‘WE DON’T LEAVE’:

THE RIGHT TO STAY PUT IN A BARCELONA NEIGHBORHOOD

By

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the fight to stay put in Barcelona. Despite the discourse of the right to the city and the right to housing have become popular in recent years, forced displacement is largely normalized. Relocation is generally offered as a dignified solution by private companies and institutions, and many accept to leave their houses without resistance. This shows an overarching lack of reflection on the importance of local embeddedness for personal wellbeing and political activity. That is, on the centrality of countering forced mobility to enable the practice of Henri Lefebvre's understanding of the right to the city. Located in the neighborhood of Sant Andreu, the case of the houses of Pons i Gallarza provides an opportunity for addressing this gap. After three years of intense social struggle against a real-estate company who wanted to force them away, the neighbors have managed to stay under the motto 'No Marxem' (We Don't Leave). Their success makes it a relevant case for conceptualizing the actual fight in the face of gentrification, not only in an overtly antagonistic way but also through a critical engagement with the politics of the everyday. Thus, based on analytic ethnography, informal conversations, and eight semi-structured interviews, this thesis contributes to the scholarship about both the right to the city and the right to housing by placing the right to stay put at the center of current debates. Not only theoretically, but also in a practical way.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Protagonists

ROGER, RAI & EMIL: neighbors of the house nº 113

MÍRIAM: former neighbor of the house nº 113

MIQUEL: neighbor of the house nº 111

SISTERS (LÍDIA & YOLANDA): neighbors of the house nº 109

VITO, YENI, ZAIRA & TAIS: neighbors of the house nº 115

MAITE: former neighbor of the house-local nº 105

PEPI: neighbor of the house nº 107

SÍLVIA & CARLA: neighbors of the houses nº 49 and nº 51 of Renart Street

MARIBEL: owner of the tobacconist's shop on the corner of Riera de Sant Andreu Street

IVÁN: long-life neighbor and former councilor of the political party CUP in Sant Andreu

CARME TURA: former landlord of the houses

SALVADOR TURA: heir of the houses

VERMONTA SL: real estate company, new landlord of the houses

FINQUES CAMPANYÀ: private company in charge of managing the houses

LAURA: lawyer of the Tenants Union

Introduction

On November 23, 2017, a man knocked on the door of the houses 115 and 113 of Pons i Gallarza Street. Puzzled by his formal attire, their residents Vito and Roger asked him who he was and what he wanted. The man introduced himself as the new landlord and offered them money in exchange for leaving the houses. Some of their leases were indefinite and others temporary, but all still in force. Without hesitation, they told him they had no intention of moving elsewhere and asked him to leave them alone. They had long been concerned about gentrification in Sant Andreu, and they knew that their old low-rise houses were a candy for speculators. Who would not want to live in a complex of eight low-rise houses, with the same cream color, height, and structure, surrounded by pedestrian streets, and located in a quiet and beautiful neighborhood well connected to the city center? "Surely richer people would pay much more than what we can afford", Roger said. They knew that the former owner Carme Tura had died a few months before. Thus, the following day, Roger called the management company Finques Campanyà to ask if ownership had changed. They replied they knew nothing. Distrustful, he discovered that Salvador Tura, the heir, was sounding out potential buyers. Roger and Míriam, from number 113, then put a note under every door: "We call on each and every one of the neighbors affected by this situation to meet, so that we can organize ourselves and prevent any speculator from buying the houses to throw us away and make profit". They all met at Miquel's place, the neighbor of the 112, and agreed to ask Salvador to buy the houses. He ensured he would consider their offer in case he wanted to sell them. But soon after, they discovered he had already signed an earnest money contract. And then it all began. They set up weekly meetings, released a communiqué, and made banners with the slogan 'We Don't Leave'. The new landlord, a real estate company called Vermonta SL, wanted to evict them, remodel the houses, and sell them at a higher price. But they wanted to stay. So, for the following three years, they did not stop lobbying, organizing events, and demanding a solution from the City Council. All the neighbors joined the cause: their children, the so-called Sisters aged 62 and 67, and even Pepi of 82 years old. Finally, in the spring of 2020, the City Council bought the houses and arranged a 'sweet equity' contract in exchange for housing. The press presented it as a victory against gentrification, and on June 20, 2020, they made a celebration with fireworks, music, and many people gathered in the street. "We haven't left", they claimed.

I settled in Sant Andreu in September 2020, three months after the end of the state of alarm in Spain due to the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which had been activated on 14 March 2020. I had already been frequenting the area for about a year, since I was part of a research collective on gentrification called Barcelona Posa't Sostre (Barcelona Put a Roof on You). We used to meet every week at La Cinètika, a squatted social center in the neighborhood that brings together political and cultural activities. The Sindicat d'Habitatge de Sant Andreu (Housing Union of Sant Andreu), a group of both activists and people with housing problems, meets there every week since it was founded in 2017. And back then the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza were very much involved. That is where I first heard of their case. We wanted to develop a gentrification index by comparing the evolution of rental prices in various districts of the city, as they all seemed to follow the same pattern. Our aim was to warn about the future impact of urban transformations in the city, such as that of the new high-speed train station in the nearby neighborhood of La Sagrera. The group, still active, was mostly composed of architects, and I was interested in finding research spaces outside university. I met one of them, Marc, in an assembly of a housing group in the neighborhood where I used to live before, Clot. We got involved in the case of an evicted family who was being displaced from neighborhood to neighborhood. And being both concerned about the effects of this forced displacement, he invited me to join this research collective they had recently created.

One day, a tall and thin guy wearing a black beret and a leather jacket came up. He was Roger, one of the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza, and greeted the rest with a tired gesture. They knew each other from the Housing Union of Sant Andreu, and he told them that they, the neighbors, were negotiating with the City Council. I asked them what it was about since I had not heard about it before. At that time, they still did not know if they would finally manage to stay, and tension was growing among themselves. They briefly explained me the story. But it was when I visited the houses that I saw the motto that has led me to write this

thesis: 'No Marxem' (We Don't Leave). "That's it", I said to myself. "It is not just about the right to housing; it is about the right to stay put". A few months later, Roger came into La Cinètika. Euphoric, he told us that the City Council had announced they were going to buy the houses and arrange a 'sweet equity' contract in exchange for housing. This meant a transfer of housing from the private market to the public stock, and the guarantee that they could stay for many years paying a very low rent while continuing to refurbish the houses. Then I thought that this case could serve to denounce forced displacement and the limits of demanding relocation and the right to housing. But to do so and make it known, three questions had to be answered: Why did they find themselves on the verge of being expelled? Why did they want to stay? And how did they finally managed to not be displaced?

Over the past years, gentrification and evictions have dramatically increased in Barcelona. Since the real estate-finance crisis hit in 2008, 1,710,963 people have been evicted in Spain, among which 323,705 in Catalonia (Ginebra *et al.* 2020, p. 9), which has raised social mobilization. However, while there has been a burgeoning interest in the idea of the right to the city, this has led to a certain conceptual bloating making its meaning increasingly indistinct. Today, it is used by social movements, academics, institutional authorities, and NGOs alike. And on the one hand, this has prompted drawn attention to fundamental needs such as housing and access to basic services in cities. But as some have pointed out, this has also led to an erosion of its former radical meaning (Purcell, 2002, 2014; de Souza, 2010; Merrifield, 2011; Goonewardena, 2011; Garnier, 2012; Carlos, 2013). Indeed, mainly claimed through the right to housing, the current discourse on the right to the city usually fails in challenging displacement and enabling a collective 'usage' of urban places of encounter. Relocation is often offered as a dignified solution by private companies and institutions, and many accept to leave their houses without resistance. Only about 20% of total evictions

between 2018 and 2020 have been addressed by the housing movement.[1] So, despite the spread of the claim about the right to the city today, there is much more displacement than what is believed to be *taking place*.

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) built his working hypothesis on the right to the city as the possibility and capacity of urban dwellers, mainly the working class, to create and produce the city. His theoretical elaboration took place in a context marked by political uprisings and social antagonisms in 1960s France, as well as by some epistemological ruptures in the social sciences of the time. Precisely one year before the events of May 1968, in his well-known essay *The Right to the City,* Lefebvre argued that modern urbanism was a strategy of the State and capital to commodify urban life. Following Marx, he stated that "urban concentrations have accompanied the concentration of capital" (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968], p. 69), for which the city deserves special attention. According to him, modern urbanism had created greater spatial segregation, the commodification of space, and the impossibility for workers to fully participate in city-making processes, being confined to an alienated, urban everyday life (Molano, 2016, p. 4). Thus, the city had to be the primary space of struggle of the working class. But as a non-orthodox Marxist against class reductionism and economicism, he advocated for a more holistic understanding of social life. On the one hand, he criticized Marxism for not having looked deeply at the relationship between space and capitalism, and particularly the city. On the other, closer to anarcho-syndicalism or libertarian socialism, he believed in withering away of the State and the collective self-governing of society (Purcell, 2014, p. 145). Eventually, this led to his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1958.

[1] Calculated by comparing the eviction orders posted on the Telegram Channel 'DesnonamentsBCN' to the data published by the General Council of the Judiciary, available at: https://www6.poderjudicial.es/PXWeb2021v1/pxweb/es/10.-Juzgados%20de%20Primera%20Instancia%20e%20Instrucci%C3%B3n/-/OUJII021.px/

His founding approach to the right to the city was not about a mere visiting right. Lefebvre defined it as a right "to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete 'usage' of these moments and places" (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968], p. 179). This was not pointing to a merely right to live a comfortable, individual life but rather stressed a collective dimension. Based on a radical conception of politics for which urban space was meant to be the key stage, his motivation was to overcome alienation and achieve social transformation. Therefore, according to him, the right to the city was not about users claiming more access to the existing capitalist city, but a movement to go beyond, to cultivate and expand the potential of urban life. Key here is the distinction he made between the 'city' –"a present and immediate reality, a practico-material fact" (p. 103)– and the 'urban' –"a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought" (p. 103). By claiming the right to the city, his aim was to intervene not only the material but the social morphology of urban society: a social form and field of relationships, a place of desire and linking up of times. According to his well-known theory of space as a social product, space is not just the concrete materiality people encounter in their daily environment –perceived space–, but also its mental planification and representation –conceived space– and daily experience –lived space (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]). Therefore, the right to the city is aimed at empowering inhabitants to both *appropriate* and *participate* in the production of urban space; not only in planning the material space of the city but, above all, in producing and reproducing all aspects of urban life. That is, the right to the city is about the possibility and capacity of *citadins* to restore the 'use value' of the city as an *oeuvre*.

Nowadays, however, its original radical meaning has been reduced to the satisfaction of basic needs and wellbeing within the framework of representative and liberal democracy. According to Purcell (2002), most contemporary initiatives using the right to the city to face the "disenfranchisement of democratic citizens" (p. 99) remain within the frame of the

nation-state and an understanding of rights as ends (Purcell, 2013, p. 142). Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2010) has also referred to this trivialization of Lefebvre's founding conceptualization. They both agree in that it has been reduced to a mere claim about the right to housing and participation as consultation. Indeed, as Ana-Fani Alessandri Carlos (2014) has pointed out, the focus on the management of the city has concealed the new role of the State as guarantor of the process. Thus, she says, access to urban services has been achieved, but at the cost of ignoring a larger historical process: the domination of financial capital over the city (Molano, 2016, p. 16). Andy Merrifield (2011) has also criticized its "bourgeois reappropriation" (p. 468). And highly critical with the so-called 'participatory ideology', Jean-Pierre Garnier (2012) has condemned its conversion into a mere slogan (p. 223).

In general, these critical scholars with the current understanding of the right to the city seek to return to Lefebvre as a 'logical place'. Not in an orthodox way, but to articulate one version of a more political delineation of what such a claim would entail. Overall, their proposal is to free the concept of democracy from the liberal-democratic State to make it "an intentional, productive, and perpetual 'project' into the future" (Purcell, 2022, p.5). Their aim is thus to focus on producing and not just occupying urban space in all its dimensions. That is, the right to the city as the "collective ownership and management of the space" (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974], p. 450). Depending on more Marxist –as that of David Harvey– or libertarian –as that of de Souza– positions, the role that the State must play varies. But overall, they all agree that both real *participation* and *appropriation* must be the two main axes of activity for implementing the right to the city. However, following Jean-Pierre Garnier (2012) neither Lefebvre nor Harvey have properly thought about how to practically transform the urban world. According to him, both fall short of what is required "in terms of the ways and means that would make it possible, if not to end it, to at least weaken this regime, even if only on the urban front" (p. 218). Yet, neither do any of these critical scholars provide practical

proposals. They remain mainly theoretical and lack concreteness. None offers a clear path as to how to practically recover the radical meaning of the right to the city.

The aim of this thesis is to address this gap. In the absence of clear practical proposals, Garnier wondered: "does this mean that the 'right to the city' is doomed to be only a subject of academic debate? What is the point of a return to radical critical thinking about the urban if it has no impact on the social reality of the city?" (2012, p. 224-225). But he did not offer any specific proposal either. Therefore, by looking at the case of the houses of Pons i Gallarza, I seek to provide not only a theoretical reflection on the centrality of local embeddedness for human association and political activity, but also a way to put into practice the 'radicality' of the right to the city –in terms of "a radical demand for a democratization of control over the collective means of producing urban space" (Brenner, 2013, p. 43). In his essay *The Right to Stay Put* (1984), Chester W. Hartman argued for the need to guarantee home-stability due to the large costs of breaking ties that result from forced displacement. He wanted to place at the center the "ownership of other kinds of property" (p. 305) to raise concern about the bonds people build through usage. Basically, his point was the same than that made by David Imbroscio in *Can We Grant a Right to Place?* (2004): that a suitable living environment is an impossible goal if people are constantly faced with the thread of forced uprooting. In his words, "much of human association continues to be structured by geographic place" (p. 578). And so did Kathe Newman and Elvin K. Wyly state in their essay *The Right to Stay Put, Revisited* (2006): displacement diffuses political power (p. 26). Thus, concerned with the fact that the right to stay put would imply a 'duty' if to be formally enforced, Hartman offered some practical-legal measures. But together with Imbroscio, this is not my purpose. My aim is to analyze the claim and use of the right to stay put in its political rather than juridical way. Not only theoretically, but also in a practical way.

This work is based on three weeks of 'strict' fieldwork in April 2022, but also on both my previous engagement with the neighborhood and a first intentional contact over the 2021 Christmas break. In October, being interested in the use of the word 'neighbor' for mobilizing solidarity at a local scale, I already interviewed three members of the Housing Union of Sant Andreu –which resulted in an article published by the *Radical Housing Journal* (see Rivera *et al,* 2021). Yet, it was in January when I finally decided to devote this thesis to their case. They told me that no one had done an in-depth study of their story before, and that they would really like to have it written down. This is what finally prompted me to such an undertaking. So, I have been lucky enough to count on their motivation, which allowed me to set the stage during the Winter term to then be able to start my fieldwork straight away. I actually conducted the first semi-structured interview during the Christmas break, and in February I opened a shared folder in google drive with their common email account. They began to upload some documents and materials of different types (audios, photographs, minutes of their past assemblies, their contracts, etc.), and I also shared some questions I was planning to ask them in person. Thus, I already had considerable knowledge of their whole trajectory when I arrived there in April.

Once there, following Lofland and Lofland's (1984) 'analytic ethnography', I started reporting on in situ information of the rhythm of their surroundings, their forms of conviviality, and their type of interaction. I could also gain a lot of information by means of informal conversation, as well as by spending time in their everyday lives. But to have a better understanding of certain aspects –such as the chronology of the conflict and their personal, more intimate experience– I conducted eight semi-structured interviews. Four to current residents of the houses, Roger, Miquel, Vito, and the Sisters; one to a former inhabitant of the only house which does not have a certificate of occupancy now, Maite; one to Artur, a long-life neighbor who lives next door; another one to Maribel, the owner of the tobacconist's shop on the corner; and finally to Ivan, a close friend of them and former

councilor of the left-wing political party Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) in Sant Andreu. As for the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza, I selected them according to their level of interest in participating in my research. Besides, based on the topics I needed further detail, they recommended me to interview the rest: Maite for knowing a lot about the history of the houses; Artur for his knowledge about the past life of the neighborhood; Maribel for her external view of the conflict, as well as for her awareness of the opinion of many neighbors; and Ivan for his well-known trajectory of being involved in many neighborhood struggles.

Overall, my aim is to make this case known as an experience of collective action in the face of displacement. Following Ananya Roy (2020), I believe that methodologies for housing justice must uncover any hegemonic and unquestioned narrative so that those affected can react, mobilize, and stay in one's own place (p. 16). But despite a recent growing literature on the topic, there have been relatively few academic studies on what constitutes (successful) resistance to gentrification (Lees *et al.* 2017, p. 346). Thus, not only it is essential to conceptualize the *right* to the city and the *right* to housing, but also the actual *fight* to stay put in the face of planetary gentrification. And not just focusing on antagonistic uprisings, but also by studying resistance at the micro scale and politics of the everyday. To this end, I take the story of the houses of Pons i Gallarza as a relevant and inspiring case. And following a sort of chronological order, three chapters structure the thesis. Each one is the answer to one of the three main questions: Why did they find themselves at risk of being expelled? Why did they want to stay? And how did they finally managed to not be displaced? First, in *Home, sweet candy: A strategy of expropriation*, I explore the conditions of possibility that put the neighbors at risk of being displaced by looking at the houses, the neighborhood, and the city as three key interrelated scales. In the second chapter, *Ask the dust: Memory and everyday life,* I give an account of the reasons that gave rise to the motto 'No Marxem' (We Don't Leave) to claim their right to stay. Finally, in *Hell out of yourself: A tactics of appropriation,* I explain the way they organized themselves and the key factors that allowed them not to be displaced.

Chapter 1. Home, sweet candy: A strategy of expropriation

"In order to understand history it is necessary to know not only how things are, but how they have come to be."

Franz Boas, *The Methods of Ethnology*

1.1. The good-houses of Pons i Gallarza

In what is popularly known as the 'northern area of Sant Andreu' right next to the Avenida Meridiana, on the border with the working-class district Nou Barris, there are the houses of Pons i Gallarza. Walking from the central square of the neighborhood, Plaça de l'Orfila, they are located at the very end of the pedestrian street of Pons i Gallarza. They are a set of eight old, low-rise houses of a triangle shape placed at the corner with the diagonal Riera (Riverside) of Sant Andreu Street. Opposite, the typical 'corner bar' dominates the scene. It is called 'Casa Li' (Li's House), and it has a certain opulent appearance. Almost every day around 5pm, an old man sits outside, smokes, drinks, and hardly ever talks to anyone. There are usually more men than woman, and some of the neighbors of the houses often spend their evenings sitting there. It has a metal bar attached to the windows, where people usually stand, while smoking and having a drink. And right on corner, an old red plastic sign is stuck to the wall; one of those already banned in Barcelona that says: "Restaurant Bar". This is how Maribel, the woman from the tobacconist shop just across the road, described it to me once I asked her about the atmosphere: "We, the upper side of the neighborhood, are not considered to be from Sant Andreu. For the police, it's as if we were the Bronx". In a way, "time seems to have stopped", I said to Artur one day we met at Li. "But that is good, no?", he answered. This is one of the things that caught me the most. Not because of being slow, but for it would be very unusual to find this interaction in other places such as the city center. And the houses are located at the very heart of this whole, particular environment.

FIG. 1: BARCELONA FROM ABOVE

FIG. 2: THE HOUSES OF PONS I GALLARZA

One question came to my mind. Why is it that people behave in different ways depending on the place they find themselves? This is nothing but a question about the relationship between space and human agency. But here it is particularly relevant. For, what might have been the role of all this physical and social environment in the case of Pons i Gallarza? As Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau claimed, the scale of the everyday must not be disdained. For Lefebvre, it is not just that social forces shape our everyday life but what we do with them through the way we 'live' them (Sheringham, 2006, p. 12). Indeed, as he stated in his three-volume work *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947-1981), "man must be everyday, or he will not be at all" (Lefebvre, 1991 [1947], p. 127). And by this he meant that emancipation must start from the common self-conduct of everyday life. For, as he put, "days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet –here lies the contradiction at the heart of everydayness– everything changes" (Lefebvre, 1987, p. 10)[2]. Despite their political differences, both Lefebvre and de Certeau believed that technocratic systems never fully succeed. There is always a constant and obstinate defiance to be found 'down there', a 'rest' they called *tactics*. Lefebvre already referred to the level of tactics as those forces that seek their moment of seizing opportunity (Ertürk, 2021, p. 3). But it was de Certeau who developed it in depth. As he claimed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), there is something always slipping away in the mapping of the city. On the one hand, maps hide the mode of

[2] This does not contradict his basic collective approach but meant to criticize Marxism's totalizing vision of social phenomena for not paying attention to everyday life. So, it is about to be everyday within the collective.

production of the city –what he referred as *strategy*: "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (…) can be isolated from an 'environment'" (de Certeau, p. xix). On the other, they do not capture the work of the people they position –what he called a *tactic*: "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality" (p. xix).

Philosopher Ian Buhanan (2015) explained very well what de Certeau actually meant: "Looking down on Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre de Certeau was struck by the fact that from there he could 'see the whole' of New York. (…) But, he wonders, (…) can the city really be seen in this way? (…) The problem is precisely one of misrecognition: the life of the city, the constellation of lives that make a city what it is, the actual experience of the city in other words, is not contained in the concept of the city" (p. 118-119). De Certeau realized that there is a double dynamic which proves that it is impossible to perceive space from an isolated, relativist position: a macro, strategic power; and a micro, tactical force. Thus, this made him conclude that space is a problem of perspective: "There are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 118). Space is the product of everyday life, not just its location. And to demonstrate this capacity for 'invention', he wanted to grasp people's 'ways of operating': "the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production" (de Certeau, p. xiv). Indeed, this is the dynamic that I noticed in the case of Pons i Gallarza, and which inspired the titles I gave to the first and third chapters. For, this case is about a struggle between the strategy that made the houses a commodity and the tactics the neighbors employed, the users according to de Certeau.

In 1990, the former owner of the houses, Mr. Ferreri, left them to Carme Tura as an inheritance.[3] At that time, Pepi was already living in house number 107, as well as the so-called Sisters, Lídia and Yolanda, with their parents in house number 109. But despite the change of ownership, everything remained pretty much the same. The houses were in a very damage and unsanitary state, so they had an informal agreement: they paid a very low rent in exchange for taking care of needed repairs. "They always let us do. We have always done what we needed to do. The landlord never did anything, nothing, never paid or anything. And that's why she didn't increase our rent much, because we did everything ourselves", the Sisters said to me when I asked them about the history of the houses. As time went by, Carme did increase their rents a little bit. But they were still very low. Maite, the neighbor of the number 105 at the time, paid less than 100 euros per month. Her house was a local, it did not even have a certificate of occupancy. And as she told me: "This woman had no need for money. But the private company in charge of managing the houses, Finques Valls, did. They put a lot of pressure on her, but she always said there was no need. (…) It was when she died that they started to look like crows to see what they could get out of it". But they found a first obstacle. The Sisters' lease was of thirty years, and those of Pepi and Maite were for an indefinite period. So, it would not be easy to force them away.

When Carme Tura passed away in 2017, her nephew Salvador inherited the houses. However, since he was not the direct heir, he had to pay high taxes to accept them. Thus, he decided to sell them. But no one notified the neighbors. They discovered it from people in the neighborhood. Because as many told me: "This is like a town". Finques Campanyà, the new company managing the houses, never notified them either. Six months later, when the man came and introduced himself as the new owner, he told them that their leases were not fully legal to drive them away. Soon after, they received a letter from Finques Campanyà

[3] According to the neighbors, Mr. Ferreri and Carme Tura were a couple. But no one could assure me that.

saying they were no longer in charge of managing the houses, leaving them without knowing to whom they had to pay. For, they could be sued for eviction if they failed to pay a month's rent. So, the neighbors ask them what to do. Finques Campanyà answered they did not know anything at all. But a few months later, they found out that the real estate agency Vermonta SL had bought them for 580,000€ for renovation. Their intention was to sell them for more than 1M€. So, it was all about a planned strategy of expropriation. Since the neighbors wanted to stay, the owners wanted to make them fall into breach of contract and then force them away. "A very explicit case of gentrification: to buy, expel, reform, and sell", Roger said.

In 1968, sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term 'gentrification' to refer to both the displacement and replacement of working-class people by the middle class (Smith, 1996, p. 31). Already in the middle of the 19th century, a fundamental urban tension arose. European cities collapsed with the arrival of industrial production, and the working class became both needed and marginalized at the same time. While it was needed as cheap labor, it was not profitable enough for what was beginning to take shape as a new strategy of capital accumulation (Smith, 2002). Capital started to flow from the industrial sector to real estate speculation to 'fix' the expansion of capitalism in territory. It was all about the city expression of a historical process termed by David Harvey (2004) as 'accumulation by dispossession': a combined process of requiring the establishment of exclusive private property relationships with assets not previously embedded in property and non-property social relationships. And Pons i Gallarza was about to be an example of this. As Miquel told me, "These houses were a candy. That is why men often came to visit them. Of course, here in the middle of Sant Andreu…".

1.2. The town-neighborhood of Sant Andreu

Sant Andreu del Palomar is one of the seven neighborhoods that belong to the district of Sant Andreu, a traditionally working-class area located in the northern part of the city

(Anguelovski *et al.* 2018, p. 467). In the past, it used to be a town. But in 1897 it was annexed to Barcelona through a Royal Decree signed by Queen María Cristina like other areas of the city (Cózar, 2013, p. 17).[4] This is how Iván described it to me: "It is clear that the great Barcelona has swallowed former, popular villages. Except Horta and Sarrià, all the other current neighborhoods were annexed by force". He is one of those who keep referring to Sant Andreu as a town. Even an exhibition I went to visit at a cultural center called Ateneu l'Harmonia began by making it explicit: "Because they hide our history from us and want us to believe and accept that we are a damn *barri* (neighborhood) owned by them". Indeed, Sant Andreu still preserves an 'old town' character. Not only physically, with its traditional low-rise houses and pedestrian streets, but also in terms of its sociocultural activity. There are still many long-life residents, there is not too much tourism compared to more central areas, and many people know each other.

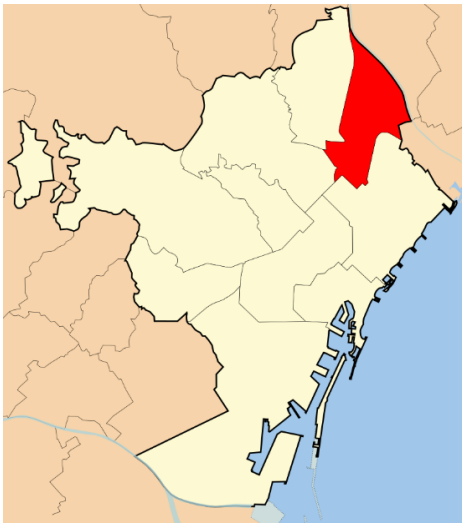

FIG. 3: THE DISTRICT OF SANT ANDREU

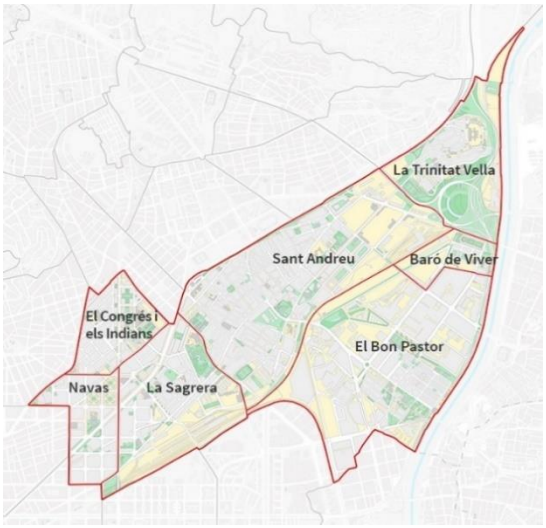

FIG. 4: THE NEIGHBORHOODS OF SANT ANDREU

At the end of the 19th century, Sant Andreu was an active area in both agriculture and artisan production. Yet, the advent of electricity and machining during the 1910s led to the

[4] According to what Ivan told me, as well as based on what I read in the cultural center Ateneu l'Harmonia, it was an illegal opperation; for the law only allowed the annexation of municipalities adjoining the old city quarter, and Sant Andreu was not. Yet, I have not found official sources to verify this.

emergence of a strong cottage industry which began to change its landscape. After the annexation, those chosen as representatives of the 'new district' stressed the need to pave some streets, improve the sewage system, and create new transport lines. And this grew Sant Andreu's anarcho-syndicalist roots. It was already a politically active area, and the increasing number of workers then fueled social struggles. By way of example, as Ivan told me, in 1936 Sant Andreu del Palomar was renamed Harmonia del Palomar until the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to disassociate its name from the ecclesiastical power. But the period of war also awakened solidarity among neighbors, with the appearance of soup kitchens managed by local defense committees. They were precisely located in Pons i Gallarza Street –now the Casal Católico (Catholic Centre)– and in Monges Street –at that time called Elissa García, an anarchist fighter of Sant Andreu who was killed during the war– where the squatted social center La Cinètika is located. "Come on, as not to be influenced by all of this", Roger told me. "It's in our memory. It's as if it were our collective unconscious".

However, contemporary urban transformation processes have endangered its traditional social fabric. In 2012, an urban development plan that sought to demolish Sant Andreu's old town. It was going to entail the eviction of many people, as well as the loss of part of the heritage of the neighborhood. Thus, in response to it, some neighbors created a platform called Salvem el Casc Antic – SCA (Save the Old Town) and managed to halt the process. Many of the houses had been affected for almost 100 years by urban development plans, and this was leading to the degradation of many houses. For, assuming they were going to be demolished, their residents did not dare to renovate them or even get permission to do so. As the former spokesman of the platform, I asked Ivan about it and he told me "they wanted to expropriate around 300 houses with the aim to build two big 'civic axes', or 'cynic axes' as we used to call them". It was like a cross that ran through Sant Andreu. And this meant that many houses in the old town, mainly inherited by working-class families from the industrial era, would be demolished. This would allow the construction of buildings of a

larger height. So, in short, the old town was going to be destroyed. "The reasons?", Ivan said. "To 'clean' the area and comply with a law that required a certain percentage of green zones". That is, they wanted to pull down part of some houses and make a small square, for example, which counted as a green area. And this was the case of Ponsi. Only the old structure would have been kept the same. The inner courtyards would have been expropriated".

FIG. 5: HOUSES WITH BANNERS OF SALVEM EL C.A.

FIG. 6: MARKET SQUARE OF SANT ANDREU

After years of social struggle, the City Council passed a special protection plan of 130 houses "with the aim of preserving the heritage and features of the village of Sant Andreu",[5] among which the houses of Pons i Gallarza. Local actors succeeded, therefore, in their attempt to face planner's intentions. However, the mobilization of the concept of heritage has also favored real estate speculation and fueled gentrification. As Chiara De Cesari and Michael Herzfeld (2015) have pointed out, this relates to "the paradoxical emergence of critical heritage studies from the very preoccupations that also nourished [in the 1980s] early neoliberal uses of the heritage concept" (p. 175): the use of nostalgia as a tool in neoliberal campaigns of reordering the urban environment to suit anti-welfarist policies. Indeed, in Sant Andreu, the preservation of this town-like character has made the aesthetic of low-rise

[5] Statement of Janet Sanz, deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, as quoted in García Mateu, D. (2017, May 28). L'Exprés de Sant Andreu. El diari independent de Sant Andreu del Palomar.
Available at: http://www.expresdesantandreu.cat/noticies/2017/05/28/casc-antic-sant-andreu/

houses a 'good opportunity' for capital investment. And the creation of green areas has attracted wealthier classes with higher cultural capital (Anguelovski *et al.* 2018, p. 472).

Following Sharon Zukin (1998), this is all a result of the conversion of culture into an engine of inter-urban competition strategies (p. 826). That is, a cultural strategy of economic redevelopment intended to heighten competition between cities, for which the commoditization of heritage is highly effective. The houses of Pons i Gallarza are a prime example. As the Sisters said: "They thought this was a candy. They wanted to throw down everything inside and make it new to make money. They wanted to build luxury houses, with even a swimming pool, while preserving their traditional appearance". This is not to question that struggles over urban heritage often occur to face neoliberal urbanism or other forms of violent spatial planning (p. 173). But as Ivan said, "gentrification is partially a consequence of this. The bottom line, though, is that another job has not been done. Businesses are infinite and so are the loopholes that they find. But it has also to do with putting limits to rents, sales, and to the percentage of territory that can be bought within a given space. But since nothing has been done well, this is the result".

1.3. The city-branding of Barcelona

Over the past years, gentrification has dramatically increased in Barcelona. An average of 19 evictions takes place every day, and around 4,700 people find themselves to be homeless nowadays (Arrels Fundació 2020). As the Observatory of ESC Rights (ODESC) stated, we should wonder "whether the emergency situation has not already turned into a sustained housing crisis during the last 12 years" (Ginebra *et al.,* 2010, p. 5). The waiting list for accessing social housing was about three years in 2019, and it has increased even more in recent days (Navarro Rupérez, 2021, p. 9). To a great extent, this is explained by the deplorable 2% of public housing over the total stock, as opposed to 48% in Amsterdam or 30.2% in Berlin (Uzqueda *et al.* 2021). Like in many other European cities, gentrification has

intensified in many neighborhoods; 42.7% population spend nearly half of the salary on covering rents (Observatori DESC 2020, p. 9), and the property structure of housing is getting increasingly concentrated in the hands of global corporations and vulture funds. Following Lefebvre's (1974) theory of space, the case of Barcelona is a prime example of how neoliberal structure has turned from the production *in* space to the production *of* space.

The roots of these processes date back to the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975, when a series of legislative changes began to ensure new strategies for capital accumulation. In the aftermath of Civil War, home ownership rates were very low in cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, and Bilbao: five, six, ten, and twelve percent of their total population respectively (Naredo, 2010). But as noted by Melissa García-Lamarca and Maria Kaika (2016), "home ownership soon became an integral part in the process of state building" (p. 317). And with the rise of neoliberalism, the State reduced the provision of social housing and focused on stimulating private homeownership. Up until the 1980s, mortgages were only available through the state-controlled Spanish Public Mortgage Bank. However, through the 1981 Mortgage Market Regulation Bill, private operators began to enter the mortgage market. Likewise, the Boyer Decree of 1985 removed the former rent control and tenancy protection for new rental contracts, boosting home ownership through mortgages with an attack on rentals (García-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016). Thus, "when the real estate-finance crisis hit in 2008, banks played a key role in dispossessing hundreds of thousands of families who defaulted on their mortgage payments" (García-Lamarca, 2020, p. 2).

This set of changes formed an integral part of a series of socioeconomic measures that were to ensure the imminent integration of the Spanish State into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the mid-1980s and 1990s, a process of deindustrialization converted major European cities into centers of services and leisure activity (Taller VIU, 2006, p. 11-12). In Barcelona, this process was

intensely accelerated by the 1992 Olympic Games, when a new stage of urban redevelopment began. They brought major road infrastructures and the whole transformation of the historical center. Industrial neighborhoods were redesigned and a progressive *museification* began. So it was announced by the famous motto *Barcelona Posa't Guapa* (Barcelona, make yourself beautiful) driven by the City Council in 1985, which promoted the creation of both the Barcelona Contemporary Culture Centre (CCCB) and the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) between 1988 and 1992 (Taller VIU, 2006, p. 62-65). The aim was to achieve a competitive image of a Mediterranean and Modernist life to be used as a cultural *brand*. However, under this discourse of re-creative paradise, the revalorization of many residential areas entailed the displacement of a great number of residents (Delgado 2007; Fernández González 2014; Portelli, 2015). At the time, most working-class people were residents of these neighborhoods that suddenly became sought-after spaces. And this was seen as an obstacle to modernization and real estate speculation. So, both a certain political and legal framework was needed to make it possible to 'empty' the city and then fill it with wealthier classes.

FIG. 7: POSTER BCN POSA'T GUAPA

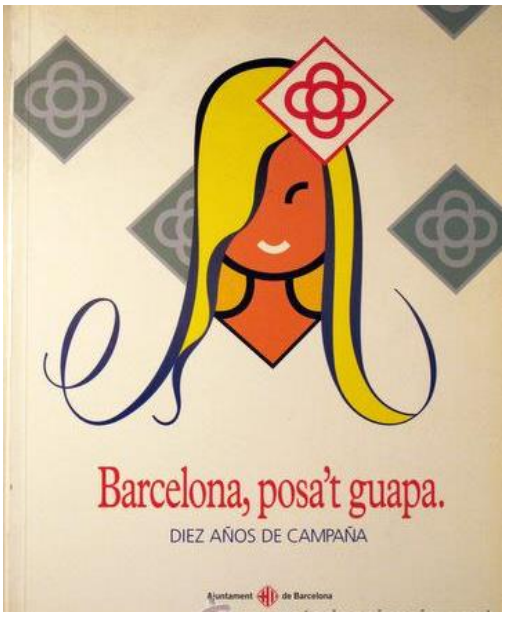

FIG. 8: POSTER 10 YEARS BCN POSA'T GUAPA

One key strategy for this process of expropriation has been 'real estate mobbing', a method of harassing or 'clearing' residents out of housing. Originally linked to the school and work environment, mobbing is an English expression where the noun 'mob' refers to the crowd, the multitude, the vulgar, the plebs, or the populace, and the verb 'to mob' means to harass, to run over, to attack *en masse* (Tuset del Pino, 2004, p. 65). Unjustified attempts to raise rental prices or terminate existing contracts, supply cuts, lack of maintenance, pejorative treatment of certain profiles, or physical and verbal aggressions against tenants and small owners are some examples of it. It has been condemned by institutions such as United Nations, but it is still a largely invisible phenomenon. In Catalonia it is considered illegal by the Law 18/2007, of December 28, 2007, on the right to housing (LDHC). However, even today, fifteen years later, it is generally ignored. As explained by the *Guide to Act Against Real Estate Mobbing* (2021) the pattern is always the same. First, a company interested in a property tries to convince the younger residents, usually tenants, to leave in exchange for money. And when only elderly owners are left, they make more pressure to the point of practically coercing them to sell their apartments at very low prices. Although it did not reach the second phase, this is also what happened in the case of Pons i Gallarza. "At the beginning we didn't care, but later....", Miquel said. "Come on, stop it… We live here and you are taking us down… and this is harassment".

Some paradigmatic examples are that of Raval, previously called Barrio Chino (Chinatown) (Fernández González, 2014), and La Vila Olímpica del Poblenou (Navas Perrone, 2016). In both cases, old buildings were demolished, streets and squares 'rehabilitated', and the working classes finally deported. A process that, according to anthropologist Manuel Delgado, consisted of the murder of both neighborhoods. This was also the case of the 'Casas Baratas' –low-cost social housing; literally, 'cheap houses'[6]– located

[6] The known as 'Casas Baratas' where four districts built under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) in the context of the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition.

in one of the city's most stigmatized neighborhoods of the district of Sant Andreu known as Bon Pastor (Portelli 2015, p. 119). Its demolition begun in 2007, and the discourse used for its justification –euphemistically defined as the 'Redevelopment Plan'– involved a symbolic attack on the identity and self-representation of the residents of the neighborhood. As Pier Paolo Pasolini's (2000 [1976]) pointed out concerning the effects of the second industrial revolution in Italy between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, this resulted in a truly 'cultural genocide': the standardization of behaviors and the complete erasure of 'marginal', local practices. And a similar thing could have happened to the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza. For, as noted by even David Harvey (2002): Barcelona's recent evolution [has] involved the disappearance of a large part of the areas that provided the city with its symbolic capital.

So, why did the neighbors find themselves on the verge of being displaced? Well, first because their houses were seen as a commodity by a new landlord, Vermonta SL, who saw in their structural conditions a good opportunity for capital investment. However, this real estate company was not the only one responsible, but counted on the collaboration of Salvador Tura, the heir; and Finques Campanyà, the private company in charge of managing the houses. Likewise, not only did they all find the houses attractive for their morphology but for their location in such a beautiful, culturally active, and well-connected neighborhood. It is therefore a case part of the gentrification process of Sant Andreu, which is also embedded in the larger branding process of the city of Barcelona. So, it was all about the interplay of three different scales based on an economic and legal framework at both the state and international levels. But in the face of such structural forces, was it not simpler to accept the money and move to 'more comfortable' apartments? Why did they want to stay?

Chapter 2. Ask the dust: Memory and everyday life

> "If, as your rich friends say, there are no gods, and the skies are dark above us, what should a man fight for, but the place where he had the Eden of childhood and the short heaven of first love? If no temples and no scriptures are sacred, what is sacred if a man's own youth is not sacred?"
>
> Gilbert K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*

2.1. Beyond a roof

In 2020, I visited the houses for the first time. I was coming along La Riera de Sant Andreu Street, from where you can see their back side and part of their inner courtyard. Back then, they already had what again caught my attention when I started my fieldwork: several banners hanging from the facade, bicycle wheels, and an old, disguised mannequin. It all has a sort of a pirates' aesthetic, and certainly draws people's attention. If you walk by, it is very common to see someone looking at them. No doubt, what stands out most is the slogan 'No Marxem' (We Don't Leave), painted with black spray, and a white banner with Mr. Monopoly crossed out in red. It got stuck in my head from the very first day. And two years later, it all remains practically the same. Why did they actually want to stay? The houses are certainly not in very good condition. Why this insistence on not moving anywhere else?

FIG. 9: THE HOUSES OF PONS I GALLARZA FROM BEHIND

When I asked the Sisters about it, they showed me a picture of the banner they hung on the balcony when it all begun. They read it aloud: "Here we were born and from here we don't leave". I was surprised. They are in their mid-sixties, and this is a very long time. "Our

grandfather moved in around 1939, my mother stayed, and we were both born here", they said. Their contract is now in Yolanda's name, the older one, and has a term of 30 years. Thus, they had never considered the possibility of moving elsewhere, let alone that someone would want to kick them out. Neither had Pepi, the 82-year-old neighbor from the number 107, who has lived there since 1935. "What were we going to do with all we had accumulated for so many years, from our parents and the rest of the family?", Lidia, the younger one said. They told me about their memories as children, the amount of time they used to spend playing in the street, and how their parents would take the chairs outside almost every day. "As in villages, to chat with the neighbors after dinner". Sílvia and Carla, from two other houses, have lived there for about 12 years. And Maite, who used to live in the number 109, moved in around 1980. But now she just keeps it as a warehouse since hers is the only one without a certificate of occupancy. The others –Miquel, from number 111; Roger, Míriam, and their two sons Rai and Emil from the house 113; and Vito, Yeni, and their daughters Zaira and Tais from the 115– arrived later, between 2015 and 2016. But they are also lifelong residents of the neighborhood. "That's why we all knew we didn't want to leave. Like them, I have the feeling of rootedness that it is my town, it is my neighborhood", Miquel told me.[7]

At first glance, anyone could appreciate how their conviviality differs from what you would think of contemporary, urban everyday life. They share a very particular cultural intimacy. In the afternoon, when the weather is nice, they take the chairs outside and chat. In Catalan, this is known as 'prendre la fresca' (take fresh air). They are usually having a drink, but sometimes they just sit down and talk while their children run, play, or cycle around. There is always someone who stops to say hello, talks for a bit, and leaves. When I first visited the houses, this was one of the things that caught my attention the most. From September 2020 to September 2021, I used to live right next door, three streets away, and

[7] The neighbors do not conform an aging community. Apart from the Sisters and Pepi, the rest are about 40 years old and have little children.

always thought that their whole surrounding has something special: a different rhythm. I would see them very often and stop for a moment. And during my fieldwork, I felt it was all pretty much the same. Nothing had really changed. Not that they sit together every day. But just that it is common to see some movement around and find someone to help you if there is anything you need. I remember once there was a power outage in my place. It was midnight. I texted Roger and half an hour later it was fixed. "Do you know what I mean?", I told Maribel once we were speaking about our relationship with them. "Yes, of course", she said. "For me they are part of my family. If you have any problem, don't hesitate to knock on the door, Roger, Vito, Miquel... and that's something to be thankful for. For me it's the life of the old neighborhood. From door to door, you know".

Jane Jacobs described a similar scenario in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1993 [1961]), where she imagined what a well-balanced city would look like "in terms of the stores where people leave keys for their friends" (p. 59). She said it metaphorically, but it is actually a common practice among them. Yet, their coexistence is not free of tensions and disagreements, especially after so many years of struggle. That is, it is not that they have a perfect, organic life like what Ferdinand Tönnies (2001 [1887]) identified as *Gemeinschaft* – 'community', a transparent and meaningful social structure associated with 'people from the countryside', based on personal relationships of intimacy and trust, corporate and collective ties– in opposition to *Gesellschaft* –made of impersonal relationships between strangers, and typical of market-oriented 'civil society'. But their interaction is certainly unusual compared to how life unfolds in the city center, and they do have a sense of commitment to whoever is a neighbor. Without romanticizing it, since there is nothing harmonious in their daily life, they try to keep alive a sort of communitarian way of life. Once we were sitting down there, in front of the houses, Miquel said that neighbors are a part of his family, those who live next door, who are a part of your life, and with whom you must share space and time. "Is this also why you didn't want to leave?", I asked him. "Of course," Roger intervened. "The house

is a whole, it does not only involve these four walls and the furniture inside, but Carles from the pharmacy, Mari from the tobacco shop.... It is where it is, and it is a whole".

2.2. With one's own hands

My fieldwork began on a Tuesday night, a week after my arrival in Barcelona. I had not seen any of the neighbors yet since I had spent the first days at my family's place, which is in another neighborhood half an hour away. I had been working on my final assignments, and that day I had submitted the last one. So, I sent a message to Roger to have a drink and catch up. It was about ten o'clock at night, and he told me he was at Miquel's place. "Come over", he said. I got there in five minutes, and he opened the door with a beer in hand. They had blues music playing in the background, and Miquel was standing behind. "The houses", I thought. "How beautiful they are". I think so every time I go inside. Each one is different, but they all have a kind of rustic aesthetics. They are small and their roofs are made of beams. On the kitchen table, they had a book of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán –a famous writer of novels set in Barcelona in the 80's, in which he narrates traditional recipes in a literary way. They told me they had started a new tradition. Every Tuesday, one would choose a recipe, cook it together, and then invite someone to have dinner. But since they had just begun, they did not have a guest yet. So, I was the first. *Spaguetti alla Annalisa* was the dish of the day.

One can think of this 'invented tradition'[8] as something without much relevance. But it is not trivial at all. In *How Societies Remember* (1989), Paul Connerton's reflection on how memories are embodied in social life sheds light on the significance of these everyday acts. According to him, practices of embodiment can be classified in three distinct categories depending on their degree of formality –that is, the level of specification of how a

[8] In *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm coined the term 'invented tradition' to refer to "both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period –a matter of a few years perhaps– and establishing themselves with great rapidity (p. 1). Here I somehow extend its meaning.

performance unfolds, as well as the occasions for its variation. He called 'everyday rituals' to those techniques of the body involved in everyday interaction, like the habit of "talking with one's hands" (p. 79-81). An example is the way Roger opened the door with a beer in hand, and then looked outside in case there was a neighbor to whom say "hi". In the other extreme, there are those codified, political rituals such as coronations and sumptuary ceremonies. But the second type is the more relevant here: those ritual behaviors for certain moments of the day, such as meals. Their everyday life is full of them. Getting together every Tuesday to cook one receipt of Montalbán, taking the chairs outside, or the way children often knock-on neighbors' door are just some examples. According to Connerton, these practices allow for sustaining localized memories since mental spaces are always supported by material spaces (p. 37). And indeed, this whole environment seems to give them a sense of identity and self-esteem. As Maurice Halbwachs (1980) said, "every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework" (p. 139); for, "to lose their location would be to lose the support of the tradition that [as a group] gives them their unique reason for existence" (p. 135).[9]

We sat at the table, and I looked around. I stared at the work tools hanging on the wall, spanners, hammers, screwdrivers... Roger and Vito have some in their houses too. I asked them how the work had been going on, since I knew the City Council had been fixing the roof for the last months. "Well," they said. "But in the end, we had to tell them how they had to do it.... You know, we have done it all ourselves. We know these houses better than anyone else". Indeed, their handmade outlook makes them look like spaces very much alive. But I asked them what they meant by having done it all themselves. "Look, the first year I did the bedroom, then the kitchen, then the bathroom, and so on. And Roger too. When we came in, we started doing a lot of refurbishment work", Miquel said. "Exactly. When we

[9] In *Between Memory and History:* Les Lieux de Mémoire (1989), Pierre Nora said that "we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (p. 7). Indeed, all these gestures and rituals are embedded in Sant Andreu as a symbol of what Nora called *lieux de mémoire,* sites of memory where a sense of historical continuity persist; and probably because "there are no longer *milieu de mémoire,* real environments of memory" (p. 7).

came in, this was crumbling to pieces. We have done it all ourselves. And like us, everyone else", added Roger. They told me they had a verbal deal with Carme before. They paid very little, and she let them do everything they wanted. She did not take care of anything, but they could do and undo whatever and any time. "So, we knew we would lose with any type of formalization, as there was no record of everything we had done", they said. "All the work and effort that we made was not written down anywhere. And of course, we were not going to leave after everything we had done. This was clear to all of us from the very beginning".

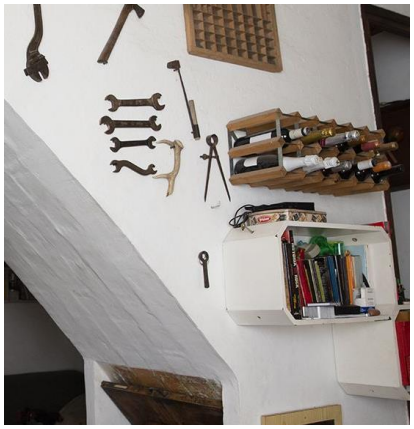

FIG. 11: WALL OF ROGER'S HOUSE

FIG. 10: ROGER IN THE DINING ROOM OF HIS HOUSE

This matter came up in almost every conversation. Sometimes I did not even need to explicitly ask them why they wanted to stay. They would start by saying they had done it all themselves, and that they were thus not going to go anywhere else. The Sisters told me that their family had gradually enlarged the house, for as time went by there were more and more of them. Among many other things, they did the electrical installation and covered the bathroom, which used to be outside in the courtyard. Maite told me a similar story: "When I went in, it was all very gloomy. That house was very dark, and I actually started to live there without a certificate of occupancy. One room had even been used to make fire on the floor, imagine. And well, I started to fix it up little by little". The case of Vito and Yeni is a similar story. They were looking for a cheap place just before their first child was born, and then they found the house. But according to Vito it was in very bad conditions. So, they talked to

Carme and agreed on the same. They would be able to live there by paying a low rent in exchange of refurnishing it themselves. "The houses were empty before we arrived. The advertisement for our place had been up for five days, and that of Roger for even longer. No one had the courage to come here and fix everything", he said.

Most of them work in the construction sector, or as electricians; and they usually take any short-term jobs they find. During my fieldwork, Miquel told me once he had found a one-day job that same afternoon. It is just an example, but it shows their employment situation and the rhythm of their everyday lives. Their hands do speak for themselves. Large, thick, and of worn skin. That is why they were able to do it all by themselves. All are somehow used to manual labor, except from Míriam and the Sisters, who used to work as clerks –the oldest is retired, and the youngest is on sick leave because of the side effects that the conflict has had on her health. So, they are all working-class families with low-income statues – another major aspect that explains why they wanted to stay. In addition to the feeling of rootedness and the great deal of both effort and time spent fixing up their houses, they had real economic constraints in finding a place nearby. "We looked for some options, but… What was affordable for us was around Manresa [a municipality 50km from Barcelona]. And I thought, will I have to come every day by train?", Lídia said. This is how they put it in their first communiqué: "We will not leave, above all, because we have nowhere to go".

FIG. 12: MIQUEL, VITO, AND ROGER

2.3. A matter of principle

Overall, though, "it was a matter of principle", Roger said when I asked him what his final statement would be. "It's because we are not homeowners, people say. So what? Man, the right to housing must be above that. At least you have something to say, don't you? Ok, someone has bought this with the aim of kicking me out to make profit. Well, I say no with the same strength. I'm not leaving because I was here first. Or because I live here, and I want to continue living here. It is about the dignity of each one of us. But you can only step your feet if you feel your house is yours. If you don't, you won't stand up for it". The Sisters told me that the motto No Marxem not only referred to the fact they had lived there all their lives, but that they had always paid the rent. So, they would not accept to leave their place. "Why should they throw you out if you pay your rent?", they said. "If they want to get rich, they should not do it at the expense of people's lives. That is why our message is to resist, resist, resist. But being aware that the struggle has a cost, uh...". "Come on", to put it in Vito's words. "It is about the right to stay; it is an injustice to throw someone away. Because of course it is about the right to housing, but if you already have a house and on top of that they come and take it away from you… Come on man, go fuck yourselves, right?"

One way or another, they all referred to their opposition to real estate business. They expressed it in different ways, but they all showed anger about society not conceiving housing as a necessity. "Because it affects all of us, almost 70% of many people's salary goes directly to rent. And this is unfair", Miquel claimed while shaking his head. However, they rarely used the word right. So, I explicitly asked Vito about it. He told me that they were not generally focused on changing or claiming the law but more concerned with local action and mutual aid. "I do not really believe in rights as such.... Well, yes, yes, yes, I believe that everybody must have a place to be if they want so. But what I really believe is that neighbors are who can help you the most". Miquel also pointed out his reluctance towards more institutionally oriented types of struggles. "It's a capitalist State", he said. "And laws favor elites. Otherwise,

how is it possible that you can be kicked out of your house even if you have always paid your rent?". For him, the most important thing is to take care of each other, on a day-to-day basis. "And we could have done it better", he said. "But nobody grows us in a collective spirit, in mutual help. This is what I think here we all believe in. It wasn't just for me. It's a matter of empathy". As Roger explained it to me, it was not only that they would have been left with no homes; "as a neighborhood, it would have been a collective and identity defeat".

This leads to a classic question raised by Manuel Castells: "is the neighborhood a unit of social life or not? Is there a coincidence between 'social space and geometrical space'?" (cited in Pickvance, 1976, p. 49). In Barcelona, the *barrio* (neighborhood) has historically been a symbolic place, not only a certain kind of urban fabric but also a space of socio-cultural expression and political mobilization. Under the Franco dictatorship, the demographic growth and migration of rural population led to a chaotic expansion of urban centers. Thus, in those neighborhoods with poor living conditions, a new form of popular organization called 'moviment veïnal' (neighborhood movement) emerged (Santacana, 2011). Their actions were originally intended to tackle urban, local trade-offs. But from 1970 onwards, they took on an explicitly political dimension aimed at overcoming the new formal representative democracy. They became a decisive 'school of civil democracy' for the end of the dictatorship (Radcliffe, 2011), and all this made the neighborhood a relevant space for local, everyday life. The use of the word *vecino/a* (neighbor) by the housing movement today can be considered its legacy, and the case of Pons i Gallarza serves as an example. For them, the neighborhood was a cornerstone of their claim about the right to stay.[10]

So, what is a neighborhood? Contrary to what could be inferred from an approach like that of The Chicago School, the neighborhood of Sant Andreu is not a solid, homogeneous,

[10] I take their reluctance to the 'rights discourse' but their occasional reference to the word 'right' as a proof of their distancing from liberal democratic ideology and their sympathy for Marxism, anarchism, and more libertarian positions –like the so-called 'theory of needs', which defines rights as basic needs (see Baratta, 1998).

and unified body; a 'given' reality whose organicity is increasingly endangered by the globalization of the city. But opposite to orthodox Marxist theories, nor it is a secondary morphology.[11] Neighborhoods are what Arjun Appadurai (1996) defined as "existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variable realized" (p. 179). They have a double character. They are not just context-produced environments, but also context-producer milieus with the generative ability of producing locality as a "structure of feeling" (p. 182). Based on Lefebvre's (1970) critique of what he referred as a sort of 'neighborhood ideology' (p. 199), Delgado put it in a similar way: the mediation between physical and social space, or the totally private and public. The neighborhood "is no longer what it was", a sort of anachronism that made sense when it was a religious, administrative unit. But the term still allows us to refer to a source of shared identity; "our neighborhood", either from a biographical experience, or to allude to a specific type of 'close' sociability.[12] As Vito said, "No Marxem is not only the neighbors of Ponsi. No Marxem is all of us".

In short, then, three aspects explain why they wanted to stay: memory, materiality, and ideology. Or, in other words: their feeling of belonging, to the past and to home as something beyond a mere shelter or roof; economic constraints and their investment of time in literally hand-making their houses; and their political commitment with challenging the subordination of use value to exchange value. Yet, how did they actually mobilize these claims? How did they make their voice heard? And how did they finally manage to stay?

[11] In *El barrio en la teoría social* (The Neighborhood in Social Theory) (2005), Ariel Gravano identifies two sociological visions for the treatment of social phenomena in relation neighborhoods: one mechanistic and ahistorical –from 19th century communitarian utopians to the Weberian 'typologism' of the Chicago school–, and a dialectical and historical one –as a set of theoretical (counter-)offers with Marxism as a backdrop (p. 163).
[12] Taken from his personal blog 'El Cor de les Aparences', where he publishes comments he sends to his students. Available at: http://manueldelgadoruiz.blogspot.com/2016/03/a-que-llamamos-barrio.html

Chapter 3. Hell out of yourself: A tactics of appropriation

"How to make the best of both strong and weak –that is a question involving the proper use of ground."

Sun Tzu On, *The Art of War*

3.1. Weaving the web

One Saturday night, I met Roger to have dinner and listen to what he calls 'good music': blues and rocksteady. A few years ago, he was part of Radio Bronka –a self-managed radio station in Barcelona born from the associative movement of the neighborhood of Les Roquetes in 1987– where he used to run a program about the history of music and political reflections. The night we met his whole house seemed to turn into an imaginary set with smoke, cheese, bread, and wine. We had made this plan before I left for Vienna, while I was living in Sant Andreu, and he would start talking about singers and their lives, then suddenly jump to literature, and finally go into politics. And always, at some point, a neighbor would show up. That day was no exception. When I arrived at his house, some neighbors were gathered in front of the door. They were talking about the firing of a friend, and then the Sisters came. They were coming back home, and they stopped to say hello. After a while, we said goodbye and entered his house. "Oh, the neighborhood…always on the move", I said as I closed the door. "Yes", he replied. "You who want to know this whole story… the neighborhood has been the driving force behind all this". "But some of you are also angry with each other. This proximity must have made things difficult too", I said. He turned around and looked into my eyes: "Of course. But you know what? They key has been to look as if we were all together all the time. As if we were one. Do you know this book by Sun Tzu On, *The Art of War*? Look weak when you are strong and look strong when you are weak".

As all neighbors told me, they started organizing themselves from the very first day. As soon as the man knocked on the door to say he was the new landlord, Roger and Míriam put a note under every door to call for a meeting. At the beginning, they met even more than

once a week. And by lobbying Finques Campanyà, they found out that Salvador had sold the houses. Then they became distressed. They did not know who the new landlord was nor who to pay, and this put them at risk of being displaced. For if they defaulted on payment, they could be sued for eviction. So, they opened a joint e-mail account, wrote to the city council, released a communiqué, and contacted the press. All this in just one week. They began to function as an assembly, set up turns to speak, took minutes, etc. Some had certain experience, but for others it was the first time they were organizing collectively. In the case of the Sisters, for example, they were very afraid at the beginning. But as they said, they slowly began to empower themselves. "Until we figured out who to pay… uh… nerves, anxiety, fear... But well, with the meetings and all that, we got encouraged with each other".

Soon after, though, they realized they were very few. As Vito explained it to me, "we all gathered, all the neighbors of the houses. But we soon realized we needed more body, more strength". They lacked knowledge on how to proceed, what steps to take, which rights they had, and above all how not to make a mistake. Thus, they first decided to go to the Sindicat de Llogateres – SLL (Tenants Union) –a Catalan organization founded in 2017 in response to the worsening of the housing crisis, and particularly due to the increasing amount of population with rental problems. "Then we soak up everything", Roger told me. "At the time, we did not know anything, and they gave us a humbling treatment". The Tenants Union was formed in addition to the internationally renowned 'Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca – PAH' (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), which was set up in February 2009 in response to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 (García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016, p. 425). The PAH is known for their tactics to stop evictions, which consists of creating human barriers to block the entrance to threatened apartments, and it is still very active today. However, as the name suggests, it was mainly focused on people affected by mortgages – which relates to the fact that ownership has traditionally been the main means of access to housing in Spain. Yet, with the financial crisis, more people started to opt for renting. And

with the rising rent prices some felt it necessary to focus on the tenant's status (Rivera *et al.,* 2021, p. 146). This is the case of Pons i Gallarza. As tenants, the neighbors found themselves at risk of being displaced. So, they decided to ask the Tenants Union for help.

"I remember the first day we went there", Miquel said. "They were a union not as strong as it is now, with a very small local in the neighborhood of Poblesec". Once there, they were met by a lawyer, Laura, and she was clear from the very beginning. She told them they had to be together and do go each on their own. They had to be a team, and especially when it came to the owners. As Miquel explained it to me, this was key. For, apart from the legal, informative, and personal support they received, the Tenants Union gave them a lot of visibility. "Because it is a union at the level of Catalonia, they have a much greater convening power than what eight houses can achieve", he told me. However, at the same time, the neighbors themselves always set the pace. Laura stood with them throughout the whole process, but they were always taking the lead. "It was crazy. As the assembly of No Marxem, we used to meet once a week and then go to the Sindicat de Llogateres every fortnight. But besides, we went to the assemblies of many other organizations in the neighborhood: 500x20, the Ateneu Llibertari del Palomar, the Ateneu l'Harmonia, the people of Noi Baliarda…[13] And we were also involved with the Sindicat d'Habitatge de Sant Andreu, of course. It was already in project, but it was finally formed out of our case".

FIG. 13: LAURA (MIDDLE), ROGER, AND TWO MEMBERS OF THE SLL ON THE RADIO

[13] These are all left-wing collectives based in Sant Andreu. They do cultural and political activities.

The Housing Union of Sant Andreu was founded in 2017 with the aim of countering gentrification in the neighborhood, and it was presented within a press briefing updating the case of Pons i Gallarza. Two years before, the housing movement in Barcelona had begun a process of decentralization. The former activist of the PAH Ada Colau won the municipal elections in 2015, and many then entered the City Council. In a way, this gave the movement visibility and strength. But for some it meant a loss of autonomy. Thus, besides the appearance of the Tenants Union, some critical voices with its institutionalization prompted the creation of new housing groups. All together they can be considered a third actor within Barcelona housing struggles. And today, there is one in almost every neighborhood. They are generally called 'sindicats d'habitatge' (housing unions) and their focus is the production of locality, the use of direct action, and the strengthening of social relations. Their logic can be described as that of materializing territorial fights in everyday life to counter speculation and social segregation. That of Sant Andreu was one of the first, and from what they all told me it became their mainstay when they no longer had strength. As Miquel said, "they were the ones who stood with us all the time. The ones who would come one day, hang the posters, and were always there. This daily support was the key, and people who dedicate their time and effort to others so altruistically... wow, this is a blast".[14]

3.2. Ma(r)king the street

Materializing claims, emotions, and intentions in public space was also a major aspect for their success. Their tactics did not only consist of seeking support in different collectives and friends, neither of just lobbying through social media, but also of intervening in the

[14] According to the 'framing alignment' theory, this process of networking can be considered on of 'frame bridging': "the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem" (Snow *et al.* 1986, p. 467). For, as a result, they ended up creating a multi-layered network. First, between the neighbors of the houses themselves. At the neighborhood scale, between several associations and collectives –despite being dedicated to different topics such as football, feminism, the independence of Catalonia, anarchist cinema, etc. And at the city scale, not only did they align themselves with the Tenants Union and other housing groups, but also with politically close media.

street. From the very first day, they took possession of space. In less than a month they launched a first communiqué on paper for mailbox delivery, organized a banner-making workshop, and called for a demonstration to prevent Salvador selling the houses. They had found out that his daughter had a green store in the neighborhood, and their intention was to gather people in front of the establishment and make them feel ashamed. Thus, they did not ask for permission from the City Council, neither made public what route they were going to follow. On the contrary, the days before, they went to many assemblies to gain maximum support. Finally, on December 22, 2022, about 200 people showed up. The demonstration started at Plaça d' Orfila, then moved to Finques Campanyà, and ended in front of the green store. Some took charge of hanging posters, and in the end a lot of tension arose. Roger told me that "people at the demonstration suddenly realized we were accusing someone they knew, and then said that she, the daughter, was not to blame. It was true, we were already aware of that. But we had no other card to play". The next day the store remained closed, and the neighbors organized a vegan, hot chocolate party.

FIG. 15: POSTERS AGAINST FINQUES CAMPANYÀ

FIG. 14: BOYCOTT TO THE GREEN STORE

"We did not stop", the Sisters answered when I asked them about the rhythm with which they were mobilizing themselves. "It was very tiring. Within a few months, we organized more banner-making workshops both in La Cinètika and in the Plaça d'Orfila; there, in front of everybody. We also organized the press briefing to both update on the status of our case and announce the creation of the Sindicat… and many things, many things". As a result, they became a benchmark for many people with housing problems. And as Miquel said, "this was because people are not used to ask for help. But after seeing us…". Many then got to know about their case, and in bars and many other places people talked about them. In a way, they made the neighborhood their own territory. And by literally marking the streets, they empowered themselves. When Salvador sold the houses, they occupied the green shop of his daughter again to make them say who the new owners were. They finally got the name, Vermonta SL, and then went to Vic –another city 72km from Barcelona– to hang posters around their headquarters. "You know, visualization and making banners is very important", Miquel claimed. "It's what allows your neighbors to know about your situation and takes away the fear of staying at home. It makes the fight big. In the end, all Sant Andreu knew about our case. But this was because we did a lot of street work".

FIG. 17: LAUNCHING OF THE SINDICAT D'HAB. DE S.A.

FIG. 16: ROGER SPEAKING IN PUBLIC IN P. D'ORFILA

They also used social media platforms. In fact, it was through Facebook that they managed to contact the new owners. When the husband of Salvador's daughter, the owners

of the green store, finally told them that Vermonta SL was the company which had bought the houses, the neighbors googled the names of the people in charge and Sílvia discovered that Roger had friends in common with one of them. Moreover, they created a twitter account, @NoMarxem; one on Instagram, @nomarxem; and a blog. As some have noted in other cases, this gave them visibility and allowed them to reach a broader audience and forge new mediatized publics. In their analysis of #Ferguson, Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa (2015) concluded that platforms like Twitter have become essential to contemporary social actors. But they claimed that "the long-lasting effects of digital modes of activism remain hotly debated" (p. 9). Thus, they believe it might be worth it to examine the advantages of taking these forms of activism seriously while remaining attentive to the limits and possible pitfalls of what they have called 'hashtag ethnography'; for it is difficult to assess the context of social media utterances. Such an exploration is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, although they were more focused on making themselves materially visible, their use of social media was also important. And not only during the conflict, for they are still active today.

Above all, the motto No Marxem was the factor that gave them more strength –both in social media and on the street. Vito came up with the idea while he was at work. He was seeking for something easy to identify, and then he thought about the Monopoly symbol crossed in red. "That of the man running out with a bag of money, you know", Vito said. "Then I put No Marxarem [We Won't Leave] and sent it to the others. But later, in assembly we decided that No Marxem [We Don't Leave] was better. That it was more... Pam! More direct". As Miquel told me, "the motto No Marxem was nothing more than a way to express a feeling we all the neighbors had. We were very clear about it. We all said it, No Marxem right? But it was very important because it totally showed our intentions and made us feel unified". Yet, at that stage, none of them imagined how important it would become. The Sisters, for example, then thought it was just a name. But after a while they all realized. As Miquel said, "when you do a campaign with the same letter, logo and so on, people associate

it. We are like little animals in the end...". They made all the posters and banners with the same typeface, and you would constantly find their logo and motto all around the neighborhood. Roger was very clear about it: "posters, stenciled graffiti… It was all very corporate. Capitalist techniques, marketing, propaganda… everything to catch attention".

3.3. Taking the key from the City Council

From day one, besides confronting the owners, the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza contacted the City Council. However, they first just wanted to expose their case. Their initial aim was to publicly announce they were mobilized with a strong network of neighbors behind. With Laura, the lawyer, they first tried to negotiate with both Salvador and Vermonta SL, the new landlord, by offering to buy the houses. They wanted to come to terms. Likewise, to make pressure and show their strength, they quickly organized a demonstration and many other sorts of events. Soon after, though, they realized they had to explicitly turn to the City Council. As the Sisters told me, when negotiating, they were asked for a lot of money: "150,000 € per house, a total of 1.2M €. And that was impossible for us, and unfair! We had made these houses ourselves! So, we made a counteroffer of 60.000 € per house. But they refused and told us there was no possible deal. And then we got really scared…". Thus, when they realized they were at real risk of being displaced, they decided to explicitly address the City Council. They made it very clear that they were not going to leave. Yet, according to Roger, they never told them what they should do. "We only claimed that as public officers they had to do everything they could to guarantee our right to stay put".

However, it took a long time for the City Council to make a move. They made a real step when the neighbors put pressure on them. "They did nothing at first", Vito told me when I asked him about the role of institutions. "They helped us after a long time, when we were already very... very distressed. We were... we were already hitting rock bottom. 'Yes', they told us. 'Yes, yes, we'll do everything we can'. But they wouldn't do a damn thing. And

then we said, ok, we'll just lock ourselves inside and that's it". Given the lack of response, they decided to occupy the district headquarters. Their wanted to make the Housing Department sign a letter stating they were going to reach out the owners. So, they decided they would not leave until the main representative, Lucia Martín, showed up in person. "Imagine, three women over 60 years old standing there… one who is stone age of more than 80 years old, the Sisters, and us with the kids playing around… And yes, yes… In the end, Lucia Martín came and wrote down that they were going to get in touch with the new landlord. But we still didn't let our guard down. We kept on, pounding, and pounding". The Sisters looked moved when they explained it to me: "we were very afraid. But we thought, well, with the others and the children around here, they won't do anything to us…We are very old… Pepita with the wheelchair… we thought, the police won't charge us, will they?".

FIG. 18: PEPI (LEFT) AND LÍDIA (RIGHT) IN THE DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

Finally, in October 2019 the City Council called them for a meeting. They did not tell the neighbors in advance what they wanted to speak about. They wanted to announce it in person. So, Miquel and Roger went with two members of the Housing Union of Sant Andreu and the spokesperson of the Tenants Union. At that time, among the neighbors themselves, they had many internal conflicts, and some had even left the assembly. Roger told me they were "completely broken". Miquel and I were not speaking to each other, and we needed help. A bit more of strength". As Maite said, "It had been a very long time… and anguish creates a lot of tension…". In the meeting, the City Council announced that they were going

to buy the houses and arrange, for the first time in the city, a 'sweet equity' contract in exchange for housing. The neighbors could not believe it. From what they all told me; they were all very shocked. The houses would be part of the Barcelona's public housing stock, the neighbors would pay a very low rent in exchange for taking care of them, and they would finally be able to stay. For the Sisters, "this saved our lives". And according to Miquel, no other political party would have done so, "but since many come from the PAH…".[15]

At present, they have not signed the contract yet. But they think that the City Council will arrange the documents soon. However, they are not completely at ease. These are new contracts, and many things remain unclear: the exact price, for how long, who will check they are actually carrying out repairs, under what criteria, etc. "And this is not nonsense", insisted Roger. "Imagine that one day, another political party considers that we haven't made the necessary arrangements and thus sues us". They all see it as a novelty and a positive thing; "the fact of expanding the public housing stock and creating new communities", as Maite put it. "But I don't know… This thing of having to depend on a public authority when it comes to homesteading…What if it's political? Now they are interested on it and then they don't give you any guarantee…", she said. All the neighbors told me they feel there is something which is being perverted. As Roger explained it to me, "We see it differently. Because living here, detecting leaks, cleaning, and maintaining… that should be enough. But in this world, everything must be quantified. And this is not always possible. Because how do we quantify the anxiety attacks that we have all had?". He made a pause. "But well, yes. In the end… In the end we have won".

[15] This echoes what Daniel Monterescu (2009) called 'circumstantial coalition' in his analysis of Andromeda gated community to explain how the Andromeda Hill project –the largest private housing enterprise promoted by the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality– was a "product of an institutional and conceptual collaboration among the Canadian entrepreneur, Israeli investors, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the local government, and Israeli architects" (p. 406). For, in the case of Pons i Gallarza, the arrangement of a 'sweet-equity' contract in exchange for housing resulted from the collaboration among the City Council, the housing movement, and the neighbors themselves. All in order to find a 'circumstantial' solution to the problem of real estate speculation.

Conclusion

I take the same question that Claudio Sopranzetti, my first supervisor, asked in the conclusions of his doctoral dissertation. A question that, as he said, any academic analysis should ask itself: "we have learnt something new about a specific context, so what?" (2013, p. 293). That is, how does this case engage with a larger theory? That is one level of learning, which does not necessarily mean that any case study should be aimed at developing a formal theory, but that any exploration should question whether its specific context engages with larger questions. Another way is less theoretical and more about giving an analytic input as to forms of mobilization and empirical understanding of a case in context. To conclude, I will here address both levels of analysis. In each chapter I have tried to provide a somehow chronological response to the three questions I originally posed: Why did the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza find themselves on the verge of being expelled? Why did they want to stay? And how did they finally manage to not be displaced? This is consistent with how I first got interested in the case, as well as the way I have both approached and analyzed it ethnographically. But let me now return to two more central questions I raised in the introduction. One has to do with the specificity of the case itself: to what extent has the fight of the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza constituted a successful resistance to gentrification? The second relates to whether my observations can provide a starting point for future research in places with similar dynamics: in what sense does the claim about the right to stay put thus offer a way to put into practice the radicality of the right to the city?

The first question can be put in simpler terms: in what sense can this case be considered a 'victory'? As Roger told me, "In the end we have won". And in other words, the rest concluded the same. "Of course, it's a victory", Vito answered when asked him about it. "Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, they didn't give us anything for free. But yes, of course, it's a victory. It's a victory", Miquel said. Overall, they all pointed out that they have managed to stay; and so they claimed it at the celebration of June 20, 2020: "we haven't left". According

to Maite, they have "strengthened the neighborhood, for there is more of a sense of community now". And this is how Maribel put it when I asked her what the struggle had meant to her: "Phew… when they won, it was as if we [referring to the surrounding neighbors] had won the lottery too. This is the best way I can tell you. They have made a good job, and now many people are fond of them". Likewise, considering the arrangement of the 'sweet equity' contract in exchange for housing, they all agree that their case has set a precedent. On the one hand, this case has shown that the City Council can actually increase the public housing stock. And on the other, it paves the way for making this type of contract a possible solution for those living in houses that need to be refurbished. That is, it serves as a model for (others) and a model of (successful anti-gentrification mobilization).

However, at the same time, all of them said that this has not been without cost. "We've become very much empowered. Neither of us would have ever imagined that we would end up singing on the street", the Sisters told me. "But the emotional effects we've been left with… will take time to heal". This is something I could observe among all of them. Two years after the 'end' of the conflict, a trace of deep weariness still appears on their faces when they look retrospectively. The Sisters were constantly emotional, and they told me that they were not like this before. But everyone's voice often broke at some point. "I wouldn't do it again", Roger said when I asked him if it had been worth it for him. "On a personal level, I have lost. I've split up with Míriam and I've worn myself out… I'm not well, and that's why when someone comes to me and says they want to do the same thing I say, 'are you sure? Think about it…huh..."'. They have become closer as a community of neighbors. But some of their personal relationships have been damaged as well. Miquel told me that there came a time when he personally could not hold on any longer. "It has been three years of discussions and a lot of stress", he said. "Look, I've even been physically affected by it". And as Vito put it to me, "To all this, don't forget that we have not only had this struggle. We also have labor problems, the responsibility of raising our children… In my case, my mother passed away

and I had to see all the deterioration… It is not only the houses, but also your life in general. It's everyone's life. We all have a poem to tell. Well, add to that the fact that they want to kick you out of your house, damn if it adds up...".

Overall, though, as the neighbors said and I mentioned before, one could conclude that despite all these emotional costs their struggle has resulted in a successful resistance to gentrification. Indeed, their case is an example of how collective mobilization can achieve desirable results. And not only in an overtly antagonistic way, but also through a critical engagement with the politics of the everyday – helping each other on a day-to-day basis, getting together in the evening to talk and have a drink, sharing child rearing, etc. That is, by employing both vertical and horizontal structures of solidarity. But as Roger claimed, "it is only a very small victory". A 'sweet equity' contract in exchange for housing is a just a stopgap to the great housing crisis. Clearly, it is not a tool that can put an end to real estate speculation, nor it is a solution that can be applied to many other cases. That is, as Miquel said, "it is important as a precedent, but it is only a small part of the housing problem. Until it is not regulated… until it stops being a business…". Now, again and above all, they have shown that they would not still be there if they had not united themselves. Without counting on their neighbors, they would certainly not have managed to stay. In that case, Vermonta SL's plan to build a swimming pool and make luxurious houses –Lefebvre's 'conceived space'– would have come true; and many evenings, or now Carvalho's Tuesdays, would probably not look like, sound, smell, or taste the same –Lefebvre's 'lived space'.

This level of analysis corresponds to what Lefebvre (1991[1947]) called *criticism of life by ideas,* which consists of "taking real life as the point of departure in an investigation of how the ideas which express it and the forms of consciousness which reflect it emerge" (p. 145). He proposed this line of inquiry in addition to the method followed by Marx and Engels. As he explained it, their aim was to account for the relationship between what people perceive

and what they are and do by proceeding "from ideas to men, from consciousness to being – e.g., toward practical, everyday reality– bringing the two into confrontation and thereby achieving *criticism of ideas by action and realities*" (1991, p. 145). So, with the second direction, Lefebvre attempted to incorporate phenomenology and post-structural analysis to orthodox Marxism –thus looking at the *potency* of lived experience. This is particularly relevant in the case of the neighbors of Pons i Gallarza. For, their (personal) experience of the houses, the neighborhood, and the city, made them come together. And from their togetherness, from the closeness of their bodies in everyday life, they have managed to defy the strategy of expropriation that was meant to expel them. That is, from the 'lived space', they have managed to intervene both the 'perceived' and 'conceived' spaces – Vermonta SL's strategy of real estate speculation and their plans to remodel the houses.

Yet, overestimate everyday users' tactics is not without risk. The burgeoning interest of urban anthropologists in looking at everyday life seems to be now more concerned about describing its *practice* than drawing its *critique*. That is, as John Roberts (2006) warned, the expansion of the 'everyday' as a site of interpretative freedom and cultural activity –a project initiated by Lefebvre– has resulted, paradoxically, in the increasing dissolution of its revolutionary content. Indeed, the emergence urban anthropology is related to the evolution of the concept of the 'everyday' –increasingly emphasizing the hidden and microscopic content of the mundane to escape the totalization of reason and systematic philosophy. Its origins are to be found in the Department of Sociology of The Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s, but it was not until the 1970s and 1980s when academics made a real attempt to draw an epistemological framework for urban anthropology (Low, 1996a, p. 385; Espinosa, 2022, p. 4). Of course, there were several influential elements. But with the advent of postmodernism, the burgeoning interest in the theme of everyday life became an essential factor. The study of culture began to be grounded more emphatically in concrete

phenomena, and the city became an increasingly complex and attractive frame for observing the multiple *happenings taking place*.

However, as Ulf Hannerz stated in his essay *Exploring the City* (1980), the burst of urban anthropology led to its paradoxically growing sense of insignificance. Prone to the introduction of critical economy in the anthropological study of the city (Low, 1996a, p. 386), and thus critical with the proliferation of fragmented micro-studies detached from more structural engagements with society, Hannerz argued for the need to move from an anthropology in the city towards something worthy of being called urban anthropology (Espinosa, 2022, p. 5). In the same vein, in the monograph *Theorizing the City* (1999) published twenty years later, Setha M. Low lamented how the city had been undertheorized by anthropology (Low, 1999, p. 1). She professed for an "anthropology of the city instead of an anthropology in the city" (Low, p. 2). And much more recently, in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology* (2014), Donald M. Nonini also raised the same claim for a new urban anthropology: "theory, theory, theory!" (Espinosa, p. 5). Ultimately, it was all about what Lefebvre had already criticized of purely descriptive approaches. For him, the 'urban' is a 'virtual object' loaded with the potential of social transformation –for which he proposed the method of 'transduction' to not only describe but analyze everyday life, a combination of the *criticism of ideas by action and realities* and the *criticism of life by ideas*. He wanted to show the duality of the everyday as both a creative and alienated space, and his legacy lies at the heart of these critical voices with the growing sense of insignificance of urban anthropology.

Therefore, to avoid falling into any strict ethnographic gaze, I consider it essential to push for the second central question I mentioned before: in what sense does the claim about the right to stay put offer a way to put into practice the collective, more radical dimension of the right to the city? By posing this question I follow Lefebvre's dialectical approach to not be just descriptive but critically oriented and thus theorize the not-yet-real-but-possible in

everyday life. That is, what are the implications of this case for social theory? What does it have to say, for example, about urban, social mobilization? And in what sense, then, can the fight to stay put allow for moving towards a not-yet-real-but-possible city? First, I believe this case provides a relevant starting point for thinking about immobility as a political arena with great potential. While mobility has acquired centrality in academic analysis and public debate (Urry, 2007), there is more to be said about non-mobility as key axis of struggle. If the creation of surplus value "through the movement, circulation, and marketing of goods and financial products, (…) has generated a shift from relations of production to 'relation of exchange' as the core of both capitalist accumulation and political mobilization" (Sopranzetti, 2013, p. 306), the claim for immobility may become a powerful way to intervene the system. Or, at least, taking up Garnier's critique of Lefebvre and Harvey, the claim about the right to stay put may become a way to weaken the (urban) regime and claim citizenship. And not only by claiming immobilization as a tactic of social uprisings, such as strikes, traffic blockades, occupations of public space, etc., but immobility as *the* target.

Likewise, while much has been said about housing as a key (reproductive) sphere for political mobilization, the case of Pons i Gallarza provides a starting point for analyzing the neighborhood also as potential, political arena. This is particularly interesting since, recovering Delgado's definition, the neighborhood is the mediation between physical and social space, between the totally private and the totally public. It is a kind of liminal space, and this is what makes it a particularly *mobile* terrain. It offers the possibility of redefining the concept of 'home' and places time at the center of housing struggles. For, what is a neighborhood if not the area one can walk in a short time from one's home? Plus, what is a place if not a livable space? And what is a livable space if not a place where one can be, stay, intervene, share, and shape? I believe this brings new insights for further research. Ultimately, the case of Pons i Gallarza shows that at a time when mobility has become essential for the accumulation of capital, the claim about the right to stay put can be a way to put into practice

the radicality of the right to the city. For, how to make the city an *oeuvre* if one cannot stay put and stop the time at which contemporary, urban life moves?

So, the case of the houses of Pons i Gallarza shows that, being the financialization of housing a key strategy for capital accumulation (Harvey, 1978), the claim about the right to stay put can be a way to weaken the urban, neoliberal regime. And this –together with an understanding of the neighborhood as an existing social form in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variable realized– can even lead to a new conceptualization of the right to the city. One which is not just confined to the liberal-democratic framework, but one that goes beyond Lefebvre's understanding of the city. For, as Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid (2012) have pointed out, we are facing a moment of planetary urbanization. Noting the creation of new urban scales of urbanization, the blurring and rearticulation of urban territories, the disintegration of the 'hinterland', and the end of the 'wilderness', their claim is that "under contemporary conditions, therefore, the urban can no longer be understood with reference to a particular "type" of settlement space, whether defined as a city, a city-region, a metropolis, a metropolitan region, a megalopolis, an edge city, or otherwise. Consequently, (…), the category of the "city" has today become obsolete as an analytical social science tool" (p. 12). What this thesis points out is that the right to the city cannot be confined to a bounded understanding of 'the city'. Rather, it must be understood as the capacity to intervene in the process of planetary urbanization. I thus argue that the right to stay put can both recover and expand the meaning that Lefebvre gave to the right to the city: a right to places of encounter, to life rhythms and time uses. The right to stay put, therefore, as the right to build, dwell, think, or be in a place in the world and make it home.

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