"No Cops, No Journos, No Anthropologists": Fieldwork Challenges in Occupied Barcelona

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From the SelectedWorks of Justin AK Helepololei

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“No Cops, No Journos, No Anthropologists:” Fieldwork Challenges in Occupied Barcelona
Monday, May 21\textsuperscript{st} 2012

The hill that rises up from the metro station Lesseps in the direction of Parc Güell is normally flooded with tourists. This morning it seems they haven’t left their hotels yet. At this hour the only people on the streets are residents leaving for work and shopkeepers getting ready for the day. Already skeptical, the quiet makes me uneasy, and I almost regret coming. What kind of a turnout is an 8am demonstration going to have - especially one in Barcelona, and especially one put together by squatters? It’s also windy and unseasonably cold and the idea of standing outside has less and less appeal the closer I get. As I arrive I’m relieved to see around a dozen people already gathered, talking, beneath a banner that reads “El barrio no se vende, el barrio se defiende.”\footnote{The neighborhood doesn’t sell itself, the neighborhood defends itself} A friend waves me over and I join them. Two large tables of food are being set up: with coffee, milk, juice, pastries, bread, tomatoes and the ubiquitous Catalan garlic-spread: allioli. Set on a high wall above us is a loudspeaker playing music – mostly American punk and new wave bands, with an occasional salsa tune.

The demonstration is being held in front of a row of four occupied houses. All have received notice that a legal process for eviction has been opened and can occur at any point starting today. The houses themselves are somewhat fortified, old manor homes with high courtyard walls. They had fallen into disrepair and had been refurbished by the squatters who have now lived there, some for several years. The banner seems curious, as the nearest neighbors in the somewhat bourgeois La Salut neighborhood are a private tennis club. But, the neighborhood also has a large, okupa\footnote{An abbreviated form of the Castilian Spanish word: ocupación. Okupa connotes a more politicized, counter-cultural type of squatter.} presence of several well-known and established squatted houses and social centers - including la Kasa de la Muntanya, a former Civil Guard police station occupied since 1989. As squatters in other parts of the city put it: the okupas in...
this barrio are “muy hardcore.” As we talk, more people arrive. Residents of one of the houses bring out a bowl of hot, freshly made churros – and are met with much excitement. A bottle of moscatell is also passed around. At the demonstration’s peak around 30 people are amassed on the sidewalk, eating, chatting and smiling. I’m surprised how calm people seem, but the periodic sighting of a police car garners nervous glances. Casually, my friend points out a lone individual, whom I hadn’t noticed, standing several blocks away. Dressed in a dark sweatshirt, hood up, the person is partially obscured by the corner of a building, but peeks out and looks towards us every several minutes. “Una secreta” – an undercover policeman – my friend explains. Apparently he has been there since 6 in the morning. While some of us had also arrived early - around 8ish - six in the morning was way too early for any real okupa.

Unsurprisingly, most of the demonstrators seem tired. Anticipating the possibility of a dramatic, rush eviction, the residents had held a party the night before and friends came to stay overnight in support. As my friend told me, laughing, the sound of an early morning garbage truck had startled them. A false alarm – but still, no one slept very well afterwards. Many of the people there had recent and unpleasant memories of other early-morning evictions: police entering by force, smashing through doors, arresting residents and throwing away belongings. While the legal process for an eviction had officially opened that day, it was unclear if and when the actual eviction would take place, as the police were sometimes known for waiting out resistors several weeks before going ahead with an operation, usually while the people inside were still sleeping. Most of the residents’ possessions had been moved to other, less risky houses in the event of such an eviction and the people living there were surviving on only what they needed. The residents and their friends described a precarious balance: of on the one hand, putting up resistance towards the police as a show of force to support other ongoing occupations; and on the other hand, trying not to get burned out by the stress of not knowing when they’d be thrown out of their homes…
Rethinking Engagement

As anthropologists we often remind ourselves that the tools of our discipline emerged from the project of empire. The control (and sometimes eradication) of rebellious, colonial subjects was made possible by the systematic collection of knowledge about people: how they saw their worlds and how they organized their lives. Lest we imagine that we have overcome this past, we can turn our attention to the ways in which social science methods have increasingly been appropriated for the toolkit of the counterterrorist and counterinsurgent state. This can be seen in controversial military programs (such as Human Terrain Systems), but also in lower-level changes in policing, as this paper will discuss. This is the external risk of cooptation that anthropology has had to contend with - and must continue to address. But not all of our problems come from the outside.

One of the central tensions and preoccupations among anthropologists over the past two and a half decades has been the politics of representation. The academic context in which much anthropology is practiced depends on an exclusive model of authority, itself highly implicated in the devaluing or delegitimizing of alternative forms of knowledge. While we have long struggled with this issue amongst ourselves, research participants are increasingly able to access and contest our scholarship as well. Changes in information technology and its accessibility have meant that groups who were previously unable to represent themselves may no longer need us to “give them voice” – if they ever did to begin with. The following paper will look at a preliminary fieldwork project in which these two issues converge. As a case in which traditional fieldwork methodologies seem untenable, we are given an opportunity to reflect on the role of anthropology for resistance movements.

As these concerns suggest, I do not see the utility of anthropology to emancipatory and resistance projects as a foregone conclusion. But, I think it’s a case worth making. To borrow Virginia Dominguez’ distinction: this paper is not a “salvage project,” an attempt to

1 For a review of examples see: Pels 1997
describe anthropology’s inevitable obsolescence. This is a “rescue project” - an attempt to figure out what anthropology might be able to contribute, despite its dark past and dubious present (Dominguez 2000). To do that requires thinking critically about what anthropology’s contributions and limitations are in regard to working with communities in struggle. If we are dedicated to moving towards a more just world, to ending exploitation, alienation, and supporting various other, worthy causes, we should ask: can anthropology help get us there? How? What are the stakes? What are the risks? (For us, and the people we work with.) Of our methodologies: what can we keep and what should be re-thought? Where might the limits of an engaged anthropology lie? At what point do the risks outweigh the benefits? And who decides? Ask any activist: academic anthropology and academic anthropologists remain highly suspect. Establishing trust, and finding a place for ourselves among communities of resistance requires critical reflection, open dialogue and sometimes taking no as an answer.

**Case Study: Barcelona**

In 2011, thousands of people took part in a wave of mass mobilizations, occupying and even living in plazas in places like Egypt, Spain, Greece and the US. While the scale and timing of these occupations have captured public and academic attention, these are only the most recent form of a kind of pre-figurative politics, experimental social projects in which people have attempted to make the worlds they wish to see. As parallels to state-based initiatives that attempt to govern migration and cultural diversity, voluntary intentional communities such as plaza occupations, address similar challenges with very different processes and resources. As a kind of social laboratory, occupations, and especially the more-established ones that I will focus on, offer interesting counter-examples to dominant modes of addressing difference.

Barcelona, like many cities in the state of Spain, has a history of land occupations and informal settlements going back at least to the period of mass urbanization between 1950 and 1975, a period of rapid change in which the population practicing agriculture went from 50%
of the total population to only 25% (Aguilar 2002). Informal land occupations became a means for some of the 1.5 million migrants arriving from rural Catalunya and other parts of Spain to procure housing⁴. Numerous neighborhood movements emerged in this struggle, through which basic services were gained and illegal settlements became formalized parts of the city (Gutierrez Barbarrusa 2004). In the early 1980s, following the end of the Franco dictatorship and the transition into democracy, small groups of mostly younger, Spanish and Catalan squatters asserted a more autonomous stance, occupying empty buildings and using them to establish houses and social centers, sometimes with the support of neighborhood associations. Many of these squatters were familiar with, and drew inspiration from earlier projects: the utopian community of French-revolution inspired Nova Icarians, the anarcho-syndicalist workplace collectivizations and libertarian ateneus⁵ of the Second Republic and Civil War-era, as well as ongoing forms of autonomous workers’ struggles that had persisted within the city despite the ban of trade unions under Franco (Fernandez Gomez 2010, Harvey 2012).

As travel into and out of Spain increased, okupas exchanged ideas with squatters from other parts of Europe - especially Germany, the UK and the Netherlands (Pruijt 2004). As a form of living protest squatters used reclaimed, empty buildings to critique growing urban displacement and real estate speculation, while promoting diverse causes including antimilitarism, anarchism, environmentalism, and Catalan independence from the Spanish state. In some cases they also became spaces for practicing alternative, collective lifestyles and enjoying the new diffusion of counter-cultural trends emerging in post-dictatorship Spain, such as the movida madrileña and punk (Pallares et al. 2002, Miguel Martinez Lopez 2002). The shift from the generic term ocupación to the abbreviated “okupa” as an identifier is generally attributed to this genre of occupation that sought to distance itself from the state, in contrast to earlier neighborhood movements that fought for inclusion.

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⁴ 1.5 million figure from Cardus i Ros 2005
⁵ “Cultural centers,” roughly
Unlike many parts of Europe, these autonomous, squatting communities have persisted, in the margins of most Spanish cities: flourishing in some moments and facing repression in others. While many of the people I spent time with in Barcelona insisted that squatting was in decline (due to changes in the law and eviction strategies by police and landlords), several dozen occupied social centers continued to hold weekly, public events. In addition, more clandestine, housing-only squats still numbered in the hundreds, if not thousands, their locations scattered throughout the city. Of the clandestine, housing-only squats we could also include those of migrants, many from outside of Spain and Europe, some of whom have occupied abandoned warehouses and factories since international immigration began to rise in the 1990s. Numerically, these kinds of occupations may likely surpass those of the more politically engaged, visible okupas, but due to the nature of the compounded legal precarity faced by some migrants, the numbers of these types of squats are harder to estimate.

These and the occasional take-overs of buildings as a protest tactic (especially universities) are the kinds of occupations that existed before the current financial crisis. Since at least 2008, occupations have entered a new phase with the wave of home evictions (and resistance) that has followed Spain’s real estate crash. During my fieldwork stay from February to July of 2012, unemployment for all of Spain remained above 25% for the general population and rose to 53% for people under 24\(^6\). As of October 2012, evictions throughout Spain were at an average of 500 per day, and homelessness within the city of Barcelona specifically had increased by 32% between 2009 and 2012; described as “discrete okupas,” families remaining in their homes, or occupying other empty houses, had become the new face of occupation.\(^7\) These occupations have been supported by groups emerging from the

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\(^6\) Unemployment figures from the Instituto Nacional Estadistica (INE): http://ine.es/

\(^7\) “Los Okupas Discretos” *El País* Feb 19, 2012; “Precariedad en la capital catalana” *El Periodico* April 13, 2012; España, Ángeles Lucas “Las víctimas de la crisis española que ocupan casas de los bancos” *BBC* August 13, 2012; Aguilar, Lianna “Más de 500 familias desalojadas por día en España” *BBC* October 9, 2012;
mass mobilizations and street protests of the 15th of May (or indignados) movement. Among the most visible has been the Plataforma por los Afectados de la Hipoteca (“Platform for Those Effected by Mortgage”) whose demonstrations in front of homes slated for eviction have successfully stopped some processes and pressured banks to renegotiate with residents. Long-term squatters have also been involved, helping to open and rehabilitate entire apartment buildings to house families displaced by the crisis, taking advantage of Spain’s massive empty housing stock. Edifici 15-O, which opened on October 15th of 2011 as part of the six-month anniversary mobilizations of the 15M, celebrated its one-year anniversary in October 2012. Another project, CSOA Guernika had just opened before I left the field in July and was in the process of being rehabilitated by a young and diverse group of squatters.

This occupied Barcelona emerges from beneath the surface of Barcelona, the tourist destination, center of modern art and architecture, and super-node of transnational capital. In the occupied Barcelona, people attempt to make the worlds they want, using what means they have – sometimes in opposition with each other, often in opposition to the state. It is within these intentional communities, and the explicitly politicized okupa social centers in particular, that I was interested in seeing how difference (ethnic, national, linguistic, gendered, etc.) were thought about, talked about, navigated and performed; how occupations were sustained over long periods of time. As oppositional, pre-figurative and creative projects, okupas exist parallel to the state-based projects governing difference. Both are subject to similar conditions and demands but operate on very different logics, with very different resources and goals. As established, long term occupations, okupas also have potential for serving as comparative cases that might be useful for understanding the emerging concerns of newer occupation-based movements such as the encampments of the 15M and Occupy Wall Street.

As my research proposal stated, I had wanted to “investigate how activists have built and maintained these diverse communities, in order to explore what alternative modes of
sociality autonomous spaces make possible and to reflect on the ways in which these oppositional forms of co-existence can help us re-examine the politics of difference.” From February to July of 2012, I began conducting fieldwork in Barcelona, spending time at, and participating in various long and short-term occupations. As a preliminary project, I had hoped also to use this time to see what projects were going on in the city and to find potential partners for more extended collaboration.

The two broad research questions I set out to explore were:

1) How do the residents of okupas develop norms and practices to address social division (ethnic, linguistic, gender, national, age, etc.) while building and sustaining autonomous social centers?

2) How do okupa activists locate themselves in terms of both local struggles and global activist networks? (Catalan nationalism, alter-globalization, etc.)

Before leaving for the field in February of 2012, I submitted and had approved, through the University of Massachusetts’ Institutional Review Board, a methodology in which I would engage in participant observation, conduct semi-structured interviews and collect okupa-produced media (films, zines, flyers, etc.). As preliminary fieldwork for a longer-term project, I had also hoped to find one or two sites for more engaged participation - anticipating some difficulty as an outsider, an American and an aspiring academic.

I began my time in the field by attending as many events, at as many okupas as I could. To find out what was going on I checked a weekly online events bulletin, Barcelona’s Indymedia page, and the recommendations from several University of Barcelona students who had either: squatted in the city previously, spent time in different squats, or were in the process trying to find a squat to live in themselves. Some of the events I attended included: benefit concerts for occupied TV and radio stations, work days in an urban garden, numerous debates, talks, and film screenings, community dinners, and theatre performances. In these spaces I made friends and contacts and developed a better understanding of what was happening and where. During the fieldwork period I visited a total of 31 okupas. Most still exist, but several have since been evicted.
By the end of February I settled into a steadier routine. I began attending twice-weekly Spanish language workshops at La Rimaia, a “Free University” held in a squatted apartment building in the Sant Antoni neighborhood near the historic center of the city. La Rimaia emerged in 2009, as a long-term project of student mobilizations against the Bologna Process – an effort by European countries to standardize their university systems, which was critiqued by the student occupiers as a re-organizing of higher education to better “serve the interests of capital” (Memorias de la Rimaia 2012). Following evictions of student occupations at the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona, students organized the occupation of a building in the neighborhood, near the University of Barcelona’s main campus. At the time I arrived to do fieldwork in Barcelona, La Rimaia was in its third incarnation, having been evicted from two prior locations over the course of 3 years. Occupying a six-story apartment building near the major Paral.lel Avenue, the current manifestation of the free university housed a public kitchen, a library, a bar, a free store, a bike workshop reserved for women and trans-identifying people, space for “self-taught” weekly classes in photography, theater, dance, philosophy, and various languages, as well as several floors of rooms dedicated to housing the fifteen or so people living there full-time.

Besides the language classes, another weekly event I took part in was a “Food Not Bombs” dinner hosted at a different house/social center: CSOA Panses, located in El Born. Every Thursday I’d arrive in the afternoon and help cook food that had been recycled (gathered from rubbish bins or crates outside of markets). We’d serve dinner in the street for free, mostly to other squatters and people in the neighborhood. A film screening or jam session usually followed dinner. Beyond these regular projects, I also joined a group of okupa residents who were trying to open a new house. For most of May and early June we went out nightly to check out potential occupation sites. We met with the “Office of Occupation” an advice group consisting of more experienced squatters and long-term residents of the city - some of whom were also licensed lawyers. During the day, a few of us would go to municipal
records offices to look at property information. We also spent time in the neighborhoods of potential sites, hanging out and talking with residents to get a sense of the political climate of a neighborhood, hoping to see what kind of reception a new *okupa* might receive. We did not succeed in opening a new house, but the experience was helpful for understanding how much time, labor, information and luck have to come together for a successful occupation to take place.

By the end of my fieldwork period in July, in addition to the activities described above, I had lived in two *okupas* for a period of two weeks each. While *okupas* vary greatly, it might be useful to have at least a general sense of how the ones I was familiar with tended to work for the purpose of this paper. Significant projects in themselves, houses and social centers were time-intensive and residents were often expected to attend weekly assemblies for the house itself, in addition to weekly assemblies for any other projects they were involved in and any house responsibilities, including: cooking, recycling food from garbage bins and cleaning duties. The programming at social centers reflected participants’ interests through the events they put together and hosted. Various tendencies (towards more feminist-oriented events, more concerts with punk bands, more solidarity projects with causes in Latina America, etc.) also changed as people came and went. Between themselves, squatted homes and social centers formed loose social and political networks, based on shared interests and personal friendships. Many were not connected, and some were unaware of each other’s existence, despite the weekly free bulletin of *okupa* events. This was likely due in part that nearly every week new houses were listed and those that had been evicted no longer appeared. From a talk at a formerly squatted, now legalized social center as well as through online searching, I learned that a citywide squatters’ assembly had once existed. The idea had been proposed again, but was decided against, as the risks and costs (of time and energy)

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1 In regard to concerns of divulging information: all of the steps described thus far are recommended in numerous free, online squatting guides, published in multiple languages in the hope that more people take up the practice. For a good example see: [http://www.okupatutambien.net/#](http://www.okupatutambien.net/#)
were seen to outweigh the benefits and it was unclear what kind of decision-making power such an assembly would have. Events were generally open to the public, and many occupations tend to be highly visible – graffiti and banners. Becoming a resident or a contributor to a social center, however, was regulated by a consensus decision to admit or not admit, which was decided in an assembly of members. For both of the houses I lived in I went through this intimidating process. Screening new members was seen as important, as trust and ongoing affinity were essential for sustaining a successful occupation over time. I noticed that people move between houses, or are evicted and start new houses fairly frequently. The overall effect can be stressful, but large empty housing stock allows for possibility of new projects to constantly emerge.

Demographically, most residents are younger, in their 20s and 30s, with exceptions of some middle aged and older residents, and a more diverse situation in the occupied apartment buildings such as the Edifici 15-O. Most decisions to participate or continue participation seemed highly individualized. The exceptions were some small families. At least two contacts had parents who had been okupas as well. There was a much broader age range among people who visited, or attend events and assemblies at social centers, than among those who lived in okupas. Squatters came from a diverse array of ethnic and national backgrounds, representing most of the countries in Europe and Latin America. There were fewer residents, in politically radical okupas, who were from Africa or Asia, despite the fact that these populations make up large percentage of the migrant population in the city. Language use varied between houses. Most interactions were conducted in Castilian Spanish, but some okupas, especially those more inclined towards Catalan independence spoke mostly Catalan. Other, more international houses, or houses with more people from Northern and Eastern Europe used more English. Gender seemed to be fairly evenly split within most houses, some were predominantly male, and others predominantly or exclusively female or queer-identifying.
At the scale of households and social centers, *difference*, as I had centered my first research question around, seemed to be negotiated and talked about at the inter-personal level, more focused on personalities, interests, and who got along with whom (or didn’t). Larger aggregations, in the form of collectives and projects were fluid. Sometimes blocs would emerge in assemblies, but these were generally discussed in terms of affinity towards pursuing certain lines of action rather than as fixed identities. Identity-based groups, when referred to, were often used jokingly: *los ingleses, los jipis*, etc.

**Fieldwork complications**

In conducting fieldwork anywhere, building trust is critical. Within the context of squatting, which is illegal in Spain, I sought to make clear from the outset the purpose of my being in Barcelona, and introduced myself as an anthropology student working on a project about occupations. This sometimes provoked concern. On several occasions, people I’d already met helped me out by vouching for me or helping to explain my interests. Later on, as I was welcomed into various projects, I found asserting a research agenda became harder as the conversations I was around became increasingly sensitive. I was able to access these spaces and participate in various activities, but the people I was spending time with were generally very much opposed to “being studied” or being themselves the subject of any recordings: photo, audio or video. In several instances, I witnessed other outside researchers turned down or avoided. In my own attempts to set up interviews, I was brushed off, though usually very politely. After numerous failed efforts and informal discussions on the subject of research and residents’ discomfort, I decided not to pursue formal, recorded interviews.

While much of *okupa* life was, and has long been, conducted around forms of active repression, the general strike that took place throughout Spain on March 29th marked a significant shift in the repression of activism in the city and as a result, my fieldwork. Following direct, violent attacks by the police on the day of the strike (in which dozens of protestors were injured, and several individuals lost eyes to rubber bullets) the regional
government established a website (“The Citizens Collaboration Against Urban Violence”) to elicit information from the public for identifying suspected rioters. In the weeks after the strike and leading up to a scheduled meeting of the European Central Bank, the Catalan autonomous police, the Mossos d’Esquadra conducted “preventative arrests” of “suspected vandals” (including several labor organizers and members of alternative media) and 3,000 additional police were brought into the city from other parts of Spain to assist the already-mobilized 4,000 security officers prepared for the May 3rd ECB meeting. Department of the Interior counselor Felip Puig justified the “hermetic-sealing” of the city by asserting that “Barcelona cannot become the anti-sistema capital of Europe.” As a response to the clampdown, one of my regular contacts went on “preventative vacation” for several weeks. During this time, evictions of several well-known okupas (including La Rimaia) took place as well, and police were seen on multiple occasions, checking identifications of individuals leaving social centers. Thus, halfway through my field stay I was already out one field site and would not see my friend and contact until several weeks later.

Confirming for many the sense that the police were concentrating their attention on okupas especially, the 2009 master’s thesis of the regional coordinator of the Mossos d’Esquadra, David Piqué i Batallé was released by independent media sources and spread throughout online networks. Subtitled “Sherwood Syndrome,” it argues that the modern-day “Robin Hoods” of anti-systemic activism are based out of occupied spaces, and to suppress this form of dissent - compared to low-level terrorism - requires collecting detailed information about okupas (which he has) in order to shut them down. The thesis begins with a detailed study of the okupas in the neighborhood of Gràcia, their history, current statuses and relationships to activism within the city and Europe more generally. Up until this point, it

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10 Baquero, Antonio “7.000 policías blindarán la cita del BCE en Barcelona” El Periódico, April 20, 2012; Barbeta, Jordi. “Hasta 2.000 guardias civiles y policías nacionales ayudarán a los Mossos en la cumbre del BCE.” La Vanguardia April 20, 2012
could easily read as a sympathetic anthropological or sociological study. It then transitions however, into a comparison of various classical military strategies, citing Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, the Prussian General Karl von Klausewitz, Julius Cesar and Miyamoto Musashi. Below this level of existential threat was the constant ongoing harassment of street policing: fines, or *multas*, are routinely given for things like not paying subway fare, street vending, occupation of a public way (which we received during one Food Not Bombs dinner) and even going through the trash. *Okupas* and other activist types often referred to the city as “Karcelona,” a pun on “cárcel,” the Castilian Spanish word for jail.

Despite the increase in surveillance and harassment, many social centers continued to offer classes and support various causes by hosting talks, concerts and neighborhood assemblies. Some, like la Rimaia and other occupied apartment buildings remained hubs for activist organizing. While *okupas* were described by one resident as an “ecosystem,” for their diversity and resilience in drawing on different resources to survive, some residents also referred to the broader *okupa* community as a kind of self-imposed “ghetto,” for its intentional and unintentional insulation from other segments of the city. While my research questions had tried to foreground the agency of *okupa* residents in asking how they located themselves, their projects were, especially at this time, highly circumscribed by external forces.

While occupations in the form of plaza encampments and eviction protests had gained increasing media attention and mainstream acceptability, *okupa* residents remained marginalized from the public as well as from other kinds of activism. More people might be squatting as “discrete okupas,” but that did not mean that most wanted to be. Nor would they necessarily want to be associated with those *perroflautas* who squatted by choice. Literally translating to “dog-flute,” *perroflauta* as a pejorative term is often used to describe a stereotypical squatter, or unemployed young person: disheveled, possibly drunk, begging for

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11 Writer Marc Caellas has also used the term to describe the securitization and “Disney-fication” of Barcelona (Caellas 2011)
money by playing music on the street, often accompanied by a dog. Long used to deride punks, *okupas* and members of other youth sub-cultures, the term was also recently used by conservative media outlets to describe the protestors of the 15M, in an attempt to discredit them as legitimate political actors. Compounding this image of the irresponsible and unstable squatter are lurid fictional accounts of *okupas* as places of rampant drug use, sex and general immorality.  

This other context became an unavoidable factor in doing research, and for understanding the difficulty of living in these spaces and the precautions residents take. The quote that provides the title of this presentation “No Cops, No Journos, No Anthropologists,” was a statement - made by someone whom I now consider a good friend - upon one of my self-introductions at an *okupa* where I eventually lived briefly. If the legal risk weren’t enough to complicate the role of a researcher, concerns about self-representation and the often sensationalistic or dismissive accounts of squatters by mainstream media and academics made establishing trust an even bigger challenge. In addition, okupa residents and social center activists produce a substantial amount of their own media: including reports and theoretical analyses of resistance events (of which I was successful in collecting a fair amount). As a result, making a case for putting up with an anthropologist was even more difficult task – the question I was stuck with, was what could I offer that they couldn’t do themselves and that would be worth the liability of giving information to an outside academic? Or broken down into its components, the questions I was stuck with were:

1) As policing methods increasingly draw from social science methodologies, how can anthropologists continue to work with communities of resistance without undermining forms of established “security culture”?  
2) In contexts where outsiders (specifically journalists and academics) have written about, marginalized and sensationalized the communities we work with, what can we contribute without undermining their own projects of self-representation?

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12 For an example, see: Care Santos’ *Okupada* (1997)
In informal discussions with *okupa* residents and further reflection upon returning from the field, I have come up with the following three project directions as a start for helping me to envision what kind of an engagement might address these concerns and provide something of value to these people who literally took me in: sheltered, fed and looked out for me.

The first intervention is oriented towards potential future collaborations with *okupas* and other radical activists. Before leaving Barcelona I had come across a number of former anthropology students who were currently squatting as well as squatters who were interested in anthropology. As a means of facilitating dialogue between outsider academics and full-time residents and activists I plan to write and print a set of short, easily accessible “fanzines” on various anthropological subjects as well as those geared towards resistance more specifically as a means of making some potential contributions to activist theorizing and beginning a more informed discussion of what anthropology has looked like and what it could offer, to be taken or leaven by research participants as they see fit. Such topics might include: historic forms of ungovernability and quiet modes of resistance, drawing on the work of James C. Scott; discussion of the role of facilitators as “powerless leaders” as described in some of the theorizing of Pierre Clastres; time orientations and squatters as “an affluent society,” drawing on Marshall Sahlins, and de-naturalizing notions of property and capitalism through works like those of JK Gibson-Graham.

The second intervention I imagine could be a more academic-oriented discussion of the limits and possibilities of engaged, militant, and/or activist anthropologies, in conversation with the work of Charles Hale, David Graeber, Jeff Juris, and many more. What can we offer, what risks can we take as academics? What authority can and should we claim? What is actually useful to activists? Jeff Juris’ “militant ethnography,” for example:

In involves a particular way of relating to movements *after* the moment of research, seeking to contribute to ongoing strategic and tactical debates. This happens on at least three levels: (1) collective reflection and visioning regarding movement practices and emerging cultural models; (2) collective analysis of social processes and power relations that affect strategic and tactical decision making; and (3) collective ethnographic reflection
regarding diverse movement networks, how they interact, and how they can more effectively reach out to wider constituencies.” (Juris 2008: 299)

Where this kind of research might be tempered is through conversations with activists and social movement participants to decide what should be produced and published by whom in order to prevent academic theorists from dominating the discussion about forms of resistance, which they might admire, but cannot possibly themselves represent.

Finally, a third mode of intervention could be geared towards a broader activist and public audience - engaging the processes of marginalization and framing that make violence against activists, squatters, migrants, etc. politically and publically acceptable. Using comparative cases to identify and counter discursive operations that legitimize violence and incipient forms of state terror (utilizing especially the scholarship of Jeff Sluka and others) could be especially important in this moment of “Crisis.” Activists in Barcelona have already pointed out the parallels between the introduction of neoliberal adjustment in Latin America, and the austerity discourse in Europe, both in their economic outcomes and in the escalation of state repression. Especially useful for elaborating on alternative/subaltern modes of belonging, and even conceptions of heritage, might be articles that highlight the oppositional history of Barcelona, drawing on Holston’s concept of “insurgent citizenship” (Holston 2009) as it might pertain to the historical and present-day role of neighborhood movements and anti-eviction campaigns as creating forms of belonging through communities of resistance. Barcelona as a city has a long history of protests, barricades and street fighting. As alternative media, Facebook statuses, and even people on the street proclaimed following the March 29th strike – *la Rosa de Foc ha tornat* – “The Rose of Fire has returned.”

**Works cited**


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