a full program of activities in the center city. Each center of course explains itself differently on its website. The staunchly feminist La Villana, three years old and a site of the Vallecas assembly of the PAH, is "the daughter of 15M, granddaughter of the Zapatista movement, great-granddaughter of the autonomous tradition."

Some important projects are missing from the 15Mpedia list, like the legendary Laboratorios active during the Global Justice movement of the late 1990s. El Labo had four iterations – first from 1997-1998, where the infamous art activist network Las Agencias was housed. Labo number 2 ran from '99-01; #3 from '02-03 – the subject of a film, "Laboratorio 3, ocupando del vacío" – and the last, Labo 4 lasted only through 2003. The collective, like the influential Patio Maravillas after them (2007-14), continued "in exile." Several went into the

Tabacalera center in 2012, a legally contracted self-organized project in the massive old tobacco factory in Lavapiés. One of the Laboratorio buildings today is occupied as CS(r)OA La Quimera by a collective with its own pedigree of occupations and evictions, dating back over 10 years.

Another not on the 15Mpedia list is the Espacio Vecinal Arganzuela, the EVA. Ensconced in a corner of the old fruit and vegetable market of Legazpi, across the roundabout from the giant Matadero cultural complex, the assembly of EVA includes seasoned activists from an evicted social center, La Traba. Although they have a modern facility, they are squeezed by the city council, which is redeveloping the site. But at least it's not being redeveloped as a commercial shopping center; that was the city's plan before the EVA mobilization thwarted it. The barrio organizers' well-publicized campaign to save the space was developed inside the city cultural agency, Intermediae.

The relationship between the self-organized "monster institutions" of the social centers and the city government is, as it has always been, the central problem facing Madrid's movement. Squatting is illegal, of course. Yet for years government cultural institutions have been vampirizing the movement even as the courts evict centers. Many artists and cultural workers have developed their craft in okupas, and later worked officially. Significant political projects have developed within and operated through social centers. They are "spaces of irreplaceable political socialization." (Elorduy, 2017)

The new wave of electoral platforms in Spain called municipalist – like Ahora Madrid, and the more ideologically rigorous Barcelona en Comú – are committed to participatory democracy. This is most clearly expressed in the development of websites for making proposals and voting on the most popular, a high-tech form of participatory budgeting. This line of work is heavily funded by city hall. (It also promotes Madrid's image as a center of the tech economy.) Yet the occupied social center has remained as a kind of shadow model for ideas of an active citizenship called citizen protagonism. Social centers serve as springboards for projects which end up being legalized and often funded by government. As a model they are being imitated by city cultural agencies like Medialab and Intermediae, which organize in-house groups and off-site pop-up centers staffed by professionals which engage mostly young people.

While ostensibly similar, these official initiatives differ sharply from self-organized

assembly-run social centers. And the basic antagonism between authentic self-organized autonomous squatted projects and government institutions remains. The mayor of Madrid, the electable face of the Ahora Madrid platform, is a former judge. She is opposed to squatting as illegal. Many activists in Madrid social centers have complained of the city's "buro-represión" (bureaucratic repression), imposing restrictions on self-organized centers. Eviction notices continue to arrive.

The activists and "electeds" of the Spanish municipalist platforms are well aware of the conflict, since many come from the squatting and occupation movements. They feel strait-jacketed by the habits of institutions they nominally control, habits that were initially formed in the dictatorship. An annual congress, called MAC (Muncipalismo, Autogobierno y Contrapoder) considers the problem, as well as many others facing progressive city governance in Spain. The very name of that conference reflects the belief that a counterpower, external to government, both elected and institutional, is needed to maintain the focus and direction of the progressive movements. At the 2017 MAC3 meeting in the northern city of A Coruña, a group of social center activists studied the protocols of the city of Naples for legalizing social centers. That city, home to some 30 social centers, recognized one of them l'Asilo Filangiere, as a common good of the city in 2015. (Ter Garcia, 2016)

The conflict between power and counterpower was brought into dramatic focus by the squatting of a former building of the UNED public university in the center of Madrid. Occupied in May of 2017, the new center is next to the Caixa Forum museum and the experimental Medialab Prado. Bernardo Gutiérrez, author of the blazingly cheerful "Pasado mañana: Viaje a la España del cambio" can walk across the plaza from his job at the Medialab for a caña after work.

La Ingobernable, Centro Social de Comunes Urbanos, is a "feminist, environmentalist, mestizo and solidarity project". The occupation is a people's reversal of an act by the last city mayor who gave the building to her friend the architect Emilio Ambasz for a private museum. The squat achieves a stated objective of the municipalist platforms, which is the re-municipalization of essential goods and services which the right wing had privatized. Ahora Madrid does not govern alone, and the right is outraged. But for the moment the right is disabled by massive scandals, of which the gift of the building to Ambasz is only a mild example.

The assembly of La Ingobernable is large and includes many veteran squatters. This center in the city center is very important to the movement, and is defended by several Ahora Madrid councilors. As a self-organized building in the center of the city, in its touristic heart, it accomplishes the often-stated goal of recovering a right to the city for the poor and dispossessed. Its occupation came at the end of a march against gentrification – "Madrid no se vende." The Air BnB flat renting company was a target of that march, since its operations take scarce apartments off the rental market. That mass march ended up planting a flag in the heart of touristic Madrid.

Elorduy cites Spinoza: "'Nobody knows what a body can do'... That is why a collective body is a force feared by policies that commercialize life to put it at the service of a grammar of privileges, hierarchies, borders, exclusions, alienations and fears. Because the world opens up to another language. To a profoundly subversive and transforming language."

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▶Roof of City Plaza

Refugees' struggles in Athens: Voices from City Plaza

by Refugee Accommodation
Space City Plaza

During the summer of 2015, around 1,200,000 people crossed the EU borders in their attempt to reach countries in Northern Europe. That is what some called a refugee crisis. That is what we call the long summer of migration, which led to a crisis for the European border regime.

Greece is one of EU's main arrival countries for asylum seekers, and among those which are suffering most for the European migration policies. Since the so called Balkan route closed on the 20 March 2016, because of the EU-Turkey agreement, more than 62.000 migrants have been stranded around Greece, in institutional or extemporary camps, and the islands of the Aegean were transformed into a double border between Turkey and Europe.

Migrants in camps are living in inhumane conditions. This, along with the high denial rate of the asylum applications, is part of a deterrence strategy meant to discourage people from crossing the Aegean.

> *"When I was on my own in the camps I saw horrible, terrible things. I came from the war, I was fleeing violence and injustice but there were times that I wanted to go back. All we wanted was to find safety and peace but I didn't see it in the camps. No respect, nobody helped me, no doctors. I was very afraid in this time."* (Frlan, 47, from Aleppo, Syria).

> *"In the camps there is so much fighting and violence. I had many things stolen from my tent while I was sleeping. The main difference though has to be the freedom here. At City Plaza we can do basic day to day things when we want. We can wash when we want, sleep when we want, express ourselves without being shouted at. I never had the freedom to make choices of how I wanted to spend my day in the camps, everything is controlled like a prison there."* (Mohammed, 18,

from Aleppo, Syria - Kurdish Syrian).

March 2016 was the moment for the Solidarity Initiative for Economic and Political Refugees to react, the moment when we decided to proceed with squatting empty buildings in the center of Athens, to offer decent housing and living conditions and counter EU migration policies.

On 22 April 2016, we occupied City Plaza. We wanted to set a good example of housing in order to overtly oppose the logic of the camps, and show that there is an alternative to the institutional reception system: treating refugees as humans.

> *"People here treat us like humans, not just as refugees. We are shown a lot of respect here."* (Alia, 49, from Aleppo, Syria).

City Plaza is:

- A self-organised refugee housing space on 78 Acharnon, in the Agios Panteleimonas area, in which 350 people are currently living, from various cultural backgrounds. Since April 2016, approximately 2,200 refugees have lived here.

- A seven floor hotel, which remained closed for seven years, until the Solidarity Initiative for Economic and Political Refugees, together with hundreds of refugees, took over and gave it back to society, by turning it into a space offering permanent and dignified housing to refugees.

- An act of resistance to the authoritarian border and migration policies in Greece and Europe, the EU-Turkey "deal of shame", the closing and militarisation of the borders, and to their consequences: the trapping of tens of thousands of refugees in the Greek mainland and the imposition of a system of mass detention, deportation, and suspension of the right to asylum for refugees arriving on to the islands.

- A counterexample of how the social movement and the civic society can deal with the refugee housing issue, claiming another approach, against state's practice of detaining refugees in wretched camps, demanding a housing solution for refugees inside the cities, ensuring their access to healthcare,

education, and asylum and relocation services.

- An example of self-organisation in the common struggles of refugees and locals and their daily life. We believe that it is through fighting togethe for practical demands in common struggles, rather than through general humanitarian declarations, that societal configurations and authoritarian and neoliberal policies can change, the far-right can be deterred, and a common front against racism and austerity can be constituted.

From the opening day until now (after two years), around 2,200 migrants from 13 countries have been housed in City Plaza, while solidarians from around the world have also contributed. We will not provide statistics on countries of origin, age groups or “vulnerable” cases. We will provide “statistics” on the enormous resources mobilized by the antagonistic movement to keep City Plaza open. 513,000 warm meals were cooked by the kitchen team. Over 47,000 work hours were offered to security shifts at the entrance and on the building’s balconies. The reception team estimates around 18,080 hours of shifts and, according to the storage room team, over 43,600 toilet rolls have been used to date! We can also count 208 vans full of supplies, fresh vegetables and meat, while 24 tonnes of petrol were purchased for heating and hot water. We could also count the hours of work for cleaning, language lessons, health care, the women’s space, and children’s activities.

Yet the most important things out of everything that happened cannot be counted. No matter what plans we made before the squatting, City Plaza turned them on their head. Two years later, we can say with certainty that it has been a deeply transformative experience for all the people who inhabit it - in one way or another. Daily life at Plaza is based on an encounter. An encounter between people from very different walks of life, with different social, class, political, and cultural backgrounds, speaking different languages and having different needs, strategies, and plans.

> *"[Of City Plaza I'll miss] everything. I don't want to leave. I can't find the words to explain why I will miss City Plaza so much… I'll miss waking up in the morning and saying hello to everyone. I'll miss translating. I'll miss playing football, my friends, playing chess, everything."*
> (Mohammed, 18, from Aleppo, Syria - Kurdish Syrian)

From the viewpoint of the solidarity movement, organising such a project is an extremely complex, yet interesting experience. Since day one we tried to make City Plaza into a counterexample to the dominant way of dealing with migration. Plaza, therefore, is not just a housing squat, but a political project extending across scales: from the small and the everyday, such as the way in which food is made and the building is cleaned, to the organisation of international rallies against the policies of control and subjugation of migration.

> *"Solidarity means everyone from every country, refugees or not, standing together. We all have to raise our voices so that the borders are open again and until then it is so important that City Plaza stays open."*
> (Mohammed, 30, from Herat, Afghanistan)

> *"The conditions we live in are worlds apart [compared to the camps]. At City Plaza we have safety. We have dignity. We are treated as humans, not just as refugees. We have opportunities to be busy, productive and active. Living in the camps you have the opposite of all of these things. If I hadn't come to City Plaza, if I'd had to stay living in a camp, I think I'd have left and gone back to Syria."* (Shero, 29, from Damascus, Syria - Kurdish Syrian)

It is a political project that uniquely connects and combines individual struggles and themes: social solidarity and civil disobedience, the counterexample and

specific demands, organising daily life and the struggle against violence, exploitation, and oppression. From the shared organization of daily life to fighting for our demands in the streets begins a process of creating a community of struggle "from below", in opposition to national and European policies for the management of migration "flows" and the industry of NGO "aid" programmes.

> *"I want to go to Germany. I want to travel one day too. I love the Shakespeare play 'A Merchant of Venice,' I'd love to go to Venice. When I'm in Germany I want to study Chemistry and work part-time as a translator. I really don't want to work in a factory again. Before I came to Greece I lived in Istanbul for 5 months. I worked on the factory line making clothes. I had no money in this time so I couldn't eat. We were only given coffee, just to keep us awake. I worked 32 hour days. I don't want to work somewhere like that again."* (Mohammed, 18, from Aleppo, Syria - Kurdish Syrian)

It is a given that City Plaza will not last forever. However, two years on, City Plaza has become a symbol of struggle against the European border regime, against camps, against multiple levels of exclusion and discrimination to which migrants are subjected. In spite of everything, Plaza is not - nor it could be - an island of freedom beyond relations of exploitation and domination, beyond, that is, the world of capital and the state. Yet we are absolutely convinced that through the cracks created by real social struggles, there appear moments of emancipation, the horizon of our capabilities is broadened, and we can sense a society of equality and freedom.

> *"[City Plaza to me means] freedom, solidarity and zero discrimination. City Plaza is a good place for us all to be and I will miss the people here, but it's important that we leave. We all have to rebuild our lives and move on."* (Rahin, 23, from Kapisa, Afghanistan)

Despite the difficulties and the contradictions, or perhaps exactly because of them, the Plaza experience is priceless. It is an experience of redefinition and reflection on our political thinking and practice, on power relations, on daily life, on co-existence and its terms, on the places and the ways of common struggle.

> *"Today my friends have come to visit us. It's so lovely to be able to welcome guests into our own space. I love that we are able to have*

One of the project's greatest successes is that it managed to transform, for hundreds of people, a period of their life when they are in transit - a period which for most is one of uncertainty and intense insecurity, worry, and anxiety - into a period of creativity, security, community, optimism, and resistance. If border policies aim to subjugate bodies, to create obedient, docile subjects, City Plaza attempts to overturn exactly this situation: relations of cooperation and solidarity promote emancipation and equal participation against exclusion and dependency.

> *"I spend a lot of my day translating, at the hospital, with the doctor, for lots of things at City Plaza."* (Mohammed, 18, speaks Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish and English. He learnt Turkish in 5 months in Istanbul and English in 6 months in Greece)

A home so peculiar, so temporary, yet so familiar and permanent.

Athens, April 2018