

Notes on a Common Insurrection: Violence and Transversal Solidarity in Occupied Barcelona

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Student Strike: May 3rd, 2012

The 20 000-strong march of the student strike has already woven through the center of Barcelona, ending its planned route at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra.² Many of the signs carried by protesters are addressed to the European Central Bank, one of the driving forces behind austerity programs, which at that moment is holding a meeting several blocks away. About a hundred of the protesters, physically restless after standing outside the gates of the sealed university and politically unsatisfied with the formality of the approved march and demands of the organizers - the Platform for the Defense of the Public University (PUDUP) - decide to march back to the University of Barcelona's campus in the Raval neighborhood where a teach-in is already underway. Some friends and I decide to leave with them. No one is sure what route we'll take to get there, or if the police will even let us, but the small break-away march is re-energized by a new chant: "*Ni pública, ni privada – autogestionada!*" Neither public, nor private – self-managed [education]!

Alongside us, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, the police body of the Catalan region's autonomous government, hangs close. About a dozen, navy blue vans (referred to colloquially as *lecheras*, or "milk trucks") line the large boulevard. Each contains officers in riot gear. Above us, a police helicopter keeps watch. As we enter the narrow, medieval streets of the Born neighborhood, the *Mossos* are unable to follow. Emboldened by their absence, we bang on dumpsters with our hands and clap in unison, visibly intimidating the dense throngs of tourists around us. Crossing into the middle of the busy *Via Laietana*, the group deliberates on what route to take. We change course, turning right on to the larger boulevard and avoiding what seems to be a police chokepoint forming on the narrow street ahead. As we move up into the posh Eixample neighborhood it becomes harder to keep the group together. The streets of the more modern zone are much broader ("barricade-proofed" in a style similar to Haussmann's post-commune Paris). Traffic is also actively trying to work its way through the marchers, and the police line has also moved closer to the back of the column. As we near the *Passeig de Gracia*, the city's designer-shopping thoroughfare, a line of *Mossos* in full riot gear comes running towards us, spreading out to block the street ahead. Before we can turn back, another line of *Mossos* has cut-off any chance of retreat. A friend and I try in vain to slip into the *Cortes Ingles* department store, but the doors have been locked. Security guards standing

Justin AK Helepololei, "Notes on a Common Insurrection: Violence and Transversal Solidarity in Occupied Barcelona." *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, Volume 6, Number 1, Winter 2013, pp. 48-67.

inside eye us coldly. As the police kettle tightens, tourists and shoppers from the nearby *Plaça Catalunya* come to see what's happening. Now only 50 of us remain in the street, unable to move, uncertain if we're going to be released or arrested. An argument takes place between protesters and police and the front line of *Mossos* begins to back up. It seems like they might let us go. But rather than opening the circle, the back line pushes forward, commanding us to move. The entire concatenation begins moving, at first slowly, then picking up speed. Maintaining the kettle, the police begin marching us down the *Passeig de Gracia* and towards the university. A few of us make sheep noises, whistle, or bark, attempting to lighten the mood and tease our shepherding "gossos" – the Catalan word for dogs which conveniently rhymes with their official title of *Mossos d'Esquadra*.

The atmosphere, briefly jovial, is ruptured as the line of *Mossos* behind us picks up their pace, swinging batons at the legs of anyone not keeping up. Rather than dispersing us they seem determined to contain the march and to keep us moving away from the luxury stores and tourist areas. We stop for a while at the intersection of *Passeig de Gracia* and *Gran Via*, two of the largest streets in the city. Photographers outside the police line take pictures as those within call for help and water. Someone begins a chant: "No somos terroristas, somos estudiantes"/" We are not terrorists, we are students." The rest of us pick it up, probably less to elicit sympathy than to clarify for the mostly-tourist audience what sector of the population is being beaten today. Many of the marchers raise their hands above their heads, a gesture which has taken on symbolic power of non-violent resistance among the *indignados* of the 15M occupations but which also seems to emphasize our captured position - the parade of a defeated army in surrender.

We begin moving again and suddenly some of the younger students behind me break into screams. The hits from the *Mossos*' clubs are coming more frequently and their marching pace has also quickened. The more the students behind us cry out, the more swings the *Mossos* seem to take. Whether this comes from some perverse pleasure or an animalistic reflex to loud noises is unclear. My friend and I make our way to the back, hoping that the *Mossos* might lay-off if we can calm down the younger students.

The plan doesn't work. A strong shove from behind almost knocks me down. I turn back to see what's happened and a club hits me in the kneecap. Another shove to the back of the head turns me forward. The blows continue landing on our legs, out of view of the cameras. I hobble along to keep up with the group as we near the *Plaça Estudiantil*, the plaza in front of the main University of Barcelona campus at which point one of the more vocal protesters is pulled out from the group and thrown into a van. The *Mossos* fall back into tight ranks. Realizing there is little we can do, we disperse. Bruised and exhausted, some of

us continue to the teach-in at the other University of Barcelona campus to alert the student assembly of the outcome of the march and the subsequent arrest. The following day a regional newspaper has a friend's face on the cover, framed by a wall of black-helmeted Mossos. The caption reads "Draghi [head of the European Central Bank] urges Spain to cut more: As many police as protesters."³

"Please excuse the disruptions, revolution in progress..."

In February of 2012, I began a six-month ethnographic fieldwork project in Barcelona. Like many, I was drawn by the city's place in radical imaginaries, past and present. I had hoped to get a sense of how established anarchist and autonomous spaces were faring within the context of the ongoing financial crisis - whether or not people within these spaces were engaging with the wave of mass plaza occupations of 2011 (Tahrir, 15M in Spain, Occupy Wall Street), whether longer trajectories of struggle were being articulated with these new ones, and if so, how. With the trust and enduring patience of a number of individuals - who will remain anonymous, as they prefer - I was introduced to an inspiring, and at many times confusing, terrain of resistance. While not among my original research interests, violence emerged as a central and public debate among autonomous squatters, state functionaries and activists of all stripes. What counts as violence? When is violence appropriate? Who are the truly violent ones? While far from new, these questions were being taken up by larger and more diverse sections of the population than I had seen anywhere else.

I have since returned to the US, back into the routine of a master's program and the process of writing up, where I am still struggling to think through these questions. At the risk of what might seem a superficial, early reading (especially to those who are living the fight against "financial dictatorship" and the misery of austerity), my goal here is to report back on what I, as an outsider, felt were some of the more compelling interactions and processes going on during my brief time there. Considering the ongoing status of popular uprisings and the likelihood of further unrest, examining discourses of violence and how they've manifested in specific contexts seems too pressing an issue not to speak to, my own analytical shortcomings aside. I hope this provokes some interest in events as they are unfolding in the state of Spain and in southern Europe where the definition of violence has itself become a central site of struggle. Violence can only be understood in context and the current context is as dire as it is inspiring.

Hotel Karcelona: Securitization in the *Anti-Systema* Capital of Europe

On March 29th 2012, about a month before the student strike described above, Spanish trade unions called for a general strike to take place throughout the country. In Barcelona, large demonstrations ended with widespread police

violence, justified as a response to protesters' destruction of property. Fashioning makeshift barricades, protesters burned hundreds of trash containers over the course of the day. In some marches, more militant anticapitalist groups selectively vandalized banks, real estate offices, and branches of transnational corporations - sites that had remained open during the strike and which for many, correspond to the daily indignities of the crisis. Alternative press venues proclaimed the return of the "Rosa de Foc" (Catalan, for "Rose of Fire,") an epithet Barcelona had earned during previous generations of barricade fighting before and during the Civil War.⁴ Late in the afternoon of March 29th, Mossos in the city center began firing rubber projectiles into crowds of demonstrators in an attempt to disperse them, beating stragglers with clubs. Different from small rubber or plastic bullets used elsewhere, Spanish riot police (or *antidisturbios*) such as the Mossos, fire heavy, tennis-sized rubber balls, or *bales de goma*, considered less-lethal crowd deterrents. Since they've been introduced they've proven particularly effective at removing or severely damaging eyes. During the March 29th 2012 General Strike many of the victims of the Mossos' clubs and *bales de goma* were older marchers and families unaffiliated with the protest, who happened to be near the protest at the wrong time and were unable to get away. Despite legal stipulations that require police to fire at the ground, Mossos were firing *bales de goma* directly into the crowds. I witnessed one hit a middle-aged man next to me square in the chest, knocking him down with an awful thud, the kind you can 'feel' just by hearing it. He was able to get back up, but other protesters incurred more severe damage to internal organs that required hospitalization, and two protesters each lost an eye during the same demonstration.

Coinciding with (and partially provoking) the march of the Student Strike that took place a month after the General Strike (March 29th) was the convocation of a three-day meeting of the European Central Bank beginning on May 2, 2012. The decision to hold the meeting in Barcelona was seen as a provocation by anti-austerity activists, in that it followed directly on the heels of traditional May Day labor demonstrations and would immediately precede the upcoming 1-year anniversary of the 15M, the mass mobilizations and plaza occupations which occurred on May 15th of 2011, partially in rejection of institutions like the European Central Bank. Anticipating dissent, over 7 000 officers from various police branches were mobilized; 3 000 of whom were brought in from other parts of Spain for the duration of the conference.⁵ In the weeks following the March 29th General Strike and leading up to the meeting of the European Central Bank in May, police violence became less overt, though the threat of violence remained constant. The influx of additional officers meant a ubiquitous police presence. Vans of the various different regional and state police bodies were running patrols throughout the city on a constant basis, equipped to disperse any sign of protest. When protests did occur, as in the case of the student march, they were accompanied by officers in riot gear as well as

plainclothes officers, Mossos dressed in hooded sweatshirts, fabric covering their faces and only an armband to distinguish them from civilians. Beyond the constant threat of physical force, random police ID checks began occurring outside of known social centers. A new government website, titled the "Citizens' Collaboration Against Urban Violence," was unveiled. The site presented pictures of protesters accused of vandalism and destruction of property during the march of the General Strike. It asked the public to identify them or to share any information they might have about those pictured. This last initiative, although new in its online form, can be seen as less a radical change in policing than a technological innovation, driven by the discourse of crisis and the state of political and economic emergency.

Friends of mine, who were from or had been living in the city, often referred to it as "Karcelona" (*cárcel* being Spanish for jail) and in this climate I could see why.⁶ The constant presence of police made the city feel even more like the proverbial panopticon - Jeremy Bentham's ideal prison design made famous by Foucault - in which all inmates are visible at all times. Residents of Barcelona are fond of pointing out the irony that the first of many public spaces where surveillance cameras were installed was the plaza named for George Orwell. The city's revolutionary history, of which Orwell was a part, is acceptable as a tourist draw, but only so long as it remains in the past and under surveillance. The guarded acknowledgment of Barcelona's revolutionary heritage makes the contemporary framing of public threat and dissent, and the discourses of violence that sticks to these topics all the more interesting to consider. This is especially so in the current moment, as powerful institutions try to mobilize ideas of exceptionality and crisis to justify programs of repression that have themselves much older histories related to the industrializing and modernizing of the city.

Several press releases from the spring of 2012 offer a window into the justifications made for the massive investment in securing the city from dissent. David Miquel, spokesperson of the Catalan Police Union (SPC), in reference to property destruction that occurred during the general strike of March 29th, 2012, claimed that "what is happening in Barcelona is low-intensity terrorism," and compared the strike to the street rioting of earlier periods of resistance in the Basque communities of Spain, and by extension, to the violence perpetrated by and against Basque separatist groups, like the oft-cited ETA.⁷ Fearing an influx of foreign protesters during the European Central Bank meeting, as occurred frequently during the heyday of alter-globalization protests,⁸ the Spanish state took the additional step of suspending the freedom of movement section of the Schengen Treaty for the meeting's duration, stopping any persons at the French-Spanish border suspected of heading to Barcelona with intent to protest. This was only the second time the open border policy of the Treaty had been suspended by the Spanish government. The first time was immediately following the 2004 train bombings in Madrid, suggesting a similar degree of gravity in how

the government viewed train bombing in the first instance and the threat of vandalism posed by protesters. When questioned about the severity of the preparations being taken, Felip Puig, the Counselor of the Interior for the Catalan government, made the justification that "Barcelona cannot become the *antisistema* capital of Europe," *antisistema* (or anti-system) being a catch-all reference for any kind of anti-establishment claims. The sum of these measures: the specter of the Spanish state's past deployment of anti-terrorist provisions for pursuing activists (especially in the Basque region of Spain), the physical, "hermetic-sealing" of the border, and the saturation of the city by security forces had a dampening effect on public dissent. No large marches or protests took place at the site of the ECB meeting itself and the aforementioned student march, which came physically closest to the hotel where the meetings were taking place, was tactically and numerically overwhelmed by security forces.

With the general wave of repression following the March 29th General Strike, and the increase in manpower and resources, the Department of the Interior of the *Generalitat* – the Catalan Government – also attempted to make more lasting disruptions in the social movement landscape of the city. Police at this time seemed especially keen on harassing and evicting some of the city's numerous squats (in Spain called *okupas*, an abbreviation of the Spanish *ocupación*). In Barcelona, as in many cities in Spain, squatting and land occupations have been a part of the urban landscape since the massive rural-to-urban migrations of the '50s and '60s, and even earlier waves of industrialization brought workers into the city but provided them with little in terms of services. Squatters became more openly politically engaged in the '70s and '80s following the end of the Franco dictatorship and the general opening up of the country, politically and socially.⁹ Associated with so-called *antisistema* agitation, politically active *okupas* have declined in number since the 1990s, targets of increasingly aggressive repression and a modification of the Penal Code in 1996 that changed the usurpation of property from a civil infraction into a crime. Despite these challenges, dozens of occupied spaces continue to host a diverse array of regular events and services as social centers, and hundreds of clandestine housing-only squats remain throughout the city. Most of these occupations last only a few months or years, but some have been running for over a decade.

La Rimaia, the "free university" and occupied apartment building where I had been attending twice-weekly Spanish classes, was evicted for the third time on May 9th 2012, only three days before the beginning of the May 15th mobilizations. Shortly afterwards, a row of four established *okupas* near the popular Park Güell also received notice of a pending eviction, and the newly opened "Expropriated Bank of *Guinardó-Can Baro*" was evicted on May 21st after hosting its first and only neighborhood assembly. In an especially strange encounter, a dozen masked officers from the *Guardia Urbana*, the city's urban police body, ticketed myself and two other members of Barcelona's Food Not

Bombs chapter for "Occupation of a Public Way," during the weekly free dinner. Confirming the connection between broader citywide repression and the targeted repression of occupied spaces, was the discovery and release of the 2009 Master's thesis of Catalan regional police coordinator David Piqué i Batallé. Sub-titled "Sherwood Syndrome," the thesis outlined strategies of suppressing the anti-systemic dissent that he argued came from the *okupas* – squatted, autonomous social centers especially – that in his language, represent the modern equivalent to Robin Hood's forest stronghold. As fixed spaces in an otherwise fluid terrain of resistance, these occupations drew the ire of the state, which sought to characterize them as sites of 'criminal' and 'terrorist' organizing. Several of these spaces, like the free university *La Rimaia*, had been host to neighborhood assemblies, debates and other activities of the 15M/*indignado* movement. Without these autonomous options, 15M organizers as well as the more critical *okupa* squatters, risked being folded into pre-existing political institutions, or having to remain in the plazas, with all of the logistical limitations that entailed.

Resisting Isolation: Solidarity Against Repression

"La nostra millor arma, la solidaritat!"

"Our best weapon, solidarity!" - protest chant

No doubt these modes of repression will be familiar to most readers. That the Catalan government has sought to use social networking as a vehicle for policing and for getting citizens to police each other is not radically new. That the Catalan government and the over-arching Spanish state might try to exacerbate ideological divisions by associating property destruction with terrorism is also a well-worn tactic (one currently being used in Grand Jury investigations of anarchists in the US).¹⁰ That a proclaimed state of emergency might be used to rout pre-existing political enemies is, as well, a familiar phenomenon. What I find especially compelling and worth looking at closer in this case then, are the responses, the ways in which these maneuvers have been actively resisted. In Barcelona, lines of solidarity have been increasingly bridging otherwise disparate social groups: between generations of activists, and transversally, across economic sectors and political tendencies, creating the possibility for the emergence of densely connected ecologies of resistance. The ways in which the process of defining violence has itself been taken up as a political struggle by these convergences between tendencies is especially interesting and may offer some ideas for strategies elsewhere.

Among the policing strategies described, the "Citizens' Collaboration Against Urban Violence" website attracted some of the most mainstream and vocal resistance. Critics in the press and on social media charged the website as promoting the ideological goals of the current political regime by featuring only

images of protesters from the March 29th General Strike. Many considered it an update of old forms of political repression, moving from blacklists and the public denouncement of political dissenters towards a kind of open-source policing, in which members of society could, and were encouraged to, denounce their neighbors from the safety and anonymity of their own home. Pasquale Pasquino describes this kind of provocation to denounce as the very “task of intelligence, which every citizen must participate in for the security and happiness of all and of each,” a disposition that the State seeks to cultivate such that these specific initiatives might be “transformed into a great general and uninterrupted confession”.¹¹ The Citizen’s Collaboration project partly succeeded. Twenty-three of the sixty-eight individuals posted on the website were identified through five hundred “significant collaborations” from the public.¹² Of those “suspects” who were not arrested, some decided to leave the city, including a friend of mine who wouldn’t feel safe returning until months later, and with a different hair color. Of those who were arrested, some were kept in ‘preventative detention,’ locked up until after the upcoming demonstrations of May Day and the anniversary of the 15M. This befell several known organizers who were considered especially likely to engage in further protest.

Under the hashtags *#LaListadePuig* (“The List of Puig”) and *#HolaDictadura* (“Hello Dictatorship”), Twitter users compared the Counselor of the Interior Puig’s website initiative to the lists of political enemies kept by the Franco regime, a period of time not far back in the memories of many Spaniards, and especially Catalans, whom along with the Basque and other historically autonomous communities suffered especially severely under the dictatorship. Among the strongest positions taken against the website was that of the Human Rights Commission of the *Col·legi d’Advocats de Barcelona*, Barcelona’s Association of Lawyers. On May 21st, a month after the website’s debut, one hundred lawyers rallied in protest against the repressive measures of the ruling political party *Convergencio i Unio* (“Convergence and Unity”), after presenting a document challenging the legality of the police website and calling for the end of ongoing intimidation of dissent.¹³ Some lawyers also took up the behind-the-scenes work of handling cases of the accused protesters and of those in preventative detention. By May 24th, three days after the lawyers’ protest, the website was taken down by the Catalan government, although no guarantee was made that it might not be reactivated at a later date.

The College of Lawyers was not the only group to come out in opposition to police repression. Among the many groups emerging from Spain’s post-15M financial crisis ferment, one of the most visible has been the *laioflautas* – due in large part to their uniform: green-yellow, day-glo vests. Like the Radical Grannies of the US, the *laioflautas* are mostly retired, older individuals who have been taking part in protests and direct actions as an organized group since October of 2011. Their name is a modification of the pejorative term “*perroflauta*,” which

literally means “dog-flute.” *Perroflauta* is generally used to refer disparagingly to young people, who are either traveling, or trying to make a living on the street, often by playing music, and often accompanied by dogs. Hence, dog-flutes. In the early days of the 15M, conservative critics and detractors of the protests used the term *perroflauta* to describe the people camping in places such as the *Plaza del Sol* in Madrid or the *Plaça Catalunya* in Barcelona in an attempt to discredit them as serious political actors. In response, the *laioflautas* embraced the protesters and asserted their solidarity as the “*iaios*” - the granddads/grandmums - of the *perroflautas*. Beginning in Catalonia, chapters have since been established in cities throughout Spain, with over three hundred and fifty active members coming from diverse backgrounds and political tendencies.¹⁴ As the *laioflauta* manifesto, now in seven languages, states:

We are the generation that fought and got a better life for their children. Now they are putting the future of our daughters and granddaughters in danger. We are proud of the social response and the impulse that are showing the new generations in the struggle for democracy worthy of this name and for social justice, against the bankers and complicit politicians. We are at your side, feeling, neighborhood assemblies and also in action. If someone wants to dismiss his bravery by calling them "perroflautas" we can call ourselves "iaioflautas."¹⁵

On April 26, 2012, in one of many public actions, fifty *laioflautas* invaded the lobby of the Department of the Interior of the Catalan government. They demanded a meeting with Felip Puig, the department's highest-ranking officer as well as the release of “their imprisoned kids” - Dani, Javi and Isma, three protesters being held under preventative detention. Like the College of Lawyers, the *laioflautas* called for an end to the arbitrary, mass identifications of demonstrators, the detention and intimidation of protest organizers and plans by the government to extend the “anti-terrorist” laws to include monitoring and restricting the meetings of activist groups.¹⁶ Puig did not come out, and throughout the incident police were reported as seeming at a loss in terms of what to do with the rowdy seniors. After reading their demands and holding a press conference in the department lobby, the *laioflautas* left smiling, having taken their cause directly to those they held responsible. As they left they called for continued organizing and a massive return to the streets for the twelfth and fifteenth of May demonstrations. The image of a mob of angry grandparents scolding the Department of the Interior, the seat of the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, is a scene which, beyond its theatrical value, carries layers of cultural meaning: explicit reminders of neighborhood-based resistance to the Dictatorship and suffering during and after the war. It also vocalized the disappointment of those who had struggled through the transition to democracy, followed the rules of

modernization, and who were now seeing all of the things they had been able to win back from the state being taken away.

In the examples above, we can see that the ways in which the state and mainstream media sought to categorize and isolate some protesters as “*antisistemas*” and “*perroflautas*,” became, in themselves, an explicit focus for mobilizing. Ralph Rozema, using Arendt's concept of “objective enemies,” describes the process in which paramilitary groups in Colombia sought to mark their enemies as morally suspect individuals, a designation which provoked social isolation and made their death, injury or forced disappearance justifiable. More often than not, their status as a suspect came about, not in relation to specific political actions or crimes, but because of perceived ideological tendencies and personal relationships. As a result these individuals came to constitute “a new category of undesirables deemed to disappear from the face of the earth”.¹⁷ Rozema argues that, as the use of these categories grows, their assignment becomes increasingly arbitrary, resulting in a generalized state of terror as people are conditioned to fear even the risk of being considered suspect. Avoiding categorization thus requires conducting oneself in a way as to avoid even being associated with those deemed suspicious, as an *antisistema* or *perroflauta*, designations that move one towards the category of terrorist. This can be thought of as a spectrum in which one becomes increasingly legitimized as the target for open repression.

To what ends the state attempts to discipline incorrect conduct is revealed clearly by these specific categories themselves. James C. Scott, describing the dynamic relationships between hill peoples and valley states in Southeast Asia, reads the categories imposed upon hill peoples (wild, primitive, uncivilized) as “state effects,” a direct reflection of their unwillingness to engage with the state, or state-compatible agricultural practices.¹⁸ In the case of Spain, the category *perroflauta*, stigmatizes those young people not involved in the productive economy. *Antisistema*, used as a catch-all to describe people engaging in any form of radical, leftist politics - from anarchists, to anti-capitalists, ecologists, feminists, queer militants, critics of the church, the media, the military, or unions, etc. - tells us more about the inter-locking nature of power (as patriarchal, capitalistic, racist, etc.) than it does about the dissenters it is used to describe. If they're against ‘the system’ – of what does that system consist? Further, the designation ‘anti-system’ is often used dismissively, to connote an ‘irrational’ opposition to structure, and as such has the potential of pitting groups with shared interests against each other.¹⁹

What was particularly exciting to see here was how such attempts to circumscribe and isolate some groups of activists were taken up by what were seen as more socially ‘legitimate’ social actors – namely lawyers and retirees – who asserted their connections to these labeled *perroflauta* or *antisistema*. This is

important on a discursive level, as a re-assertion of collective solidarity. But it's also important on an immediate, practical level, as the website was quickly taken down, some of those arrested were released, and the methods of preventative arrest and surveillance were made publically visible. The ability of the College of Lawyers and then *laioflautas* to leverage their social privilege brought pressure upon the state in ways that were more difficult for it to dismiss. In addition to these limited instances, the resurgence of weekly neighborhood assemblies and mutual aid projects (time banks, consumption cooperatives, community legal funds) has offered concrete, though precarious, openings for inter-generational and inter-class solidarities to be made possible.

Exception and the Ruled: Making Everyday Violence Visible

“Lo mas violento de todo seria volver a la normalidad.”

“The most violent of all would be to return to normal.”²⁰

Among critics and theorists writing about mobilizations in Spain, those coming from a feminist perspective have often engaged the rhetoric of violence most directly. In their analysis *“Violencia de l@s indignad@s o violencia de Estado?”/“Violence of the indignados or violence of the state?”* the *Asamblea Feministes Indignades*, the Indignant Feminist Assembly of Barcelona ask *“Quienes son l@s violent@s?”* that is, “Who are the violent ones?” In doing so, they draw attention to a common tendency within mainstream Spanish media to categorize and delegitimize sections of protesters and direct actionists as *“los violentos,”* or “the violent ones” (often overlapping with the designation *antisistema*). Against this tendency, the Assembly suggests we look towards bankers and politicians, those responsible for the “destruction of millions of jobs and razing of social rights for millions” as the perpetrators of true violence.²¹ They argue that the culture of fear and the precariousness of daily life in crisis Spain are the direct product of “financial and speculative violence,” one which disproportionately impacts women, migrants and people with limited resources.²² This and other essays from the collection titled *“R-evolucionando: Feminismos en el 15-M”* (R-evolution: Feminisms in the 15M) were presented at the *Ciutat Invisible* a self-managed, publishing collective, as the fruit of a year of deliberations within various feminist assemblies that had come out of the encampments throughout Spain of the previous year. In a similar vein, the March 2012 issue of the Barcelona-based publication *“Etcetera: correspondencia de la guerra social”/“Etcetera: correspondencia of the social war”* offers this view as part of a brief reply to the question of violence and its use:

Between us, maybe it would be better to employ the term violence to qualify the current system of domination in its normal functioning, not only in its exception, which is to say, to talk of the daily violence

of the State, the violence of the Economy, the violence of the media, etc. to not lose time in a false polemic created by the propaganda of the State.²³

In a more dispersed format, wheat-pasted onto walls and bus stops throughout the city during the spring and summer of 2012, were posters carrying a similar message. Under a line which reads: "This is violence" (in Catalan) are pictures and corresponding descriptions: "racist raids, misery, political impunity, female enslavement, evictions," and "new misogynist laws." Below these, another message reads: "This is self-defense," with an image of an older man standing besides a burning barricade, and another with a group of marchers carrying a banner which reads: "facing evictions, lay-offs, or whatever other aggression: Neighborhood Self-defense." At the very bottom of the poster is the final line: "Don't collaborate with those who perpetuate misery."

As Shear and Lyon-Callo, drawing on Žižek's distinction, discuss in their article on organizing popular economic projects in Kalamazoo, Michigan, the emphasis on exceptional forms of subjective violence (e.g.: between police and protesters) distracts from, and makes possible the continuation of objective, naturalized forms of violence. These everyday forms are understood as "the way things are" and include such common dispossessions as evictions.²⁴ In instances where the exceptional and everyday can be seen to overlap, "objective violence" becomes name-able and these aspects of "normal" can be called into question, providing an opportunity to challenge them directly. This moment is not inherently emancipatory, however. Institutions that depend on the seeming inevitability and naturalness of things like private property often meet these transgressions with escalations of subjective violence, a disciplinary function to remind others of what happens to those who seek to disrupt 'the way things are.'

For many individuals with less experience in activism and direct action, the violent eviction of protest encampments in 2011 was a first encounter with this coercive repertoire of the state. In their fluorescence, these large-scale occupations of public spaces (in Egypt, Spain, Israel, Greece, the US and many other places) helped millions to imagine other forms of sociality. They also served to make state violence visible to a mainstream audience. For those *indignados* who were not used to seeing such heavy-handed responses, the eviction of encampments challenged their understanding of the state's relationship to its citizens. This is precisely because most evictions are seen as routine, and occur without such fanfare.

In Spain, where speculative construction and easy credit formed the basis of a boom economy, it's no surprise that housing has been a central point of focus for the mobilizations of 2011 and onwards. Since 2008, nearly 400 000 evictions

have taken place within Spain, with 20% occurring in Catalunya alone.²⁵ In the past three years, the number of homeless within the city of Barcelona has increased by 32%,²⁶ while thousands of homes throughout Spain sit empty. While squatters have sought for decades to challenge the legitimacy of private property and speculation, they have remained a marginalized voice, much maligned within progressive sectors. With the current crisis, many activist groups, such as the *Plataforma por los Afectados de la Hipoteca*/Platform for those Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Spain have - like Occupy Our Homes, and No One Leaves Springfield, in the US - sought to resist foreclosures and evictions through mass demonstrations. Individuals who previously would have never seen themselves as having anything in common with squatters are taking up similar tactics. As Spanish sociologist Julio Aguacil speaking to the newspaper *El Pais* put it, "the concept of the *okupa* [squat] has always had a negative connotation, but with the crisis this vision is changing and society will no longer assume that."²⁷ The occupation of apartment buildings like the Edifici 15-O²⁸ and CSOA El Guernika in Barcelona, and Corrala Utopia in Seville, Spain, are bringing together experienced squatters and families who've been affected by the crisis. As direct actions, they provide immediate relief for people without homes, while continuing to politicize the conditions that have created homelessness.

While some *okupas* seek to maintain lower profiles or even occupy clandestinely, these others embrace visibility. By using the walls of the buildings as a canvass for denouncing speculation and homelessness (among myriad other causes), these spaces, like the large-scale temporary occupations of the plazas, bring the attention of the state upon them and require participants to live within an often-stressful space of uncertainty. A daily reminder painted on the wall of a squat where I lived was the mantra: "*Kien Okupa Preokupa*" ("Who Occupies, Worries"). This sentiment approximates the perpetual anxiety of not knowing when the *Mossos* are going to come, but knowing at some point they will. As anyone who has squatted can attest, the threat of eviction and the spectacular forms of violence that attend evictions are a familiar and constant threat. Evictions of *okupas* in Spain (as elsewhere) have often led to massive police raids, hours of pitched resistance, severe injury and criminal charges for occupants. In exchange, the full extent of the state's dedication to protecting private property is rendered visible.²⁹

At a basic level, this is what public demonstrations have always done. They are spaces in which individuals place their bodies such that the obscured, invisible problems of a society become visible and name-able to a broader audience. Central to the protest mobilizations of 2011 was the desire of participants to *live* within these spaces, to eat, sleep, learn, debate, find love, find friends, find something to do - to inhabit these places as complete human beings. Occupiers sought to make the "revolutionary moment," as Hannah Arendt has described such times of potentiality, last as long as possible. Squatted houses

and social centers, *okupas*, are more long-term projects undertaken with similar goals. An encampment, like a squat, is an unstable physical space. But for its instability it contains the potential to bring people together into ongoing, collective imagining. What kind of world would we make if we could? As laboratories for imagining other ways of living, such spaces offer an opportunity to work towards less oppressive, less violent forms of sociality. As one reviewer of this piece has helpfully pointed out, however, these spaces are also fraught with forms of interpersonal violence. For the purpose of this discussion, I have focused on state and structural violence but the ways in which these dynamics work themselves into oppositional spaces, and the ways people try to address these internal dynamics, is a central concern of participants and has been given more detailed treatment by other writers (and especially in regard to occupied spaces see the work of Nazima Kadir and Lynn Owens).³⁰ As the subjectivities we bring into these spaces have been produced within, and are still marked by, the violent logics of the state, market and patriarchy, unlearning problematic ways of being is a crucial site of struggle, one that deserves more attention than I can give here.

Returning to a focus at the scale of the city, much-lauded “temporary autonomous zones” – from unauthorized street protests, to encampments, to squats - antagonize the same external mechanisms that maintain exclusion at higher scales and often provoke amplified forms of state violence.³¹ In these situations, the resistance of evictions disrupts the divide between subjective and objective violence. Evictions are converted from a highly individualized moment of desperation into a collectively experienced, political event. A moment usually associated with shame becomes a moment for mass indignation. In her book *Economies of Abandonment*, Elizabeth Povinelli identifies “miracles of enduring difference” in the abandoned spaces of late liberalism, drawing especially from her experience in indigenous Australian communities. I think that her insights are also relevant here for understanding those erased spaces closer to the core of the modernizing project. That some spaces are subject to exceptional levels of poverty and violence is not *in spite of* the material wealth made possible by late liberalism; they are themselves produced and maintained by and in order to perpetuate the dominance of market regimes and liberal rationalities of governance. The policies of “letting die” which produce and govern marginalized spaces of the everyday, are contrasted with the techniques of “making die,” reserved for those who choose to go up against neoliberal regimes, those most likely to be categorized by as terrorists.³² In the example of Spain, the demands of continued EU-integration have meant that larger segments of the population are being increasingly “left to die,” through the gutting of social supports and conservative labor reform measures. These adjustments are seen as necessary for maintaining the health of the greater European Community. Any attempts to disrupt these ‘necessary’ abandonments, to expose the ongoing abuse in marginal spaces are marked

as contrary to the collective wellbeing. Occupiers, squatters, and other direct actionists that make these spaces visible by living in them are denied moral personhood. Through their designation as *perroflauta*, *violento*, *terrorista*, individuals are removed from equal consideration and can be made to suffer, and if necessary die, such that everyday forms of violence may continue.

In-Conclusion: Reflections of an *Antisistema* Sympathizer

For me, the march described in the opening of this paper illustrates one of too many lost opportunities to disrupt this separation between everyday violence and exceptional violence. There the state succeeded in isolating the unauthorized marchers, the more critical sectors of the demonstration. It was able to use them as a warning to anyone else considering protesting during the European Central Bank meeting, or considering protest in general. By placing themselves into spaces of exceptional violence, direct actionists (squatters, occupiers, unauthorized marchers) make visible the functioning of state terrorism and the logics that underlie it. They reflect back the unequal distribution of suffering and the techniques of domination to the society that depends on their existence. In doing so they can also make visible the possibilities contained within such moments, to resist, to walk away from this trade-off between the suffering of the many and the profit of the few, and to produce new relations of mutual care. As long as they can endure, they keep open the physical and rhetorical spaces in which we can discuss and develop more ethical relationships with one another. These spaces become more powerful the longer they're held open and as greater numbers of people can take part in them. For those more critical sectors who engage in direct forms of action, finding linkages to unexpected allies in more compromised, yet privileged positions (like lawyers and retirees) can mean the difference between spending time in jail - or worse - and being able to continue the work towards increasingly active disruptions of systemic violence. If we can continue to build meaningful solidarities, not rejecting those with more institutional entanglements but engaging them as persons able to take on complementary forms of resistance, we can better contest strategic attempts to contain us. In doing so, we constitute a much more effective challenge to the neoliberal logics and regimes that produce the economic and social violence we face on a daily basis. As Walter Benjamin writes:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism.³³

Update from the War Against Misery

On February 28, 2013 an anonymous communiqué was posted on the Barcelona Indymedia website. It is written in response to recent communiqués from self-proclaimed nihilists that claimed responsibility for recent attacks on banks and political offices in the city. The response details actions committed by an un-named collective, committed in the "struggle for the destruction of the State, Capital, patriarchy and any system of domination, a struggle for the free creation of voluntary and solidaristic relations at the global and local level; in other words, a struggle for anarchy." The actions that the communiqué claims read as follows:

- May 5, at night, we told a child the story of the *maquis* [Spanish guerrilla fighters] and the anarchist struggles against Franco and against democracy.
- May 13, we cooked a healthy meal for a comrade who has a chronic illness.
- May 17, we wrote a letter to a comrade imprisoned for participating in a riot.
- June 12, we took care of the infant of some friends who suffer economic precarity and the imposed obligation of wage labor.
- June 16, we spoke publically with our neighbors about the need to burn the banks and attack the police in order to realize our dreams.
- June 19, we told some leftist activists that the masked-ones were not police infiltrators but ourselves, and that it is necessary and good to mask up and take the streets with force.
- June 20, we gifted vegetables from our garden to friends and neighbors, without money or exchange.³⁴

As someone also invested in more radical forms of social change, I would echo these comrades' insistence on the need to bring more people into the discussion of violence, to talk and work with neighbors and across generational lines. Such a practice helps to situate more critical analyses within larger historical and social contexts. It also helps to articulate them in terms people find meaningful and to express them through concrete actions. Finding a common ground for insurrection may not be necessary (as the nihilist tendencies to whom this communiqué responds have argued), but the potential is powerful and worth considering if we want to sustain and enrich this battle being waged on many fronts. If social isolation is necessary for the production of the patriarchal capitalist state, then bridging the divides it seeks to create will be key to the imagination of a long-term insurrectionary practice, one that negates contemporary social isolations and the structural violence on which they depend. And it's just more fun.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the anarchist and autonomous *colegas* keeping up the fight in Barcelona and elsewhere. Also a thank you to Robin Steitz, Boone Shear, Alissa Rickborn and Christine Htoon and the two anonymous reviewers from Affinities for taking time out of their own journeys to help make this piece more cohesive and readable. Any remaining errors, mistranslations, and weak arguments are the author's own. Funding for fieldwork provided by the National Science Foundation grant OISE-0968575, "Cultural Heritage in European Societies and Spaces".

Endnotes

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- ¹ **Justin AK Helepololei** is a grad student and sometimes outside agitator, situated in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Justin's interests include troubling racial categories, unsettling dominant notions of sovereignty, and hastening the destruction of the patriarchy. Justin can be reached at jhelepol@anthro.umass.edu or publicanomie@riseup.net.
- ² For an account from the march organizers, Platform for the Defense of the Public University see their blog: <http://reconstruimlapublica.wordpress.com/>
- ³ Pizarro, J. (2012, May 4). Draghi urgeix Espanya a retallar més." *Ara*, p.1
- ⁴ An overview of the General Strike and preceding developments is available at *CrimethInc.com*, Retrieved from <http://crimethinc.com/texts/recentfeatures/rosefire.php>
- ⁵ Barbeta, J (2012, April 20). Hasta 2.000 guardias civiles y policías nacionales ayudarán a los Mossos en la cumbre del BCE. *La Vanguardia*, Retrieved from <http://www.lavanguardia.com/>
- ⁶ Other writers have used the term to describe the securitization and "Disneyfication" of Barcelona. See Caellas, Marc. (2011). *Carcelona*. Spain: Editorial Melusina.
- ⁷ Baquero, A (2012, April 20). 7 000 policías blindarán la cita del BCE en Barcelona. *El Periódico*. Retrieved from <http://www.elperiodico.com>
- ⁸ Juris, Jeffrey. (2008) *Networking Futures: the movements against corporate globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- ⁹ For more-detailed accounts of okupas in Spain see: Feixa, Carles and Carmen Costa and Joan Pallares. (2002). *Movimientos juveniles en la Peninsula Iberica: graffitis, grifotas, okupas*. Barcelona: Editorial Ariel. Argiles, Ramon Adell and Miguel Martinez Lopez, coord. (2004). *Donde estan las llaves? El movimiento okupa: practicas y contextos sociales*. Madrid: Catarata. Martinez Lopez, Miguel. (2002). *Okupaciones de viviendas y de centros sociales: autogestion, contracultura y conflictos urbanos*. Barcelona: Virus Editorial. de Paula Fernandez Gomez, Francisco. (2010). *Okupacio a Catalunya: 1984-2009*. Manresa and La Floresta: Edicions Anomia. Dominguez Sanchez-Pinilla, Mario and Miguel Angel Martinez Lopez, Elisabeth Lorenzi Fernandez. (2010). *Okupaciones in Movimiento: derivas, estrategias y practicas*. Madrid: Tierradenadie ediciones.
- ¹⁰ For a comparative case in the US, see the Committee Against Political Repression's blog at <http://nopoliticalrepression.wordpress.com/>
- ¹¹ Burchell, Graham and Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, ed. (1991). *The Foucault Effect: studies in governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ¹² Baquero, A. (2012, May 25). "Puig retira la web de delación tras 22 identificados y ningún detenido" *El Periodico*. Retrieved from

<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/sociedad/puig-retira-web-delacion-tras-identificados-ningun-detenido-1832202>

¹³ EFE (2012, April 25). El Col·legi d'Advocats ve de dudosa legalidad la web para delatar a violentos. *La Vanguardia*.

¹⁴ From Iaioflauta website: <http://www.iaioflautas.org/>

¹⁵ Iaioflauta website, English version. Accessed on, October 27, 2011

<http://www.iaioflautas.org/el-nostre-manifest/>

¹⁶ (2012, April 26) Los iaioflautas ocupan la sede del Departamento de Interior de Barcelona *Madrilonia*.

¹⁷ Rozema, Ralph. (2011). "Forced Disappearance in an Era of Globalization: Biopolitics, Shadow Networks, and Imagined Worlds" *from American Anthropologist* 113(4), 582-593

¹⁸ Scott, James C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

¹⁹ Though smaller "insurrectionary" and "nihilist" tendencies have embraced this claim and declared themselves to be, in fact, against all current institutions (political, social, cultural, etc.).

²⁰ Grupo Surrealista Madrid, (2012, January) *El Rapto*.

²¹ Asamblea Feministes Indignades (2012) "¿Violencia de l@s indignad@s o violencia de Estado?" in *R-evolucionando: Feminismos en el 15-M*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial: 39-48.

²² Asamblea Feministes Indignades, 2012, 44.

²³ Various Authors (2012) *R-evolucionando: Feminismos en el 15-M*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial.

²⁴ Shear, Boone and Vin Lyon-Callo. (2013). "Kalamazoo's Promise: exploring the violence of economic development" *City and Society* 25(1), 70-91.

²⁵ Aguilar, L. (2012, October 9). Más de 500 familias desalojadas por día en España. *BBC*. Retrieved at <http://bbc.co.uk/>.

²⁶ Sanz, Mari Rosa (2013, April 13) Precariedad en la capital catalana. *El Periodico*.

²⁷ (2012, February 18). Los okupas discretos. *El Pais*.

²⁸ For more information on developments by the 15O project see their blog at <http://edificio15o.wordpress.com/>

²⁹ For a short video documentary on squatting and eviction resistance in Barcelona see "Okupa: Cronica de una lucha social" at

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6djbjf_okupa-cronica-de-una-lucha-social_creation?search_algo=2

³⁰ See Nazima Kadir's blog: <http://nazimakadir.wordpress.com/> and Lynn Owens (2009) *Cracking Under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatter's Movement* University Park: Penn State University Press.

³¹ Bey, Hakim. (1985). *TAZ: Temporary Autonomous Zones*. New York: Autonomedia.

³² Povinelli, Elizabeth A. (2011). *Economies of Abandonment: social belonging*

and endurance in late liberalism. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

³³ Benjamin, Walter. (1940). "On the Concept of History" translated from *Gesammelten Schriften*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1974. Accessed at <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html>

³⁴ Anonymous. (2013, Feb 28) Comunicado de acciones anarquistas en Barcelona y respuesta a los nihilistas. *Barcelona Indymedia*. Retrieved from Barcelona.indymedia.org

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