Good and Bad Squatters? Challenging Hegemonic Narratives and Advancing Anti-Capitalist Views of Squatting in Western European Cities

By Miguel A. Martínez

Abstract

Mainstream mass media and politicians tend to portray squatters as civic evils. Breaking in and trespassing on private property is clumsily equated with the occupation of empty premises. Squatting is often represented as a serious criminal offence even before any legal verdict has been determined. The social diversity of squatters and the circumstances around this practice are usually omitted. Dominant narratives in Western European cities were effective in terms of criminalisation of squatting and the social groups that occupied vacant properties –homeless people in need of a shelter, those who cannot afford to buy or rent convenient venues for performing social activities, activists who squat as a means of protest against real estate speculation, etc. This article reviews the available evidence of those narratives and disentangles the main categories at play. I first examine homogenisation stereotypes of squatters as a whole. Next, I distinguish the divides created by the conventional polarisation between 'good' and 'bad' squatters. It is argued that both dynamics foster the stigma of squatting and facilitate its repression, although these discursive struggles engage squatters as well. As a consequence, I discuss the implications of 'reversive' and 'subversive' narratives performed by squatters to legitimise their practices and movements. In particular, the anti-capitalist features of these counter-hegemonic responses are identified and elaborated, which adds to the topic's literature.

Introduction

The occupation of vacant properties without the owner's authorisation has been increasingly criminalised in European countries, with law changes in the Netherlands (2010) and England and Wales (2012) among the most recent examples (Dadusc 2017, Fox-O'Mahony et al. 2015). Despite its prosecution, squatting continues to go on and has even proliferated in those territories more acutely hit by the global financial and refugee crises (Di Feliciantonio 2017, García-Lamarca 2016, Mudu & Chattopadhay 2017). Beyond their illegal condition, many squats manage to last for years and decades while developing a rich variety of social milieus, activities and residential alternatives (Cattaneo & Martínez 2014, Martínez 2018b, Van der Steen et al. 2014, Vasudevan 2017). This indicates the continuing existence of tensions and controversies about the nature and contributions of squatting, which are manifest in 'culture wars' (Pruijt 2013) and discursive struggles (Bouillon 2013, Dee & Debelle 2015, Manjikian 2013). This article contributes to these analyses by unveiling how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses about squatting of buildings (for housing, cultural and political purposes) in Western European cities operate. I also add to the prevailing literature, emphasising the anti-capitalist views of squatters when they confront dominant stereotypes, stigmas and rhetoric strategies aiming to suppressing them.

According to many observers, mainstream mass media and politicians tend to portray squatters as 'folk devils' (Dee 2016), "gangs of thugs, layabouts and revolutionary fanatics, parasites, invaders who steal people's homes" (Fox-O'Mahony et al. 2015: 4). Breaking in and trespassing on private property is often clumsily equated with the occupation of empty premises. They all are quickly conflated into a representation of serious criminal offences before any research on the circumstances of an occupation or any legal verdict has been determined. These dominant narrations have the immediate consequence of criminalising squatters (Dadusc 2017). No distinctions between their income, residential and labour conditions are made – homeless people in need of shelter, those who cannot afford to buy or rent convenient venues for performing social activities, activists who squat as a means of protest against urban policies, etc. Rational discussions about the political, economic, social and urban contexts are usually neglected by media reports. Accordingly, capitalism, absolute property rights and real estate speculation are naturally taken for granted, despite the multiple legal regulations at play. Home evictions and homelessness are seldom associated with the human rights violations involved in the eviction of occupied places.

In accordance with Debord's insights, the term 'spectacular narrations' may be used to designate the aforementioned set of assumptions. According to him, 'spectacles' first *separate* and alienate workers from the products of their work, workers from other workers (also as inhabitants of the same city), and subjects to

a system of oppression from their potentialities to overcome it. Second, 'spectacles' are cultural weapons aiming to represent the world as a *unity* of interests, feelings, national identity and universal human values between the exploited and their exploiters, servants and masters, matter and culture, past and future.

> The unreal unity proclaimed by the spectacle masks the class division underlying the real unity of the capitalist mode of production. What obliges the producers to participate in the construction of the world is also what excludes them from it… While all the technical forces of capitalism contribute toward various forms of separation, urbanism provides the material foundation for those forces and prepares the ground for their deployment. (Debord 1967: §72, §171)

Mass consumption, political disenfranchisement and homeownership are some of the key areas that spectacular narrations bring together in order to foster an 'unreal unity' and to mystify the ongoing economic inequalities and spatial segregation which characterise capitalism and contemporary cities. When applied to squatting, it is worth questioning how the divisions among squatters and their supposed unity as a whole, in radical opposition to the rest of society, are disseminated. Furthermore, I wonder to what extent there are alternative narrations that manifest discursive struggles about the legitimation of squatting. Yet these questions have not been properly addressed by the literature on squatting. In particular, I have noticed a lack of distinction between 'homogenisation' and 'polarisation' narratives in the main works dealing with dominant discourses on squatting (Aguilera 2018, Bouillon 2013, Dee 2013, Dee & Debelle 2015, Manjikian 2013, Middleton 2015, Fox-O'Mahony et al. 2015, Pruijt 2013). While the split between 'good' and 'bad' squatters has been carefully disclosed, the accounts differ substantially. As a consequence, a more systematic categorisation of the cleavages among squatters imposed by the 'spectacular narrations' is needed. Moreover, the attempts to anchor counter-hegemonic responses and to legitimise squatting have not identified which dimensions are more oppositional to capitalism (Cattaneo & Martinez 2014, Hodkinson 2012, Madden & Marcuse 2016) and which ones do not imply such a radical view, although they may still help enhance the reputation of squatters. This article contributes to remedy these knowledge voids.

While disclosing the ideological turn operated by spectacular narrations there is also the risk of representing a false homogeneity or solidarity among all kinds of squatters. This would prevent us from recognising their significant social diversity as practitioners and activists (azozomox 2014, Cattaneo & Martínez 2014, Martínez 2018b, Mudu & Chattopadhay 2017). For instance, they can differ in terms of gender, race, age, cultural and economic capital, motivations, political affinities

and alignments, organisational membership, etc. The variety of occupied properties also intersects with the squatters' social networks and communities. The land use of the urban area and the building, the time span of vacancy, whether the property is subject to heritage protection, the state of maintenance and age of the building, who the owners are and what they did with the building before its abandonment, etc. are not pointless features (Martínez 2018a). Therefore, squatters can share an opposition to private property as far as it entails unacceptable inequalities, but squatters can also occupy buildings under very much different circumstances, without invoking private property as a pillar of capitalism. The avoidance of the above variations by the literature on squatting requires clear identification of the radical (anti-capitalist) and moderate grounds that justify the occupations of vacant properties.

In the following sections I first review the evidence from European cities in order to disentangle the underlying categories of the homogenisation and polarisation narratives[1]. Next, I discuss the counter-hegemonic responses expressed by squatters and their main anti-capitalist features. Finally, in the concluding remarks, a summary assessment of the findings and gaps is provided.

The performative powers of 'spectacular narrations'

The term 'stigma' dates back to the Ancient Greece when it referred to visual signs which "were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor" (Goffman 1963: 1). Later on, it was generalised to encompass the identity attributes of specific social groups who are seen as "quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak… sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap." (Goffman 1963: 3) The stigma accentuates undesirable or discredited attributes of the 'stereotype', or biased social identity, held by the group members. Therefore, Goffman's sociological use of the term 'stigma' suggests negative connotations overall. Instead of taking for granted his interactionist and functionalist approach, I rather assume that stigmas, stereotypes, and social identities in general, are mainly, though not exclusively, the outcomes of dominant discourses. These discourses are produced according to the economic and symbolic means of production under the control of dominant social groups, elites and capitalists (Therborn 1980, Jessop 1982). I will thus interpret stigmatisation processes of squatters according to the ideologies and hegemonic discourses that intervene in the reproduction of the capitalist city at large, and the neoliberal city specifically (Madden & Marcuse 2016, Mayer 2016).

Borrowing from Debord (1967), the stigmatisation of squatters via hegemonic stereotypes may take two basic forms: a) homogenisation ('all squatters are the same'); and b) polarisation ('there are good and bad squatters'). Squatters themsel-

ves may equally adhere to these rhetoric strategies by filling them with their own content. They can also reverse them by: a) revealing significant differences when its collective is seen as homogeneous; b) underscoring the commonalities among all the squatters as subjects to market oppression and state marginalisation when they are distinguished as 'good and bad' squatters. Let's examine first how homogenisation operates.

Opposition to squatting may be backed for different reasons. For example, a rooted belief in the primacy of private property that allows almost absolute power to those granted ownership, regardless of the legal limitations applicable in each national jurisdiction (Fox-O'Mahony et al. 2015). More often, it is due to urban elites' revanchism against poor people, migrants, racial minorities and young activists, all perceived as marginal, deviant and undesirable individuals whose mere existence in the city is not welcome (Pruijt 2013). Smith illustrates this revanchism with declarations of New York's former mayor, Rudolf Giuliani: "He identifies homeless people, panhandlers, prostitutes, curbside squeegee cleaners, squatters, graffiti artists, 'reckless bicyclists', and unruly youth as the major enemies of public order, the culprits of urban decline generating widespread fear" (Smith 1999: 100).

Elite revanchism against those altering the status quo tends to occur in association with a 'moral panic' that frames squatters who actively resist their eviction as violent, unruly or even a sort of low-key terrorism. Pruijt recalls how a majority in the Dutch Parliament and Senate have always claimed a 'sense of urgency' to legislate against squatting since its first public manifestations in the mid-1960s. They only succeeded four decades later, after three incidents in 2007 and 2008 that triggered the moral panic:

> The police reported that squatters had left booby traps in barricaded squats… Prime Minister Balkenende expressed shock… In 2008, the impression of a violent turn in the Amsterdam's squatters' movement was reinforced by a case in which the Amsterdam police reported having found various weapons during an eviction. (Pruijt 2013: 1121-2)

The Dutch anti-squatting law was passed in 2010 with a preface in which the association between squatters and violence justified the criminalisation. Dee (2016: 786-788) delved into the same three cases by citing the squatters' views. According to Dee's analysis, there was no compelling evidence for the accusations made by the police – i.e. no booby traps, no bombs and no guns. These counterarguments, however, were not reported by the mass media as much as the authorities' version. "The panic was used for 'agenda-setting'… but it is important to note that it was based on completely fictitious grounds" (Dee 2016: 789). Interestingly, during the process of stigmatisation that resulted in the end of tolerance towards squatting,

Dee interpreted the squatters framing as a 'symptom of the other' in a typical labelling process that assigns deviant properties to specific social groups: "as young, threatening, violent, disrespectful, foreign, different, and so on" (ibid.).

Based on parliamentary debates, government documents and politicians' statements to the press in the UK between 2010 and 2012, when the criminalisation of squatting in England and Wales came into force, Middleton (2015) confirms how effective the rhetoric of homogenisation is in successfully supporting a law change. She goes more in detail and distinguishes three tactics within that general rhetoric: a) squatters are not fair because they "are getting so much for free" when most people "are struggling to get by" (Middleton 2015: 101); b) "squatters are criminal and lazy" because they are not "virtuously hard-working and law-abiding" as most home-owners are (Middleton 2015: 101-2); and c) squatters are a consolidated and even 'professional' subculture that must be eradicated:

> They display 'arrogant behaviour', believing themselves superior to the rest of society, and in particular believing themselves to be 'above the law'. They are 'web-savvy', they have a predilection for high-value properties, they deceive us with their 'guilt and tenacity' and they are carefree, continuing 'on their merry way' when they are evicted. The term squatter is also frequently prefaced by 'prolific' and 'professional', qualifiers which connote success, implying that squatters view their activities with pride. (Middleton 2015: 103-4)

Similar generalisations about squatters as a whole are found in Spain as well. Although a legal reform was passed in 1995, which made squatting a criminal offence, the rise of this practice during the last economic recession has infuriated the most conservative voices. In particular, the right-populist party Ciudadanos has launched a parliamentary attempt to increase the prosecution and punishment of squatting. In a September 2017 op ed of an online newspaper, the leader of this party in Madrid, Begoña Villacís, combined all the above-mentioned stereotypes in a single column:

> No 'good morning', no introduction to their new neighbours – those simpletons, who paid to live in a house like theirs, in a neighbourhood like theirs, and, up to now, with the same tranquillity as theirs… For years we have produced laws that protect usurpers and opportunists, which allow some to 'live for free' and… evict this man [a legitimate owner] from his own home… Squatters impose fear and intimidation to deteriorate neighbourhood life. Some streets are now in the hands of gangs and bullies. There are now [occupied] drug-dealing flats… brot-

hels and nests of terrorists. The phenomenon becomes viral… There is no such dichotomy between the right to housing and the right to property… We should not wait a minute more in getting rid of our condition as a paradise country for squatters. (https://blogs.elconfidencial.com/espana/mirada-ciudadana/2017-09-19/una-de-listos-y-tontos-hipotecados_1445886/)

According to this politician, all squatters are unfair, unlawful, criminal and a plague that should be supressed immediately because the criminalisation in force does not suffice. She only compares squatters with homeowners and presents the latter as the principal representatives of society as a whole. Private property rights and homeowners' rights, then, are the priority to be protected. Squatters are bad neighbours (no hello to others), outsiders, they do not pay rent, do not pay mortgage instalments, and do not comply with the legislation, which is assumed to be outdated and inefficient. In an effort to raise alarm (a 'sense of urgency' and moral panic), she also exaggerates her hard-line approach by suggesting that squatters can occupy principal homes when their regular residents are away – although this is not a proper case of squatting empty properties, but a completely different and more serious criminal infraction: housebreaking and intrusion into one's private home. The association of squatters with delinquents, drug trafficking, prostitution and terrorism are not chosen randomly. Without any evidence, these activities are attributed to all squatters and not distinguished from the practice of squatting itself. The newspaper contributes to the creation of panic by including four pictures without any actual squatters in them, as if they were unknown and dangerous ghosts that oblige owners to wall their front doors (photo 1) and keep a wary eye on their middle-class townhouses (photo 2), mansions with swimming pools (photo 3) and low-middle class developments (photo 3), where a group of eight new-buyers in their thirties represent the 'idiots who pay a mortgage' (according to the author's headline) as the lawful rivals, and potential victims, of squatters. Both discourse and images pursue the same pragmatic aim – instilling a revanchist mood in public opinion which would justify harsher criminalisation.

The above discourses stigmatise and homogenise squatters as a whole or 'other' against 'society'. Not so frequently, they can also be expressed in apparently less negative terms. The most well-known framing is made up of squatters as functional to the capitalist regeneration of urban spaces. The stereotype of squatters as artists (cultural workers and professionals) and, eventually, gentrifiers is usually produced by wealthy groups as a homogenising label but is also widespread among political (left-libertarian) squatters as a polarising category (Aguilera 2018). For example, an editor of an architecture magazine was quoted as follows:

> [The area] in London where our office is based was once full of squatting artists and designers who gradually transformed the area from one that was quite dangerous to one that is now home to Google, Facebook and a myriad of trendy bars. (Martínez 2015: 34)

Cities such as Amsterdam, where squatting enjoyed many decades of tolerance, and Berlin, where a rapid gentrification process occurred in formerly squatted neighbourhoods, have often shaped the paradigmatic imaginary for the dissemination of this discourse (Novy & Colomb 2012, Owens 2009, Pruijt 2013, Uitermark 2004, Vasudevan 2017). Although exceptional, this can be designated as the 'improvement frame' according to Manjikian (2013: 57-58). Another indicator of how squatting is portrayed in mainstream media is the graffiti murals on the walls of long lasting squats. These are used by tourist guides, airlines and fashion magazines as identity signs of cities, an evident turn to the homogenisation of the squatting culture, social life and politics by incorporating these flagship images into city branding and urban marketisation strategies (Mayer 2016). Freetown Christiania, in Copenhagen, occupied since 1971, also became a very well-known tourist attraction internationally (Thörn et al. 2011).

Recently, a report in the *Elle Décor Italia* magazine represented this general association of squatters with artistic venues and hip spots that eventually - against their will, though - paved the way for subsequent urban gentrification:

> SiViaggia.it, the Italian travel website, published a review of the most beautiful and socially influential European squats… Between Louvre and Centre Pompidou, in one of the most important commercial streets of Paris's historical centre, they [Rivoli 59] created more than thirty artist studios, visited by thousands of people every week, and an art gallery that sells the works of artists from all over the world… In 2014, a spectacular mobilisation pressured the city hall of Altona district [in Hamburg, Germany] to rule that the edifice [Rota Flora] will not be demolished and it will remain an active cultural centre… The Snakehouse, in Spuitstraat, in the heart of Amsterdam, it is a four storey squat occupied in 1983, where dozens of artists worked and lived together… The building was recently bought by the De Key construction company… The edifice will be turned into a complex of luxury apartments… After countless eviction attempts and notices, the Tacheles [in Berlin] was closed in 2012, and it is now under restoration as part of the renovation plan of the surrounding area… Kukutza III [in Bilbao, Spain] filled an institutional void on cultural and entertainment issues, providing

spaces for dance, climbing, martial arts, a library, a canteen, a theatre, and a workshop for craft beer production. After the definitive eviction – one of the most difficult in history, with more than 140.000 euros in damages, dozens of people wounded, and 64 arrests – even the area's shop-owners complained about the loss of the effervescent atmosphere that made the neighbourhood vibrant. (http://www.elledecor.it/en/architecture/the-most-beautiful-squats-in-the-world)

Although there are many types of squatted buildings and squatters, Pruijt (2013: 1124) argues that 'entrepreneurial squatters' who promote studios, exhibition venues and gathering spaces for artists, and other cultural producers, hold the most positive image for local authorities. This often prompts legalisation agreements, state subsidies and the co-optation of former activists although squatters can also manipulate the discourse of creativity to convince authorities about how valuable they are for the sake of economic growth while, internally, keeping and promoting a middle-class discourse of leftist radicalism (Fraser 2015, Novy & Colomb 2012, Valli 2015). Nonetheless, the media and political manipulation of this positive image does not consist of a mere partial representation of squatters, but it promotes a role model for more radical or destitute squatters.

In sum (see Fig. 1a), the homogenising rhetoric unfolds in two directions: a) 'full stigmatisation' by accusing squatters of disturbing social order and behaving

Fig. 1a 'Homogenisation' narratives that stigmatise squatters
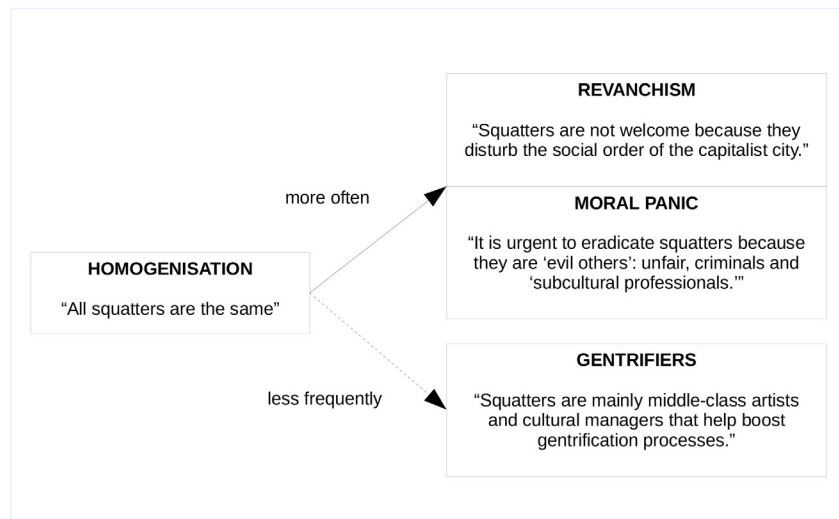
Note: Quotations are only paradigmatic discourses from my own recreation (based on the gathered data) in order to illustrate the meaning of each category. Source: Author

as 'evil others' (morally unfair, legally criminal and too socially tolerated); and b) 'partial stigmatisation' by selecting the portion of squatters which is more functional to the reproduction of the capitalist city – artists and middle-class creative squatters able to contribute to the vibrancy of urban life and the attraction of private capital investment by pioneering gentrification processes.

Divide and rule

Social discipline, normalisation and integration are the general weapons of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 1991). In our case, they are used against the internal diversity of squatters as a social group or urban movement. The main purpose of these stratagems is to undermine the squatters' political leverage. This applies to both homogenisation and polarisation rhetoric. The latter can be more accurately described as a 'divide and rule' tactic because the major attacks towards squatters take the paradigmatic form of a split between 'good' and 'bad' squatters (Bouillon 2013, Dee 2013, Dee & Debelle 2015). Four predominant axes are drawn here, according to the evidence collected from various European countries. First, the more squatters resort to socially perceived violent means of protest, or are unilaterally accused of doing so, the more they are classified as 'bad' squatters. Second, ideological and political radicalism is usually seen as a 'bad' thing. Conversely, the more squatters show restraint with their social, political, urban and cultural criticisms (or these are only expressed through harmless artistic means), the more they are categorised as 'good' squatters. Their disposition to talk to journalists and be reported on and recorded by mass media may be used as an additional distinction between 'moderate' and 'radical' squatters. Involvement of squatters in formal organisations with non-squatters and their own political agenda helps condemn them compared to only-squatters self-help initiatives. Third, squatters' attitudes towards negotiations with private owners and political and judicial authorities determine another bottom line for the divide. There are different kinds of negotiations, including interactions with the police, although the issue of reaching legal agreements regarding the status of the squat represents the highest stake. A plain refusal to accept the prevailing legal system as an extension of economic and political unbalance tends to label squatters as unreasonable outsiders who should not deserve recognition. In contrast, 'good' squatters are deemed and expected to, sooner or later, obtain legal status and durable arrangements for their illegal condition. This will to negotiate is proof that they are another acceptable social category among the diversity of city stakeholders. A fourth categorical cleavage directly frames squatters as either socially integrated (normalised) or attached to a marginal status (deviated). There are plenty of traits that fall under either side, so this frame stresses a supposedly resilient and original "wild" nature versus the

eventual process of "taming" squatters in order to comply with socially accepted conventions. For example, their public outlook, the way they dress, how clean or dirty are the squats, their lifestyle in relation to drugs and partying, their gender and ethnic identity, their jobs and education, whether there are children and elderly involved, their relationship with welfare services, politeness with neighbours, etc. I will further elaborate these axes in more detail.

Mass media plays a key role in the diffusion of the 'divide and rule' repertoire. Dee (2013) compared media representations of squatting in the UK and the Netherlands and found striking differences. For instance, the negative stereotypes of squatters as drug-users who trash buildings prevailed more in the UK than in the Netherlands, where 'krakers' developed cordial relations with the police, had expert knowledge about the occupied buildings and the planning legislation, and usually behave non-violently unless provoked (Dee 2013: 251). Polarisations among squatters in the UK date back to the 1960s and 1970s around an axis of deserving or undeserving poor. On the one hand, positive stories were told about homeless families who occupied council properties and were led by non-homeless activists. On the other, negative stories encompassed squatting actions by "single people, 'outsiders', 'hippies'… particularly if they turned their attentions towards empty privately-owned properties or were seen to have some sort of wider political agenda" (Platt quoted by Dee 2013: 252).

Dee provides more illustrations of the divide. One of the squatters of an expensive mansion in London declared to the Daily Telegraph: "I don't mind being called a squatter, but I am a good one. We are normal people, we go to work." (Dee 2013: 257) A neighbour of squatters in Brighton was quoted as saying: "They look like scruffy students… But they are very polite and well-spoken. They seem like your typical middle-class dropouts." (Dee 2013: 257) Another squatter plays the game of normalisation by insisting on the favourable label when talking to journalists: "We are good squatters. We treat the places we live with respect. We keep the place clean and tidy" (Dee 2013: 258). On the other hand, marginal and deviant attributions are placed upon the bad squatters, according to the media highlights: "a gang… and mostly in their early 20s and [Southern and Eastern] European… They were intelligent students, not impoverished… anarchist collectives living rent-free in Georgian townhouses…" (Dee 2013: 258-260).

In France, Bouillon interviewed policemen who confirmed that squats occupied by "people seen as marginals… isolated adolescents without papers from Maghreb… [and] Roma [people]… have the shortest life expectancy" (Bouillon 2013: 236). Racism and preventive stereotypes placed upon social groups who generate "a strong feeling of insecurity among neighbours" (ibid.) prompted police to swiftly evict the 'bad' squatters, even without granting them due rights to legal assistance and juridical procedure. This extends to squatters who are ignorant of

the legislation, are intimidated by landlords and neighbours, and are subject to forced mobility due to asylum or job seeking. According to her research, in 75% of cases, court sentences determined immediate eviction (Bouillon 2013: 237), which is a sign of the predominance of such negative stereotypes.

Bouillon also found that court trials are a privileged stage to test how effective stereotypes are. Judges distinguished first between good and bad landlords based on three conditions: a) Small private landlords may experience a higher loss than big corporations or state agencies when their properties are occupied; b) The longer the period of vacancy, the more prone judges are to blame the owner and acquit the squatters; c) The less active owners are in repairing, hiring or selling their property, the more favourable judges are towards squatters. But the burden may also fall on the side of squatters; if they are judged to be 'genuine poor' and 'good poor', they have more chance of avoiding eviction and further punishment (fines or imprisonment). Accordingly, defensive tactics in court trials play with these four arguments:

> [a)] They are not usurpers but 'truly poor'… [b)] The judge will be all the more indulgent if the occupants have exhausted all legal solutions [to find accommodation]… [c)] They are not 'drug addicts', they 'don't steal'… [d)] The question is to prove that they suffer from marginality and do not represent a danger for the collectivity. (Bouillon 2013: 238-239)

The appointment of an "anti-squatters police chief" by the Spanish central government in 2016, which could operate across the Madrid region, was announced with the overt intention of speeding up lawsuits and increasing the penalties for what is already considered a criminal offence according to the Spanish penal code (1995). In a meeting he held with residents' organisations, the police officer said they had identified 1,300 squatted houses in the region, and they classified them roughly as "social squatters" (homeless people who occupy out of necessity or 'deserving poor'), "ethnic squatters" (Roma people), "foreign squatters" (poor migrants) and "anti-systemic and 15M squatters" (political squatters who help others to squat and organise social activities) [15M refers to the Indignados movement that rose up in 15 May 2011] (https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/global/30611-dancausa-general-contra-la-okupacion.html) . Only the 'deserving poor' did not represent a serious threat. Madrid's supposedly progressive mayor also condemned "mafia-style squatters" while expressing concerns about the "needy squatters" who face homelessness (http://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/Cerco-okupacion-Madrid-coordinador-policial_0_504650296.html). Many local activists commented informally and online that those views were completely biased, misrepresented the actual diversity of squatters and created artificial divides to

spread fear and justify repression (Coordinadora de Vivienda 2017).

Other accounts of 'bad' and 'good' squatters in Barcelona confirmed the patterned boundary between "artists, bohemians… peaceful, eager to negotiate… with a visible spokesperson" and "rioters, violent… punks with dreadlocks… foreigners… far left, anarchists, independentist" squatters (Dee & Debelle 2015: 123-128). The most extreme attribution to 'bad squatters' is a link with terrorism, which is exceptional but not completely avoided by politicians and journalists (most recently via a diffused fear of migrants, refugees and clandestine jihadists: Manjikian 2013, Mudu & Chattopadhay 2017). Media stories about terrorists hidden in Spanish squats or disguised as radical squatters were common in two periods, 1999-2001 (Asens 2004: 320-327) and 2015-2016 (Debelle 2017: 181), although they were mainly based on specific police raids and followed by politicians and journalists' declarations instilling a sense of panic. These incidents added to the general negative discourse on squatting, but the terrorist connotation hardly contaminated the public identity of Spanish squatters in the other periods, from the mid-1980s to date (as verified in the three cities examined in Martínez 2018b).

Middleton (2015) identified a similar hegemonic divide in the UK when both conservative and labour politicians sought to dissociate homelessness from squatting. She provides many samples to illustrate this point: "Squatters do not fit the profile of the kind of vulnerable people we should be looking after… it is 'a FACT' that squatters are politically motivated and anti-establishment', 'not genuinely destitute'… In squats they [homeless people] have no protection." (Middleton 2015: 103, 105) Although poor people may be excluded from the category of 'bad squatters', according to UK politicians, the homeless should not dare to take matters into their own hands and cross the line towards self-housing themselves. If they dare to squat, they risk losing face, subsidies and any help from the authorities. To some extent, this discourse praises homeless people for continuing to sleep in the streets and marginalises them should they aim to find a proper roof (Reeve 2011). However, "in the absence of an alternative, it is highly probable that the persons concerned will sooner or later occupy a new building. Eviction thus contributes to producing the very situation it was supposed to end" (Bouillon 2013: 243).

Polarisation between deserving and underserving poor is by no means the only dichotomous frame at play. The analysis of four cases in Western Europe (the UK, France, Denmark and the Netherlands), including Roma settlements, distinguished nine specific frames that shifted over time towards an increasing 'exclusionary narrative' (Manjikian 2013: 32). This discourse leads to waging a 'war on squatting' based on the assumption that squatters have become a security issue for nation-states. Internal borders are erected and increasing police stop-and-frisk operations target migrants who squat (Manjikian 2013: 11). All squatters, then, are likely to be demonised. As a consequence, this frame justifies the 'politics of emer-
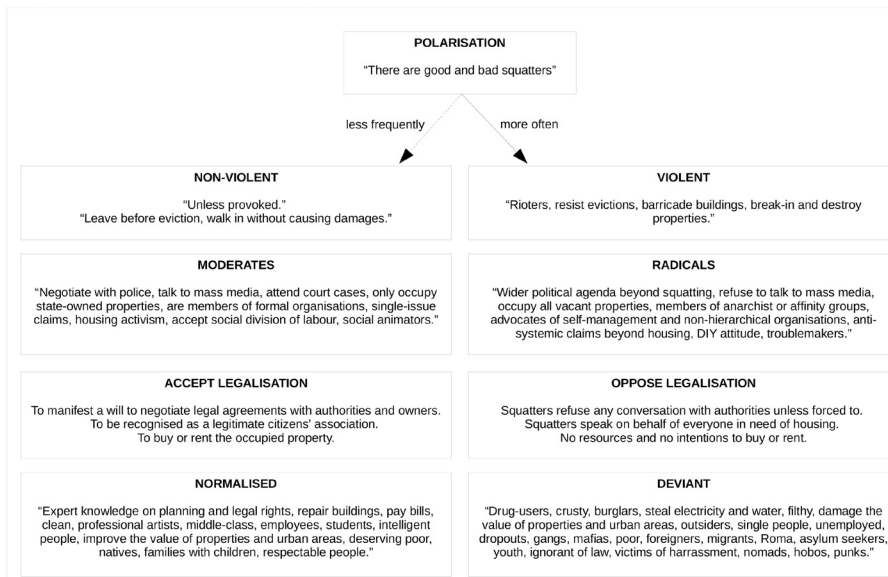
gency' that ends up in the criminalisation and quick evictions of squatters, while replacing standard democratic procedures and rights to housing. For example, Manjikian gathers media samples where squatters are pictured as 'free riders' (selfish, lazy, rent-free), 'blight' (guilty of damaging the home value and investments made by homeowners), 'barbarian' (uncivilised, vandals, intruders, illegal tenants), 'deviated' (nomads, hobos, hippies, living in communes, unemployed and not seeking jobs, alternative lifestyles and dress-hair codes, anarchists, refugees, nuisance to neighbours), 'security threats' (gangsters, invaders, army, "dangerous scourge", weapon-tool wielders). Although the exclusionary narrative takes the lead, Manjikian argues that there is also a subordinate 'inclusionist narrative' that entices public policies to support, subsidise, integrate and understand squatters' motivations based on their legitimate response to housing needs. However, this approach is rooted in a view of the good squatter as a passive victim of systemic conditions, in opposition to the 'empowered squatters' who actively challenge the system that excludes them (Manjikian 2013: 18-32).

Whether in court facing lawsuits or while interacting with neighbouring residents and journalists, some squatters also play the game and strategically take sides. Furthermore, stigmas and stereotypes enjoy a performative power within the squatting scenes, especially in the most militant ones (Kadir 2016, Dee 2013: 256). However, social, cultural, ideological and even economic diversity are the daily life experience of most squatters. Even the same individuals may go through different categories or combine their features (azozomox 2014, Mudu & Chattopadhay 2017, Polanska & Piotrowski 2016, Pattaroni 2014). A paradigmatic case is the Metropoliz squat in a peripheral area of Rome where migrants, natives, militants and artists cooperate with each other and live together on the same premises, a former salami factory (Grazioli 2017; Mudu 2014: 152). In Paris, the conflicts between the 'autonomous' (radical left-libertarian squatters who see squats as an end rather than a means to a legal place) and the 'institutional' wing (artists and housing activists in favour of legalisation of the squats, some even eager to fully participate in political parties) prompted Aguilera (2018: 135-140) to argue that this internal diversity and cleavage represents a strength of the movement. In interviews held with public officials from housing and cultural departments, he confirmed that the distinctions had practical consequences:

> They tolerate and legalise the 'animators' [who create services and house the needy,] who accept to negotiate, who are institution-friendly and officially organised through tangible structures like associations. They evict the 'troublemakers' [autonomous, survival and recognition squatters] who perpetuate a strong anti-institutional discourse and who self-organise in fluid and decentralised networks. (Aguilera 2018: 137)

After examining the reciprocal accusations the two *opposed* types of squatters express about each other, Aguilera observes that "every group of squatters attempts to represent itself as the 'good ones' while simultaneously denouncing the process of categorisation… [All] emphasise that they 'truly' need to squat." (Aguilera 2018: 138) His argument is that the radical wing helps the moderate one to negotiate and achieve its goals because the former represents a more critical threat unable to be managed by the authorities who, forced to choose, prefer to give concessions to the moderate squatters. Radical squatters contribute to the rejuvenation of the movement with their libertarian insight in terms of self-management. On their side, moderate squatters help to soften the repression against squatting by attracting the attention of more favourable media and policymakers. "Municipal officials consider them collaborators: 'They help me in my job to find vacant spaces in Paris… They are experts, they have lists. We call them, they squat, we implement projects with them and then we build social housing" (Aguilera 2018: 140). Figure 1b summarises the gathered evidence concerning the polarisation discourse.

Fig. 1b 'Polarisisation' narratives that stigmatise squatters

| POLARISATION |
| "There are good and bad squatters" |

less frequently | *more often*

NON-VIOLENT	**VIOLENT**
"Unless provoked." "Leave before eviction, walk in without causing damages."	"Rioters, resist evictions, barricade buildings, break-in and destroy properties."
MODERATES	**RADICALS**
"Negotiate with police, talk to mass media, attend court cases, only occupy state-owned properties, are members of formal organisations, single-issue claims, housing activism, accept social division of labour, social animators."	"Wider political agenda beyond squatting, refuse to talk to mass media, occupy all vacant properties, members of anarchist or affinity groups, advocates of self-management and non-hierarchical organisations, anti-systemic claims beyond housing, DIY attitude, troublemakers."
ACCEPT LEGALISATION	**OPPOSE LEGALISATION**
To manifest a will to negotiate legal agreements with authorities and owners. To be recognised as a legitimate citizens' association. To buy or rent the occupied property.	Squatters refuse any conversation with authorities unless forced to. Squatters speak on behalf of everyone in need of housing. No resources and no intentions to buy or rent.
NORMALISED	**DEVIANT**
"Expert knowledge on planning and legal rights, repair buildings, pay bills, clean, professional artists, middle-class, employees, students, intelligent people, improve the value of properties and urban areas, deserving poor, natives, families with children, respectable people."	"Drug-users, crusty, burglars, steal electricity and water, filthy, damage the value of properties and urban areas, outsiders, single people, unemployed, dropouts, gangs, mafias, poor, foreigners, migrants, Roma, asylum seekers, youth, ignorant of law, victims of harrassment, nomads, hobos, punks."

Note: Quotations are only paradigmatic discourses from my own recreation (based on the gathered data) in order to illustrate the meaning of each category. Source: Author
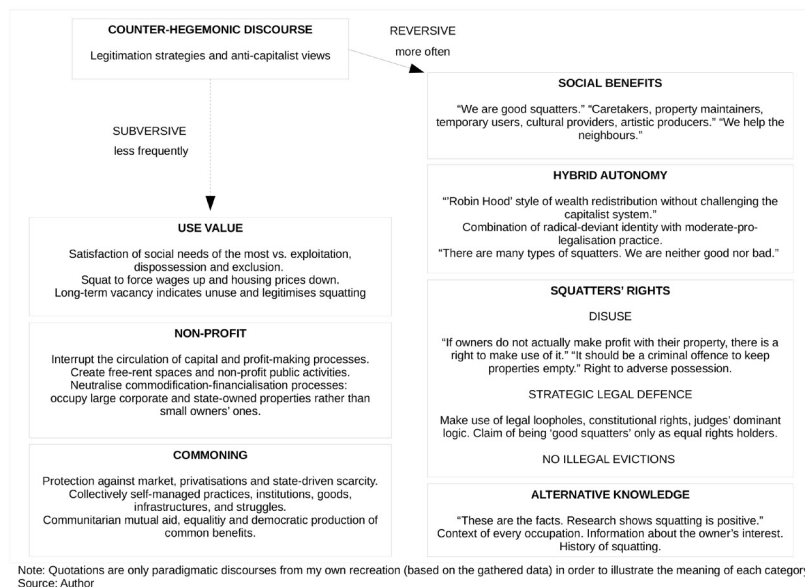
Counter-hegemonic discourses

Both the dominant homogenisation and polarisation rhetoric intend to undermine squatting, hide its social diversity and make squatters speechless. As shown above, this operates by more frequently pointing out 'bad squatters', revanchism and moral panic. On a subordinate hierarchical level (that is, less frequently), the hegemonic narrative sometimes frames squatting as a "positive" contribution thanks to gentrifiers, artists, moderate housing activists and normalised 'good squatters' in general. This hierarchy and frequency is verified, for example, by the examination of media news in the UK showing the frequency of negative views as double when compared to positive categorisations (Dee & Debelle 2015: 120). How do squatters face these dilemmas or escape them?

Dee and Debelle identify two major counter-tactics: 1) 'trying to produce a positive image' of squatting by spreading the features of the 'good squatters' and by emphasising the social benefits of squats; and 2) a 'refusal to engage with the media' by embracing otherness, difference and subjectivity while "sidestepping subjectivities imposed from above", which may also entail an intense dedication to underground, face-to-face, independent and grassroots' communication (Dee & Debelle 2015: 135). They also mention more ambivalent tactics in which squatters adopted different identities to detach themselves from the prevailing stereotypes. This, for instance, has proved somewhat successful in the squatting actions carried out by the PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) in Spain (Coordinadora de Vivienda 2017, García-Lamarca 2016, Martínez 2018). Instead of using 'squatting' or 'occupation', they promoted their actions as 'recuperations' of public assets for those with a lifelong debt after forced evictions due to foreclosures. PAH squatters were also favourable to negotiations, legal arrangements and even the payment of affordable rents. In a similar vein, Dee argues that there is a certain social sympathy for those squatters "mythologised [as] 'Robin Hood' figures, taking back from the people what has been stolen from them by the ultrarich." (Dee 2013: 253) This figure, even without taking explicit anti-capitalist stances, may help to break down the dominant polarisations while justifying squatting as a necessary direct action.

Figure 2 compiles these and other responses to confront the hegemonic discourse on squatting according to the available research (e.g. Cattaneo & Martínez. 2014, Martínez 2018a). Drawing on Hodkinson (2012), the responses can be grouped in two large groups: a) additional; and b) oppositional. He employed these categories to distinguish squatting (as 'oppositional') from housing cooperatives (as 'additional') without, however, delving into the discursive struggles around squatting I am scrutinising here. Both categories hold potentials to dispute the hegemonic logic of capitalism and its attached discourses of legitimation, although only the 'oppositional' alternatives would confront them at its core. In or-

der to avoid the traditional distinction between reform and revolution, moderate and radical struggles, etc. that those terms may entail, I refer to them as 'reversive' and 'subversive' (Martínez 2008). In short, reversive strategies take advantage of system cracks, expand them, and drive the masters crazy. Guerrilla warfare, insurrections and everyday life resistance to domination fall under this category. Subversive strategies critically point to the pillars of the system and aim at prefiguring full alternatives to it. New forms of language, social organisation and practices, even placed within strongholds, are possible manifestations. As far as they both encompass a counter-hegemonic nature, we could also name them as 'radical reforms' and 'radical experiments'.

Fig. 2 Counter-hegemonic narratives that legitimise squatting

| COUNTER-HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE | REVERSIVE |
| Legitimation strategies and anti-capitalist views | more often |

SOCIAL BENEFITS

"We are good squatters." "Caretakers, property maintainers, temporary users, cultural providers, artistic producers." "We help the neighbours."

HYBRID AUTONOMY

"'Robin Hood' style of wealth redistribution without challenging the capitalist system."
Combination of radical-deviant identity with moderate-pro-legalisation practice.
"There are many types of squatters. We are neither good nor bad."

SUBVERSIVE
less frequently

USE VALUE

Satisfaction of social needs of the most vs. exploitation, dispossession and exclusion.
Squat to force wages up and housing prices down.
Long-term vacancy indicates unuse and legitimises squatting

SQUATTERS' RIGHTS

DISUSE

"If owners do not actually make profit with their property, there is a right to make use of it." "It should be a criminal offence to keep properties empty." Right to adverse possession.

STRATEGIC LEGAL DEFENCE

NON-PROFIT

Interrupt the circulation of capital and profit-making processes.
Create free-rent spaces and non-profit public activities.
Neutralise commodification-financialisation processes: occupy large corporate and state-owned properties rather than small owners' ones.

Make use of legal loopholes, constitutional rights, judges' dominant logic. Claim of being 'good squatters' only as equal rights holders.

NO ILLEGAL EVICTIONS

COMMONING

Protection against market, privatisations and state-driven scarcity.
Collectively self-managed practices, institutions, goods, infrastructures, and struggles.
Communitarian mutual aid, equality and democratic production of common benefits.

ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE

"These are the facts. Research shows squatting is positive."
Context of every occupation. Information about the owner's interest. History of squatting.

Note: Quotations are only paradigmatic discourses from my own recreation (based on the gathered data) in order to illustrate the meaning of each category.
Source: Author

Reversive responses

1) 'Social benefits'. Squatters can fight their usual bad reputation by claiming they contribute to society in very peculiar ways. Instead of parasites, many squatters argue that they take care of and rehabilitate the properties they occupy, which, otherwise, would continue to deteriorate (Dee 2013, Pruijt 2013). Vacancy in a building or urban area is also considered negative in terms of the potential cooperation among residents, so some squatters are welcome when they help other neighbours with their daily issues. This logic applies to 'squatted social centres' as

well. The more public activities are organised in the squats for visitors, the more squatters use them as proof of their altruism.

2) 'Hybrid autonomy'. The main battle here is waged around the distinction between the temporary occupation of disused properties and stealing. Discursive tactics employed by squatters vary from appealing to those in society critical of rich people who own many properties, to demands of more just housing policies and affordable real estate prices for the many. This opens up a fruitful avenue to legitimise squatting through various combinations of positive and negative traits which are invigorated by 'spectacular narratives'. A regular illustration of 'hybrid autonomy' (Martínez 2016) consists of embracing radical and deviant identities proudly while, at the same time, expressing the will to pay rent and reach legal agreements (Coordinadora de Vivienda 2017, García-Lamarca 2016, Martínez 2018). Equally, a refusal to identify squatters' spokespersons when engaging with the media and politicians, and the spread of confusing messages by all means possible (in a situationist-inspired fashion), may contribute to a certain political ambiguity that is able to erode the stigmatisation process.

3) 'Squatters' rights'. In this dimension, squatters use their legal expertise in order to remind both the authorities and the public of the owners' duties regarding the conservation and management of their properties. The lack of maintenance, ruin and vacancy are not tolerated in many legal codes, and 'adverse possession' was a historical means to grant squatters' rights to remain or even acquire or purchase the occupied property (Fox-O'Mahony et al. 2015). Disuse is often considered a source of problems for the building, the neighbours and the urban area at large. Squatters also address their legal rights to be informed in due time, to legal assistance and relocation in case of eviction. They also reveal the large number of illegal evictions worldwide, executed by police and private owners, to which courts turn a blind eye. By knowing the details of the applicable law, their constitutional rights as citizens and the judge's prevailing arguments, squatters can strategically plan their legal defence (Bouillon 2013, Cattaneo & Martínez 2014).

4) 'Alternative knowledge'. In general, a common resource that squatters, especially those more politicised, manage is a detailed knowledge of the targeted property, the state of the building and the economic conditions and behaviours of its owner. This research serves to assess the pros and cons of the occupation, but also to publicly justify the action. In addition, squatters can relate this key information to other alarming political and economic circumstances (corruption, housing shortage, gentrification processes, etc.). References to consolidated practices of squatting over decades in the same city or country have the advantage of cooling down the news inducing panic about single incidents (Martínez 2018b, Van der Steen et al. 2014).

Subversive alternatives

All the 'reversive' strategies (narratives and associated actions) can legitimate squatting, undermine stigmas and turn artificial splits upside down. However, there is no intrinsic content in them that is genuinely anti-capitalist, aiming to challenge the systemic conditions that foster squatting. Even the appeal to completely abolish private property, endorsed by left-libertarian squatters, is seldom realistic because squatters are focused on a specific contradiction of the capitalist system – the social management of empty properties, both privately and state-owned. In order to enhance the 'oppositional' or anti-capitalist nature of counter-hegemonic discourses, Hodkinson proposes various packages of prefigurative, defensive and circulating forms of commoning (Hodkinson 2012: 438-440). Similarly, Madden and Marcuse define 'radical' or 'transformative demands' as "system-challenging… non-reformist reforms: not attempts to make the current system more resilient, but actions that improve present conditions while also progressively enabling the building of a different world" (Madden & Marcuse 2016: 200). Regarding squatting, its radicalism entails a discourse with potential performative capacities in line with the 'oppositional' and 'transformative' practices suggested by Hodkinson, Madden and Marcuse, not only in the field of housing, but also in other facilities such as counter-cultural, anarchist and refugee squats. Without dismissing the radical potential of the squatters' reversive strategies, we can also envision three major dimensions of its subversive attempts, although both may be combined in practice. According to my own pool of pamphlets, fanzines, banners and articles written by squatters, and other researchers' analyses, we can group the dispersed pieces of subversive discourses in the following three categories: use value, non-profit and commoning.

1) 'Use value'. Capitalism works due to underlying processes of exploitation of the labour force within given social structures. Capitalists also manipulate the reproduction of the labour force (health, education, residential needs, non-working time, etc.). Some of their profits can be invested in the 'secondary circuit of capital', i.e. the production of the urban fabric. All these activities are driven by the pursuit of 'exchange value' at the expense of 'use values'. When squatters occupy empty properties, they claim a right to satisfy their needs for social reproduction, but also they resist exploitation as waged workers (Cattaneo & Martínez 2014). They also dispute the appropriation of resources by real estate developers and speculators. The alternative to focusing on the specific portion of vacancy among properties subject to profit-making in the real estate market means direct opposition to their extension. Given the primitive accumulation of capital that gave birth to private property, current forms of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2006: 90-115) and privatisations of public assets such as social housing stocks, squatters argue that capitalists always illegitimately *squatted* larger spaces

than the ones that are taken back into the hands of the exploited, dispossessed and excluded. As a consequence, squatting is truly anti-capitalist when it is practised by homeless people and others who cannot access social housing or affordable and decent shelters (Reeve 2011). Even for those who are not homeless, to buy or rent an expensive dwelling may imply the serious erosion of other aspects of a buyer or tenant's well-being. People with low or unstable income, such as unemployed people, students and the elderly, may resort to squatting as a solution to their urgent economic needs, especially in the absence of any state measures that suit them. Squatting can mitigate these undesirable effects and erode capital accumulation in both the real estate and job market. In short, the better the living conditions enjoyed by the many, the less probable capitalists will force wages down and housing prices up. As Madden and Marcuse (2016: 207) advocate: "Privilege inhabitants… rather than investors, owners and landlords."

2) 'Non-profit'. When squatters are not so deprived economically, their refusal to pay high rents, selling prices and mortgage loans directly challenges the interests of capitalists, real estate financialisation and state policies that facilitate capital accumulation. Well-off political squatters (from the middle or well-paid working classes) may, remarkably, reject the argument of extreme necessity in their own case by stating that wealthier owners ought not to profit from their empty properties. Manipulated vacancy only boosts speculation and inflation, which results in higher living costs for all urban dwellers and inhabitants. This is especially justified when the targets of squatting are spaces left unused in convenient locations for collective gatherings and activities supplied by squatters at no or low cost. They could not be performed by paying market prices, and the right to the city centre (Cattaneo & Martínez 2014, Madden & Marcuse 2016) would be just a privilege of the wealthy. Theoretically, regulations of land planning, welfare services, financial transfers and taxation are intended to limit the absolute powers of real estate owners. However, these limitations have not been sufficient in impeding the commodification and financialisation of housing. Furthermore, state agencies may also set up for-profit housing corporations, urban plans and policies that reveal the failures of the capitalist system to properly accommodate everyone. By "breaking the monopoly of for-profit developers" (Madden & Marcuse 2016: 207), squatters can grant access to houses and social facilities to those more in need as well as to those that defy capitalism on different flanks. This approach implies that squatters cannot make any profit either by renting, subletting, or selling the occupied property to others. Selling food, beverages, books, clothes, or handicrafts is deemed legitimate when it is not for profit and democratically managed among the squatters.

3) 'Commoning'. Squatting contributes to creating 'commons' in direct opposition to the continuing enclosures and appropriations of all spheres of life and

nature operated by capital. Inequality is not only an outcome of capital accumulation, but also an intrinsic feature of capitalist production at the workplace and in all markets at large. Without equal conditions of work and consumption, common properties and an orientation of productive-reproductive activities to satisfy everybody's needs, there is no way out of capitalism. Historically, the commons encompassed portions of land and resources in a community-managed 'third space' between the state and the market. The notion of commons, however, entails much more: "Daily acts of producing alternative forms of sociality that protect against enclosure and accumulation" (Hodkinson 2012: 437). Therefore, instead of authoritarian forms of production and organisation of domestic and social life, commoning processes comprehend every collectively self-managed practice, institution, good, infrastructure, and struggle able to overcome the duality of state-owned and privately-owned modes of tenure and government. Squats are thus precious strongholds "of non-hierarchical, small-scale, directly democratic, egalitarian and collective forms of housing in our everyday lives" (Hodkinson 2012: 438) whenever they avoid the reproduction of economic, social and cultural oppressions within their walls. Their example can also amplify the cry to democratise the planning, provision and management of state-owned assets such as housing (Madden & Marcuse 2016: 211-215). In addition, commoning practices extend the social benefits of squatting to the surrounding residential communities not just as mutual aid, but also as a contribution to the self-management of common goods, historical experiences, institutions and struggles within their boundaries. This includes vacant spaces subject to the conflict between economic speculation, government decisions and grassroots claims. Moreover, squatters may be highly resourceful and valuable to the local community when they disclose the speculative processes underway.

Conclusions

Whether they like it or not, squatters are subject to a pervasive stigmatisation process in which the negative contents take priority over the occasional positive ones. Research across many European cities reveals three significant patterns: a) the stigmatisation process is performed according to a twofold rhetoric consisting of 'homogenisation' and 'polarisation' narratives; b) each dominant narrative always includes, as a subordinate dimension less often expressed in public, a relatively positive depiction (or 'partial stigmatisation', more precisely) of squatters; and c) the hegemonic 'spectacular narrations' about squatting are, at least in the long-term, performative, i.e. effective in terms of their prosecution, criminalisation and social exclusion. In particular, the divides between 'good' and 'bad' squatters are drawn out according to the dichotomies of 'non-violence/violence', 'moderation/

radicalism', 'pro-legalisation/anti-legalisation' and 'normalisation/deviation'. I interpret this finding as a result of discursive struggles in which squatters' agency plays a significant role in defying the circulation of negative stereotypes, although the dominant positive/partial ones are not necessarily what most squatters would wish to disseminate.

Going back to the literature on the topic, my analysis shows the limited scope that squatters enjoy when they engage with the media, politicians and juridical instances to overcome stigma and artificial splits, as some authors suggest (Bouillon 2013, Dee 2013, Dee & Debelle 2015). As these researchers also show, both the refusal to play the communication game in the media realm and political ambivalence may strengthen squatters' identity and discourse but, I would argue, without challenging the hegemonic system of categorisation and the capitalist structures that such a system ('spectacular narrations') obscures. In my view, Manjikian's (2013) main virtue is to delve into multiple discursive frames that underpin the increasing 'exclusionary narratives' about squatting. She also recognises the subordinate place of 'inclusionary narratives'. However, compared to other studies and my own analysis above, all these frames indicate more a plurality of squatters and hegemonic stigmas rather than a priority of the security-related ones (especially when associated to terrorism and violence, although her argument seems more valid when assigned to poor international migrants and refugees from Asia and the Middle East: Mudu et al. 2017). In contrast, I suggest fewer dichotomies in order to map the divide between 'good' and 'bad' squatters, and the need to look at how squatters react to them, by following, for example, Aguilera (2018), Dee (2016) and Pruijt (2013). More specifically, Dee (2016) proposes to conduct inquiries able to disclose facts and alternative voices which were dismissed by the dominant narratives. Pruijt (2013) also encourages the introduction of public opinion polls, the scrutiny of the diversity among politicians and media, and the squatters' own accounts such as the Dutch "white book", in which they tell positive stories about their practice and social contributions. What I miss in their analyses is a tighter connection of these and other counter-hegemonic tactics with the structural conditions of power and economic relationships within the capitalist system (some attempts, notwithstanding, have been presented in Cattaneo & Martínez 2014).

As a consequence, my final section identified two main strands of discursive responses performed by squatters –'reversive' and 'subversive' (Hodkinson 2012, Madden & Marcuse 2016). 'Use value', 'non-profit' and 'commoning' principles would be, in my view, the main components of the most radical-experimental approach, while also considering the more moderate responses (or radical reforms) a crucial source for a broader legitimation of squatting. This distinction is useful, although neither Hodkinson nor Madden and Marcuse distinguish speci-

fic variations among squatters' practices and discourses. These authors contribute a general framework that helps the understanding of how squatters root their anti-capitalist discourse among various housing struggles, despite its exceptional occurrence according to the evidence examined here and more general trends in European social movements (Mayer 2016). Future research will hopefully illuminate more in detail how effective these counter-hegemonic narratives are in terms of consolidating and expanding the cracks opened up by squatters.

Miguel A. Martínez is Professor of Housing and Urban Sociology at the IBF (Institute for Housing and Urban Research), Uppsala University (Sweden). Since 2009 he is a member of the activist-research network SqEK (Squatting Everywhere Kollective). He has conducted different studies about urban sociology, social movements, and participatory-activist methodologies. Most of his publications are available at: www.miguelangelmartinez.net

Notes

[1]The main empirical sources for this research stem from personal and group interviews, and mass media and activist documents I collected in Spain from the mid-1980s to present. In addition, I relied on secondary data provided by other researchers about various European countries (Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and the UK). Critical discourse analysis (Wodack & Meyer 2001) with a sociosemiotic approach (Ruiz 2009) were adopted in their interpretation.

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