DiGeSt

Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

Embodied Solidarity: Feminist Care and Vulnerability in Parisian Squats
A. Tancrède Pagès

Embodied Solidarity: Feminist Care and Vulnerability in Parisian Squats

A. Tancrède Pagès
PhD Research at Social Work and Social Pedagogy Department, Ghent University
alexis.pages@ugent.be

Abstract
Squatting has long been a strategy of migrant solidarity in urban areas. Whilst researchers in the past have focused on squats as sites of autonomous solidarity and as alternatives to state and/or humanitarian infrastructures of reception, little has been written on the care practices taking place within their walls. Based on militant ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, this article highlights the transformative social and political potentialities of care practices within squats. I focus on how the binary of provider/recipient of care is blurred in squats as intersectional identities allow for greater fluidity in identifying who can and cannot engage in care practices. As such, I argue that squats serve a role as an infrastructure of care within broader networks of solidarity while also emphasizing the way in which they enact an ethics of care revolving around radical inclusion.

Introduction

On a hot and humid August evening, I sat in the courtyard of a squat chatting with fellow residents about the installation of a new carpentry workshop, the division of collective cleaning duties in the common spaces, and interpersonal spats that had recently arisen. From the vantage point of the front porch, I had sight of the front-gate about fifty meters away from us. A Black man stood in the street, waving through the bars of the gate in an attempt to grab our attention. Thinking that he may be a neighbor curious about the building, the collective, and our occupation, I strolled over to ask if I could help in any way. As I approached, the streetlamp revealed his distressed face. Ibrahima[1] lived at the *foyer de travailleurs migrants* (FTM)[2] down the street, sharing a nine square meter room with two roommates. That night, returning from a grocery run, Ibrahima found his belongings at the building's entrance; his landlord had unceremoniously evicted him without notice or explanation. Without any immediate solution, Ibrahima approached the squat with the slim hope of asking for emergency shelter. Unsure as to how to respond to his request, I suggested that he went to pick up his belongings as I conferred with the residents who were sitting outside with me and with those who were gathered in the kitchen preparing dinner. After briefly relaying the information Ibrahima had provided me, another resident, Adama, went to the front gate with me. After a brief exchange in Bambara, Adama nodded to me, implying that Ibrahima's narrative was trustworthy and open the gate. Upon entering the kitchen, Ibrahima was offered food and tea, a seat at the table, and the opportunity to further elaborate upon his situation. Following a thirty minute discussion, Ibrahima was offered a space in the mixed dormitory for a week, the time for him to arrange his affairs with an eye of moving to a new apartment or, perhaps, be integrated into the squat's collective and live there permanently. In the end, Ibrahima would become another person on the legal procedure in defense of the squat.

This paper explores the embodied solidarity practiced within squats in the Parisian *banlieues* (suburbs) with specific attention paid to the ethics of care. While squats – empty buildings oftentimes left abandoned by public or private property owners and occupied illegally by groups of persons – increasingly face repressive measures by the French state[3], they remain a vital informal safety net for thousands of persons experiencing varying degrees of precarity largely induced by neoliberal austerity and xenophobic policies. Researchers have previous explored the ways in which squats can serve as critical sites for 'autonomous solidarity' (Mudu & Chattopadhyay, 2017) with illegalized migrants and refugees, the convergence of socio-political struggles between housing and migrant movements (Grazioli, 2017), and as alternative infrastructures of reception than those provided by state and humanitarian institutions (Tsavdaroglou et al., 2019). Furthermore, the heterogeneity of those living in the squats calls for the adoption of an intersectional lens. That is to say, whilst the majority of the inhabitants share in common barriers in accessing conventional housing, whether through the private rental market or social housing schemes, their intersectional identities – racial, ethnic, gendered, migratory, etc. – impact their personal trajectories and their respective capacities to and needs for care. As Judith Butler (2004) indicates, one's intersectional identities gives rise to particular forms of vulnerabilities exacerbated by socio-political institutions that, in turn, require specific interventions of care to alleviate and address said vulnerabilities. In this article, I use thick description (Geertz, 1973) and excerpts from ethnographic interviews as a means of supplementing the existing literature on care practices within existing migrant solidarity movements in Europe.

The following article is based on a year of militant ethnography in two squats in the greater Parisian metropolitan area over the course of a year and relies upon participant

---

[1] Following ethical protocol, all names of interlocuters/interviewees have been altered. Pseudonyms were either chosen in collaboration with those concerned or have been chosen by myself. In the case of the latter, I have picked pseudonyms that correspond with the socio-cultural background of the person.

[2] FTMs are a category of social housing earmarked for non-EU foreigners with temporary work permits, refugees with recognized status, or those awaiting an administrative decision regarding their regularization.

[3] See the recent Kasbarian-Bergé anti-squatting law enacted in August 2023.

observations and ethnographic interviews with residents of squats. It explores the ways in which squats develop alternative infrastructures of care and puts into action care practices that contest binary constructs of those who provide care and those who receive care. The article begins with an exploration of the existing literature and the theoretical framing that informs the ethnographic analysis. The following section provides greater context of squats in the Parisian area alongside a reflection on the methodological approach used in data gathering. Finally, it examines the ways in which care practices are experienced by residents of the squat with diverse intersectional identities. The article does not discuss in depth the tensions or difficulties that arise in the everyday practice of care within the squats' heterogeneous communities. Rather, the article reduces its analytical scope to the ways in which squats allow for practices of care that contest the dominant relationality of care found in (semi-) humanitarian spaces.

Literature and Theoretical Framing

This paper builds on existing literature from a range of disciplines and is largely premised on two key topics of research. The first is focused on migrant solidarity movements in urban spaces; the second is the exploration of care practices in the complementary studies of feminist theory and critical humanitarian studies.

Concerning the first pool of literature, experiences and practices of solidarity with migrants in the urban context take different forms (Raimondi, 2019a). These include physical and political support for illegalized migrants in transit such as in Athens (Kotronaki, 2018; Lafazani, 2018; Raimondi, 2019b), Rome (Grazioli, 2017), or with more long-term practices in cities where they decide to settle such as in Amsterdam (Dadusc, 2019), Brussels (Depraetere & Oosterlynck, 2017), or Copenhagen (Siim & Meret, 2021). Specifically, this paper builds upon the growing literature that identifies squats as unique spaces for the practice of solidarity with migrants. Squats have been previously read as spaces wherein solidarity can be 'reproduced on a daily basis' (Caciagli, 2021, p. 252).

Close proximity through a shared space is traditionally considered by urban theorists to be critical in the formation and maintenance of relations between people (Massey, 2005) and for social movements in particular (Nicholls, 2009). Squats have been read as spaces in which there exists an 'autonomous solidarity' (Mudu & Chattopadhyay, 2017), referring to place-based relations and practices that are produced as self-organized spaces among heterogenous collections of people living a variety of precarities, including illegalized migrants, unemployed people, and homeless families.

As an urban space, squats can emerge as sites wherein 'solidarity is contentious and as such a counterhegemonic, social and political mode of action which can unify diverse actors to come together and challenge authorities in order to promote or enact alternative imaginaries' (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019, p. 35). Crucially for solidarity movements, squats have the political potential of rendering visible what was invisible (if those co-habiting them wish so). They can become 'spaces of appearance' (Massey, 1995) that permit the concretization of the political identity as a 'player', unified in its heterogeneity. In short, squats have potential to serve as spaces for solidarity to be forged and fostered, a rallying point wherein diverse subjectivities can interact with one another in identifying commonalities (and differences) in their socio-political struggles.

Similarly, scholars have deployed Lefebvre's (1996) conception of the 'right to the city' as a means of underscoring the way in which squats can offer access to basic care services to those most marginalized in urban settings (Tsavdaroglou et al., 2019). Additionally, squats can produce a 'counter-strategy of spatialization' of the city allowing for the transformation of everyday inter-personal relations and 'break or go beyond the legal/illegal inclusion/exclusion of spatial relations' (van Houtum & Aparna, 2017, p. 47), or become possible spaces, networks, and corridors of care (Dadusc, Grazioli & Martínez, 2019). Experiences of solidarity with illegalized persons in the urban context take different forms (Raimondi, 2019a). In most cases, acts of migrant solidarity face institutional

responses consistent with repression and criminalization (Kalir, 2019; Dadusc & Mudu, 2020) in favour of a humanitarian response oftentimes found complicit in (re)producing the harms and violence of the borders and rigid immigration regimes. This leads to a critique of the ways in which critical humanitarian studies has deconstructed the unintended consequences and inherent hierarchical interpersonal relations found within humanitarian spaces in the second pool of literature.

As Catherine Brun (2016, p. 396) has elucidated, a major challenge faced by humanitarianism is 'the inflexibility that this standardized and professionalized system has created – a system that does not sufficiently care for contextual differences and for the ways in which needs change over time during protracted crisis'. Within humanitarian practices, the concept of care is one ensnared in inter-relational power dynamics, wherein the providers and recipients of care are not on equal footing, with a disproportionate amount of socio-political agency to be found in the hands of the former. Deeply intertwined within its benevolent intent, humanitarian care has always carried within it an element of repression (e.g. Harrell-Bond, 1986; Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012), contributing to an obfuscation of the border violence of 'Departheid' (Kalir, 2019) by discipling, depoliticizing, and commodifying the lives and subjectivities of those who are recipients of 'care' (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020). Humanitarian care is discursively constructed through narratives of individualized moral gestures detached from politics (Fassin, 2012) (re)producing dichotomies of 'savior' and 'victim' (Ticktin, 2011).

Prior to receiving humanitarian care, migrants are required to prove their vulnerability in order to access aid and support from humanitarian actors. In doing so, migrant populations are partitioned into subgroups to make them legible through a humanitarian lens. As elucidated by Dadusc and Mudu (2020, p. 9), 'discrete groups are governable through an updated "divide and rule" principle, through the creation, imposition, and perpetuation of a set of welcoming priorities among migrants of different nationalities, genders and ethnicities'. Humanitarian care demands the formation of these categorical distinctions as fundamental in producing vulnerability – primarily bodily – as a privilege (Sözer, 2020). Critically, vulnerability is commonly rendered 'observable' through the body in that humanitarian actors determine the validity of an asylum seeker's claim to care by 'reading off the body' by using skin color or visible signs of trauma and/or torture (Fassin & d'Halluin, 2005). In short, humanitarian care is entangled in a particular politics of time in which care is administered in the present but is limited in its capacity to alter systemic structures to alleviate needs of continued care in future. As such, humanitarian care's emphasis on 'universalism, biology, urgency and emergency […] decontextualizes lives and futures' (Brun 2016, p. 406). However, one must be wary of characterizing all humanitarian care practices as a monolith. Indeed, as scholars have repeatedly shown (e.g. Vandevoordt, 2019; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; della Porta, 2018; Garny & Murru in this Special Issue), humanitarian care practices are not exclusive to state-operated reception centers characterized by control, exclusion, and isolation but, rather, can be found as operative practices within grassroots, bottom-up civil society groups and migrant solidarity collectives. Similarly, associations and NGOs who initially emerge as 'traditional' humanitarian actors may, overtime, evolve towards openly contesting racialized migratory regimes and actively politicizing their everyday operations and care practices.

In response to this depersonalized and universalized practice (or ethic) of care, there is a need to reorient the frame through which care is understood and implemented. For this, a feminist ethics of care is crucial. As Fisher and Tronto (1990, p. 40) wrote, care is 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible'. That is, an ethics of care is a political project that englobes all social interactions. This includes a need for reflection on the particularistic needs of individuals based on their intersectional identities and the particular ways in which they recognize or articulate care (Raghuram, 2019).

As opposed to 'caring *for*' found within humanitarian frameworks, squats entail alternative structures and spaces where-in emergent practices of 'caring *with*' (Power, 2019). Squats allow for a re-imagination of the 'everyday politics of care, by creating the necessary conditions for [all] city-dwellers to meet basic needs while engaging in a range of caring practices (childcare, community health clinics, guerrilla gardening, harm reduction initiatives, migrants solidarity, mutual aid, etc.)' (Burgum & Vasudevan, 2023). Borrowing an idea from Kenny and Fotaki (2015), squats are cohabitation and compassionate borderspaces wherein a shared existential reality – namely our bodies' fragility and our capacity to experience injury, both physical and psychological – is acknowledged. In short, these are spaces in which solidarity can be embodied in everyday practices of mutual care. As Fotaki (2022, p. 297) underscores, the 'proposed solidarity is non-exclusionary because it accounts for individual differences yet focuses on common vulnerabilities, establishing an obligation to care for the irreducible other'. Embodied solidarity sees care as an intersubjective practice that evolves according to the particularities of each actors' vulnerabilities, allowing for a relationality with the 'irreducible other' that opens up the possibility for horizontality and a reciprocity of care (Kekstaite, 2022). One's vulnerability and/or precarity does not negate the possibility of caring for the Other.

On the contrary, the multitude of intersectional vulnerabilities and precarities within squat environments reinforces the need for mutual care practices as a means of co-creating a space that prioritizes collective healing and strengthening. There is a recognition that not all persons are capable of reproducing care practices that are fitting or apt for intervening in another's particularistic form of vulnerability or suffering. Rather, the confluence of a wide range of intersectional identities and life trajectories in an inclusive common space – the squat – allows for greater exchange of individual articulations of specific needs of care. Care is not a unidirectional exchange wherein the care provider dictates the terms to the recipient, but rather a reciprocal exchange wherein the care provider elucidates which practices of care they are capable of providing whilst the recipient articulates the types of care – be they social, material, psychological, moral, etc. – they require in the present. As opposed to the static binary of provider/recipient in humanitarian care, within practices of embodied solidarity, one can simultaneously be a care recipient *and* a care provider.

Cases and Methodology

According to the Abbé Pierre Foundation (2023, p. 33), 60% of persons with 'irregular migrations statuses' live in precarious housing (reception centers, with relatives or friends, or in a 'social' hotel); nearly one person out of ten lives in the street, in a squat, or in an informal encampment. Indeed, for many squat residents – whether they are illegalized migrants, isolated LGBTQI+ youth, 'unproductive' psychiatrized persons, marginalized drug addicts, etc. – the occupation of empty buildings without authorization is the only barrier to sleeping rough when social housing is inaccessible, hotel rooms are unaffordable, and social networks of support do not exist (Bouillon, Fourquemin & Louey, 2012). Though reports on the precise numbers of squats across France are limited, the Ministry of Ecology announced in 2021 that of the 124 squats it had identified in metropolitan France, 40% were located in Île-de-France (IDF)[4] (2021).

IDF is a historical and administrative region in the north of France that encompasses the capital city, Paris, and its surrounding *banlieues* (suburbs). Hosting just under 20% of metropolitan France's population, it is the epicenter of social, cultural, economic, and political developments of the nation. It has been a hotbed for squatting practices embedded in a myriad of socio-political strands. As Thomas Aguilera has highlighted (2018), the totality of squatters in IDF find commonality in their mode of action alone: occupying and living in

---

[4] This figure should be questioned. The Ministries methodology involved requiring prefectures across the nation to report on the squats in their administrative districts in which a legal procedure was ongoing or recently terminated. The report does not take into consideration squats that have been tolerated by local authorities and property owners or so-called 'hidden' squats that rarely enter drawn-out legal and administrative procedures.

a building without the owner's authorization. Their short-, medium-, and long-term objectives are varied and are largely informed by their intersectional identities, ideological convictions, and relative access to wider social welfare services. Many authors have made attempts to produce typologies as means of demonstrating the complexity of the social, political, and cultural problems that push individuals and collectives of individuals to engage in squatting (cf. Aguilera, 2013; Bouillon, 2011; Bouillon & Dietrich-Ragon, 2012; López, 2013; Péchu, 2010; Pruijt, 2013; Squatting Europe Kollective, 2013).

Typically, the authors make the distinction between squats functioning for political ends and squats that represent immediate access to shelter. Whereas the former are frequently referred to as 'open' or 'public' squats given their propensity to be outward presenting and making tangible efforts in communicating their political ideology and objectives, the latter are commonly denoted as 'closed' or 'hidden' squats to underscore their squatters' preference for remaining under the radar of the authorities (Bouillon, 2017). In this paper, I focus on militant ethnographic research conducted in so-called 'open' squats, whose deliberate visibility within the urban landscape is a politicized denunciation of structural conditions that reproduce precarity across intersectional identities and geographies. Furthermore, I narrow the focus to 'open' squats that Aguilera (2018) identifies as being 'autonomous'. That is to say, they tend to be reluctant to enter into negotiations with local administrative institutions and property owners as a means of 'regularizing' their statuses. Rather, 'autonomous' squats are sites of contentious politics wherein the act of squatting is entangled with political demands including housing rights, migrant and refugee rights, and anti-capitalist ideologies.

I draw on the long tradition of militant ethnography by combining politically engaged participant observation with the aim of generating insights into the political logic and practices informing activist migrant solidarity networks and squatting practices. Whilst militant ethnography shares much in common with more traditional aspects of ethnography – using mixed method qualitative approach to research including participant observation and interviews, emphasizing the personal experience of the researcher, reflexivity on the output of the research in its written or other expressive forms – it also aims to produce politically applicable knowledge from within movements, for movements (Juris, 2007). Militant ethnography blurs the distinction between research and political activism as it requires the researcher to become embedded within activist movements as 'insiders producing politically applicable work' (Apoifis, 2017). In large part due to the semi-illegality of their status, squats are predominantly insular spaces hesitant to provide insight into everyday life in private spaces to non-resident outsiders.

Consequently, living alongside my research participants, taking part in the mundane tasks of collective life (e.g. cleaning chores or communal cooking), 'hanging out' with squat residents are equally integral to data collection as semi-structured interviews. As explained by political anthropologist Florence Bouillon a crucial component to researching precarious groups in politically sensitive contexts is building a working relation of trust and confidence. Bouillon writes, '[ethnography in squats] involves "being with", sharing common experiences with persons being researched, creating a connection [and] reciprocated trust […] To live a police eviction is, for example, a strong experience emotionally, over the course of which we feel fear, excitement, anxiety. This *shared experience* and its accompanying emotions provides' a foundation for an opening of exchanges in otherwise cautious and insular socio-political groups (Bouillon, 2011, p. 75; my translation).

In the past year, I have lived in two squats. The first squat (Squat A) was, at the time of writing, evicted through a police operation after little over two years of occupation. Squat A was located in a former two-story office building in a southern Parisian *banlieue* with a political past and present of left-leaning municipal governments. At its highest occupancy, approximately 40 persons lived there. The second squat (Squat B) has been the primary residence for approximately 80 persons for the past sixteen months at the time of writing. Squat B is located in a northern *banlieue* that has historically been a working-class city with left-leaning municipal governments. The squat is a large complex of three buildings and

interconnected hangars, a legacy of the site's evolution from a factory producing train headlights to an office park and, briefly, an atelier and exposition space for an artist collective. These methods of participant observation and critical self-reflexivity are supplemented by informal discussions and ethnographic interviews (Sherman Heye, 2007) that have been recorded and transcribed. Interview participants were given the opportunity to revise their transcripts in order to make additions, retractions, and alterations to the text as a means of ensuring the fair and accurate representation of their perspectives. The intersectional identities of interviewees are heterogeneous including a state-recognized refugee who is a trans-woman, a French national who is a trans-man, an illegalized asylum seeker who is a cisgender and heterosexual man, and a French national who is a cisgender and heterosexual man. As will be discussed below, one's gender identity and migration/refugee statuses are but two of a plethora of inter-sectional identities at work in the embodied solidarity being theorized and discussed below.

Embodied Solidarity: Acts of Everyday Care
An Infrastructure of Everyday Care
Accessing the squats as a potential resident relied upon an informal process of submitting a housing request to the collectives, whereupon the request would be discussed during weekly general assemblies. Knowledge of the squats, and the subsequent housing request, were usually the result of being 'referred' by pre-existing contacts in external affinity networks. On rare occasions, such as in the case of Ibrahima in the introduction of this article, requests would be submitted by chance encounters or impromptu visits to the squats.

When deliberating on accepting or refusing housing requests, a multitude of factors are taken into account; available space within the squats' 'dormitory' spaces appropriate for the requestee (i.e. in the 'mixed' or 'non-mixed' dormitories), the particular intersectional vulnerabilities of a person if they were to remain in the street, the length of their desired stay, the person's compatibility with living in a collective setting largely informed by the knowledge gathered from affinity networks, and the bureaucratic needs of the person (i.e. if they need aid in pursuing administrative processes such as regularizing their migratory status, accessing social housing or medico-psychiatric services, and creating resumes for employment possibilities). Critically, as spaces of solidarity for illegalized migrants and refugees, deliberations over housing requests by those with 'irregular' statuses never focused on the 'validity' or 'deservingness' of their claim for lodging. Rather, decision-making processes relied upon the collectives' internal understanding of their capacity to accommodate and provide the appropriate space for the care of eventual residents.

As Camille remarked, 'We have never sorted good or bad migrants like in [state] reception centers. Indeed, many people have provided administrative assistance to migrants here'[5]. Whereas humanitarian care is often predicated on moral valuations of individuals' deservingness of access, a squat's embodied solidarity is made manifest in the observation that everyone, regardless of migratory status, is in need of shelter from the elements. Camille, a trans-man with French citizenship, emphasizes how his living in a squat is predicated on there being intersectional heterogeneity within its residents:

> From my own experience, I couldn't see myself living in a squat where there weren't any migrants. Because my dad is Syrian. And that reminds me a bit of home, smelling good food and people speaking Arabic. But then, it's true that there was that, there were the FLE courses[6], there was administrative help, there was solidarity and then above all, well here there's no judgment. We don't sort out the undocumented and the documented and those who speak French or not. [7]

---

[5] Interview with Camille on 16/02/2023

[6] FLE stands for *Français Langue Étrangère* (French as a Foreign Language)

[7] Interview with Camille on 16/02/2023

Elaborating on his position, Camille expanded upon his vision of squats as being sites of contested life existing at the margins of French society. Their primary function is to offer alternative modes of social and political organization with the explicit intent on (re)producing safe spaces for those most precarized by systemic state structures – in his eyes namely illegalized migrants and trans-persons – wherein they can find solace in solidarity. To Camille, the very existence of squats is an act of care for those rendered most vulnerable to systemic structures of power and racialized violence. Within squats, there is the possibility for residents to more easily access solutions to their critical material needs without going through administrative hoops and ladders.

Within the squats I lived in, the most visible practices of care revolved around meeting the material needs of their residents. Beyond the access to a roof and bed, the squats organized a variety of spaces and practices that are routine across 'open' squats in the IDF region. In each squat, an area was designated as a free-shop where residents and outside visitors could 'shop' for clothing apparel at no cost. Sourced from local collectives that conduct clothing drives and from neighbors, the clothes are cleaned, sorted into size and age categories, and presented on assortments of racks, shelves, bins, and display cases. Through the free-shop, new residents in the squats would also harbor the possibility of furnishing their newly moved into rooms with a bed and a mattress, night stands, tables, chairs, curtains, rugs, lamps, etc. As is the case with all the activities within the squat, the free-shops were self-organized, meaning that residents contributed to their management on a voluntary basis, dedicating more or fewer hours to their upkeep and condition based on the self-assessed availability and desire to participate.

Both squats were embedded in regional networks of mutual aid that facilitated the distribution of food, including products donated by supermarkets to autonomous food banks and the collection of fresh vegetables and fruits from open air markets. Furthermore, these networks regularly supplied the squats with sanitary kits containing feminine hygiene products, soap and shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrushes, first-aid supplies, and infant care products such as diapers, baby formula, and talc powder. In coordination with the CAARUD[8], the squats set up risk reduction measures for residents who consume drugs in the form of semi-regular needle exchanges, the installation of needle disposal bins, the provision of Narcan in the event of opiate overdoses, and extensive literature on safe drug use, the effects of a variety of drugs, the socio-medical effects of marginalizing drug users, and resources for those seeking to reduce their consumption or sobriety. The association Medicine du Monde once parked a mobile clinic – manned by a doctor, two nurses, and a psychiatrist – within the courtyard of a squat in order to provide medical services to residents and local neighbors otherwise facing obstacles in accessing institutional healthcare. On a voluntary basis, an outside supporter for one of the squats organized a weekly therapy practice wherein residents and non-residents alike could access hour-long therapy sessions. There existed the possibility for referrals to ally psychiatrists in the event that psychotropic medicine were deemed necessary for further treatment.

The amalgamation of all of these internal practices, along with affinities with local associations, constitutes the squats as 'corridors of care' (Dadusc, Grazioli & Martínez, 2019) embedded in broader networks of solidarity. Materially, the most significant care practice is the provision of safe sleeping spaces sheltered from the elements and the various dangers of sleeping rough in the street. However, squats also serve vital spaces of psycho-social care as well by fostering inclusive environments that encourage authentic self-expression.

---

[8] *Centres d'Accueil et d'Accompagnement à la Réduction des Risques pour Usagers de Drogues* (Center for the Reduction of Risks of Drug Users). An association with offices across the IDF region and engaged in direct interventions at the locations where at-risk populations live.

Creating Inclusive and Safer Spaces

A critical component to the embodied solidarity of the squats in which I lived was the intersectional diversity of their residents. As mentioned above, the residents were heterogeneous and included persons with a wide-range of combinations in regard to their administrative migratory status, gender-identity, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic identity, faith, age, and parental status. Under the same roof lived a twenty-something transfemme Georgian with refugee status, a cis-male French Black septuagenarian retiree, a cis-male Iranian asylum claimant subject to a Dublin deportation towards Italy whilst being the fiancé of a Greek national, a Sinti mother with two children, a cis-female French national who is a self-identified militant anarchist, a cis-male Iranian PhD student who is a self-identified monarchist, and a cis-male Malian musician who has lived '*Sans-Papier*' in France for eight years. Most importantly, the squats were spaces wherein individuals could be themselves.

Farhad, a cis-male Iranian asylum claimant, underscored the sense of personal liberation he felt upon entering the squat after weeks of living in the street by expressing to me, 'I don't want to have a mask. I want to be myself'[9]. Integral to the conception of care within the squats was an allowance for individuals to express themselves in a manner true to their intersectional identities. In the case of Farhad, this entailed the opportunity to share his story without fear of judgement or reprisal. The squats became safe spaces where care was embroiled in an ethics not upheld by prerequisites or expectations of reciprocity. As he told me, 'we help each other because we love each other [and] we don't look to receive [anything] back' in return. Herein lies a critical component of embodied solidarity; the interchangeability of the role of care-receiver and care-giver. In any instant, two or more residents could be entangled in relations of care that fluctuate between the two roles. Each individual articulates particular needs of care while simultaneously offering implicit care practices in everyday exchanges.

Upon arrival in France, Valentina submitted her request for asylum on the grounds of fearing state persecution and gendered violence from family members due to her trans identity. Arriving in Paris, a city wherein she had no previous social network, she initially expected the French state to provide the necessary safe and hygienic accommodations to undergo the protracted asylum procedure. She turned towards the *Centres d'Hebergement d'Urgence* (CHU, Emergency Shelter Centers) as a means of avoiding sleeping rough in the streets, an all-too-common situation for trans youth, be they asylum claimants, illegalized migrants, or naturalized citizens, who find themselves marginalized from accessing social services that recognize the particular vulnerabilities and violences faced by trans persons. When questioned on her experience within the CHU, Valentina responded:

> For three hours I did [stay in the shelter]. It was my third day in Paris. I went to the Porte de La Chapelle, there was one bus [clicks tongue] – around eighty persons in one bus. I cannot describe the environment. Like the people who are unlucky in this world, like all of them. It was the most intense [moment] in my life when I saw everything that was happening there. Like, beginning with the food they were serving and everything that was dirty and the smell, not even lights. In the room, you have only one bed, without any sheets, without any pillow. [..] And I escaped and I preferred to stay outside in the street then to spend even one night in there.[10]

Valentina went on to describe the way in which she was 'processed' in the CHU; she was repeatedly misgendered and allocated a bed in a men's dormitory in spite of her protestations. Existing state reception structures are not built with every intersectional identity in mind, leaving persons like Valentina to fall between the cracks; given that her administrative status aligned itself with her birth certificate – assigned male at birth (AMAB) – her trans identity

---

[9] Interview with Farhad on 27/02/2023

[10] Interview with Valentina on 14/02/2023

was neglected in providing the necessary space of care. In contrast, upon her accommodation in squats, her self-expressed trans identity was taken seriously and she was assured that she had access to a safe(r) space:

> I mean, a squat offers you more freedom you know? You can create something [that is] your own, it can give you [the] opportunity to make your little space. To feel a little bit safe [compared to what] the government that gives you…[11]

Referring back to Butler's (2004) notion of vulnerability as being socially induced, squats in IDF aspire to create social environments in which the systemic violences individuals with particular intersectional identities confront on an everyday basis are challenged and opposed. In the case of Valentina, this involved the establishment of 'mixed' and 'non-mixed' dormitories intent on providing cis-women and LGBTQI+ persons spaces wherein they are not subject to the male gaze and the potential violence associated with it. As opposed to her experience in the CHU, upon arrival in squats, Valentina's trans identity was not subject to probing questions or doubts by members of the collective. Rather, her identity was affirmed, and accessing the 'non-mixed' dormitory for two weeks a given. The same is true for those with 'irregular' migration statuses.

As mentioned by Catherine, a cis-female French national, one of the positive aspects of the squat is 'exceptional encounter one has with the Other' allowing for 'constructive exchanges' based on the diversity of 'identities and lived trajectories'[12]. Such exchanges are critical in the first step of care, *caring about*, as highlighted by Tronto (1996, p. 149):

> Care is universal because all humans need care at some point in their lives; at the very least, people need care as infants, when they are infirm, and often when they are dying. Care is particularistic because answers to such questions as "what kinds of care? how much? who is providing it?" are deeply tied not only to culture but to gendered, classed, raced, and other structural features of any culture.

The universal aspects of care practices, oftentimes associated with meeting material needs, are addressed by squats through the systematic structures of mutual aid mentioned above. Embodied solidarity emphasizes the need for those with privileges associated with their intersectional identities to mobilize these privileges in the care of the irreducible other. Roland, a cisgender, heterosexual man with French citizenship observed:

> If you add up all the non-privileges – I don't know how you say it, all the discrimination that exists – in fact, you can't do anything at all. And so, yes, solidarity is [possible] because you have these privileges. Privileges like knowing how to read, you know. If you have the privilege of knowing how to read, then your solidarity is going to be to help the person who can't read with administrative formalities, finding an apartment, stuff like that. […] Solidarity means putting my privileges forward to help [others] live a little better.[13]

As Roland's perspective reveals, solidarity within squats revolves around the mobilization of certain privileges for those whose intersectional identities impose systemic barriers that lead to further marginalization and precarization. Though Roland speaks directly to the privilege of literacy in a territory's predominant language and all of its implications for navigating burdensome administrative procedures and paperwork, the same can be extended to a wide range of everyday acts of care.

---

[11] Interview with Valentina on 14/02/2023

[12] Interview with Catheine on 08/03/2023

[13] Interview with Roland on 22/11/2023

Likewise, residents with non-French backgrounds contribute to the well of collective knowledge by deploying their mother tongues – such as Arabic, Wolof, English or Bambara – to facilitate communication with new arrivals who do not speak French. Another example of intersectional privilege includes those with the ability to obtain a valid driver's license. A ubiquitous document is in fact a privilege that enables them to conduct errands to recover a wide range of material goods – for example unsold fruits and vegetables after open-air markets close or blankets and mattresses from giveaways conducted by associations – to the benefit of all including those without access to license. Those with acquired knowledge such as in electrical work and plumbing can contribute to the overall quality of life of all in the squat by ensuring the safety and function of a building's utility infrastructure. The strength of the squat lies precisely in its heterogeneity and the ways in which everyone, regardless of their intersectional identities, can positively contribute to the amelioration of another's living condition.

Conclusion

The preceding article has explored the practices of care within IDF squats and the way in which they differ from care practices within humanitarian spaces. Whilst being embedded in broader networks of solidarity, squats serve as critical 'corridors of care' (Dadusc, Grazioli & Martínez, 2019) wherein the inclusive access to housing serves as a platform for a litany of interactions of social care. In particular, squats are spaces wherein an embodied solidarity can take root, focusing on 'individual differences yet focused on common vulnerabilities, establishing an obligation to care for the irreducible other' (Fotaki, 2022, p. 297). Care becomes, implicitly and explicitly, a lens through which solidarity is interpreted and enacted: 'care is both a goal (a collective ideal) and a strategy (a way to affect the outcome of political conflict)' (Tronto, 1996, p. 143).

The cases presented, supported by militant ethnographic participant observations and interviews, reveal two critical components of care within IDF squats. First, they underscore the way in which squats and squatter collectives strive to install infrastructures of care that are embedded in wider networks of care. There is particular focus on establishing practices of care that meet the immediate material needs of residents in alleviating intersectional vulnerabilities, notably that of shelter, access to food, and clothing.

Second, squats become inclusive and safe(r) spaces for all those who desired to express themselves authentically and freely. Squats are spaces of encounter for persons with heterogeneous life trajectories and whose intersectional identities are immediately acknowledged. There is a recognition that all persons within the squats simultaneously have needs to be cared for and have the capacity to care for others. Indeed, intersectional identities provide each resident with the potentiality to provide care in areas that are not readily accessible for other residents. Whilst feminist ethics of care address the universality of the need for care, by introducing intersectionality within the analysis, there arises a greater appreciation of the ways in which intersectional identities not only valorize unique and particularistic forms of caregiving intrinsically tied to life trajectories, but also the way in which one's intersectional identities necessitate particular forms of care: though the *need* for care is universal, the *type* of care needed is particularistic and tied to intersectional identities. The article has underscored the political strength of care practices within squats, providing an alternative vision of who can provide and receive care that transcends categorizations based on gender, nationality, race, and other differentiating factors.

At their core, care practices in squats provide a template for the application of a presentist democracy (Lorey, 2022) that draws its strength from a heterogeneous assemblage of dynamic and fluid roles of participation. Squats give space for an ethics of care that seeks to address immediate needs for the alleviation of material and social vulnerability along intersectional lines in the present, whilst not losing vision of longitudinal struggles for emancipation from structures of power including repressive migratory regimes of

'departheid' (Kalir, 2019). They are spaces wherein a prefigurative politics of care is enacted with a vision of stressing the vitality of care in the ongoing struggle for intersectional justice.

References

Agier, M. (2011). *Managing the undesirables: Refugee camps and humanitarian government* (D. Fernbach, Trans.). Polity Press.

Aguilera, T. (2013). Configurations of squats in Paris and the Ile-de-France region. In Squatting Europe Kollective (Ed.), *Squatting in Europe: Radical spaces, urban struggles* (pp. 209–230). Autonomedia.

Aguilera, T. (2018). The squatting movement(s) in Paris: Internal divides and conditions for survival. In M. A. Martínez López (Ed.), *The urban politics of squatters' movements* (pp. 121–144). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95314-1_6

Agustín, Ó. G., & Jørgensen, M. B. (2019). *Solidarity and the "refugee crisis" in Europe.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91848-8

Apoifis, N. (2017). Fieldwork in a furnace: Anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and militant ethnography. *Qualitative Research, 17*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116652450

Bouillon, F. (2011). Le squat. *Regards croisés sur l'économie, 9*(1), 75–84. https://doi.org/10.3917/rce.009.0075

Bouillon, F. (2017). Why migrants' squats are a political issue: A few thoughts about the situation in France. In P. Mudu & S. Chattopadhyay (Eds.), *Migration, squatting and radical autonomy* (pp. 67–77). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673301-6

Bouillon, F., & Dietrich-Ragon, P. (2012). Behind the façades: Ethnographies of Parisian squats. *Ethnologie française, 42*(3), 429–440. https://shs.cairn.info/journal-ethnologie-francaise-2012-3-page-429?lang=en

Bouillon, F., Fourquemin, R., & Louey, C. (2012). Le squat, lieu et promesse de résistances. *VST - Vie sociale et traitements, 113*(1), 79–85. https://doi.org/10.3917/vst.113.0079

Brun, C. (2016). There is no future in humanitarianism: Emergency, temporality and protracted displacement. *History and Anthropology, 27*(4), 393–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2016.1207637

Burgum, S., & Vasudevan, A. (2023). Critical geographies of occupation, trespass and squatting. *City, 27*(3–4), 347–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2023.2223854

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence.* Verso.

Caciagli, C. (2021). Generating solidarity in diversity: The case of housing struggles in Rome. *Critical Sociology, 47*(2), 249–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520943657

Dadusc, D. (2019). The micropolitics of border struggles: Migrants' squats and inhabitance as alternatives to citizenship. *Citizenship Studies, 23*(6), 593–607. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1634377

Dadusc, D., Grazioli, M., & Martínez, M. A. (2019). Introduction: Citizenship as inhabitance? Migrant housing squats versus institutional accommodation. *Citizenship Studies, 23*(6), 521–539. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1634311

Dadusc, D., & Mudu, P. (2020). Care without control: The humanitarian industrial complex and the criminalisation of solidarity. *Geopolitics.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1749839

della Porta, D. (2018). *Solidarity mobilizations in the "refugee crisis": Contentious moves.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71752-4

Depraetere, A., & Oosterlynck, S. (2017). "I finally found my place": A political ethnography of the Maximiliaan refugee camp in Brussels. *Citizenship Studies, 21*(6), 693–709. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2017.1341653

Fassin, D. (2012). *Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present.* University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520950481

Fassin, D., & d'Halluin, E. (2005). The truth from the body: Medical certificates as ultimate evidence for asylum seekers. *American Anthropologist, 107*(4), 597–608. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1525/aa.2005.107.4.597

Fisher, B., & Tronto, J. C. (1990). Toward a feminist theory of caring. In E. Abel & M. Nelson (Eds.), *Circles of care: Work and identity in women's lives* (pp. 36–54). SUNY Press.

Fleischmann, L., & Steinhilper, E. (2017). The myth of apolitical volunteering for refugees: German welcome culture and a new dispositif of helping. *Social Inclusion, 5*(3), 17–27. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v5i3.945

Fondation Abbé Pierre. (2023). *L'état du mal-logement en France 2023* (Annual Report No. 28). Fondation Abbé Pierre.

Fotaki, M. (2022). Solidarity in crisis? Community responses to refugees and forced migrants in the Greek islands. *Organization, 29*(2), 295–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/13505084211051048

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (pp. 3–30). Basic Books.

Grazioli, M. (2017). From citizens to citadins? Rethinking right to the city inside housing squats in Rome, Italy. *Citizenship Studies, 21*(4), 393–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2017.1307607

Harrell-Bond, B. (1986). *Imposing aid: Emergency assistance of the present.* Oxford University Press.

Houtum, H. van, & Aparna, K. (2017). Undocumented territories: Strategies of spatializations by undocumented migrants. In P. Mudu & S. Chattopadhyay (Eds.), *Migration, squatting, and radical autonomy* (pp. 47–53). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673301-4

Juris, J. S. (2007). Practicing militant ethnography with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona. In D. Graeber, S. Shukaitis, & E. Biddle (Eds.), *Constituent imaginaries: Militant investigations, collective theorization* (pp. 164–178). AK Press.

Kalir, B. (2019). Departheid: The draconian governance of illegalized migrants in Western states. *Conflict and Society, 5*(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2019.050102

Kekstaite, J. (2022). Beyond Derrida: Fragments of feminist hospitality in residents hosting illegalized migrants in Belgium. *Hospitality & Society.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1386/hosp_00049_1

Kenny, K., & Fotaki, M. (2015). From gendered organizations to compassionate borderspaces: Reading corporeal ethics with Bracha Ettinger. *Organization, 22*(2), 183–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508414558723

Kotronaki, L. (2018). Outside the doors: Refuge accommodation squats and heterotopy. *South Atlantic Quarterly, 117*(4), 914–924. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-7166080

Lafazani, O. (2018). Homeplace plaza: Challenging the border between host and hosted. *South Atlantic Quarterly, 117*(4), 896–904. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-7166043

Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writing on cities* (E. Kofman & E. Lebas, Trans.). Blackwell.

López, M. A. M. (2013). The squatters' movement in Europe: A durable struggle for social autonomy in urban politics. *Antipode, 45*(4), 866–887. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01060.x

Lorey, I. (2022). *Democracy in the political present: A queer feminist theory* (L. Rosenblatt, Trans.). Verso.

Massey, D. (1995). Thinking radical democracy spatially. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 13*(3), 283–288. https://doi.org/10.1068/d130283

Massey, D. (2005). *For space.* Sage.

Ministère de la Transition écologique et de la Cohésion des territoires. (2021, May 26). Emmanuelle Wargon rend public le premier bilan de l'observatoire des squats. Ministères Écologie Énergie Territoires. https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/emmanuelle-wargon-rend-public-premier-bilan-lobservatoire-des-squats

Mudu, P., & Chattopadhyay, S. (2017). Introduction: Migrations, squatting and radical autonomy. In P. Mudu & S. Chattopadhyay (Eds.), *Migration, squatting, and radical autonomy* (pp. 1–32). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673301-1

Nicholls, W. J. (2009). Place, network, space: Theorising the geographies of social movements. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 34*(1), 78–93. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2009.00331.x

Péchu, C. (2010). *Les squats.* Presses de Sciences Po. https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.pechu.2010.01

Power, E. R. (2019). Assembling the capacity to care: Caring-with precarious housing. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 44*(4), 763–777. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12306

Pruijt, H. (2013). Squatting in Europe. In Squatting Europe Kollective (Ed.), *Squatting in Europe: Radical spaces, urban struggles* (pp. 17–51). Autonomedia.

Raghuram, P. (2019). Race and feminist care ethics: Intersectionality as method. *Gender, Place & Culture, 26*(5), 613–637. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1567471

Raimondi, V. (2019a). For common struggles of migrants and "locals" - Experiences of squatting between local and migrant activists in Athens. *Citizenship Studies, 23*(6), 559–576. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1634373

Raimondi, V. (2019b). Resisting the camp: Migrants' squats as antithetical spaces in Athens' City Plaza. In J. Darling & H. Bauder (Eds.), *Sanctuary cities and urban struggles: Rescaling migration, citizenship, and rights* (pp. 191–216). Manchester University Press. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526134929.00015

Sherman Heye, B. (2007). Ethnographic interviewing. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 369–383). Sage.

Siim, B., & Meret, S. (2021). Patterns of reflective solidarity and migrant resistance in Copenhagen and Berlin. *Critical Sociology, 47*(2), 219–233. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520944517

Sözer, H. (2020). Humanitarianism with a neo-liberal face: Vulnerability intervention as vulnerability redistribution. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 46*(11), 2163–2180. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1573661

Squatting Europe Kollective (Ed.). (2013). *Squatting in Europe: Radical spaces, urban struggles.* Autonomedia.

Ticktin, M. I. (2011). *Casualties of care: Immigration and the politics of humanitarianism in France.* University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520950535

Tronto, J. C. (1996). Care as a political concept. In N. J. Hirschmann & C. Di Stefano (Eds.), *Revisioning the political: Feminist reconstructions of traditional concepts in Western political theory* (pp. 139–156). Westview Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429497612-7

Tsavdaroglou, C., Giannopoulou, C., Petropoulou, C., & Pistikos, I. (2019). Acts for refugees' right to the city and commoning practices of care-tizenship in Athens, Mytilene and Thessaloniki. *Social Inclusion, 7*(4), 119–130. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v7i4.2332

Vandevoordt, R. (2019). Subversive humanitarianism: Rethinking refugee solidarity through grass-roots initiatives. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 38*(3), 245–265. https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz008