Searching for Autonomy and Prefiguration

Resisting the Crisis of Social Reproduction through Housing and Health Care Struggles in Spain and the UK

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Als meus pares,

Karmele i Lluís

Agraïments [1]

Dins la pell de l'ona salada
serem cinc-centes, serem mil.
Perdrem el compte a la tombada.
Juntes farem nostra la nit.

Maria Mercè Marçal (1979)

Hi ha tantes coses que no t'expliquen quan comences una tesi doctoral... La més important és que és un camí llarg, sovint aclaparador, una prova de resistència on moltes vegades la vida personal i la laboral es confonen. Almenys així és com ho he viscut jo. Arribar al final ("the best thesis is a finished thesis") no hauria estat possible sense la força i el suport d'un bon nombre d'amics i amigues, mentors i camarades; i us en vull donar les gràcies.

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Barcelona, 14 de setembre de 2019

Abstract

This doctoral thesis studies the ways in which resistance and self-organisation have emerged in the sphere of social reproduction in the post-2008 global financial crisis context. It argues that social reproduction and everyday politics are key arenas for contestation, and fields where alternatives to contemporary forms of financialised capitalism can be articulated. Following an abductive research design and using a critical comparative methodology, it analyses multiple anti-austerity struggles in defence of the right to adequate and affordable housing and the universal access to free at-the-point-of-use healthcare in Spain and the United Kingdom. The thesis examines how the use of prefigurative politics and the creation of autonomous spaces of solidarity, together with the adoption of complex strategies of institutional transformation across a range of scales, have been central in contemporary struggles over social reproduction for the development of processes of politicisation, the collective empowerment of vulnerable groups and the grassroots protection of basic social rights.

Resum

Aquesta tesi doctoral estudia l'emergència de diverses formes de resistència i auto-organització en l'àmbit de la reproducció social en el context posterior a l'esclat de la crisi financera global l'any 2008. L'argument principal és que la reproducció social i la política quotidiana són escenaris clau per a la contestació, així com terrenys on es poden articular alternatives a les formes actuals de capitalisme financer. Seguint un disseny d'investigació abductiu i una metodologia comparativa crítica, aquesta recerca analitza diferents lluites anti-austeritat en defensa del dret a un habitatge digne i assequible i per l'accés a una atenció sanitària gratuïta i universal a Espanya i al Regne Unit. La tesi examina de quina manera l'ús d'una política prefigurativa i la creació d'espais autònoms de solidaritat, acompanyades de l'adopció d'estratègies complexes de transformació institucional a diverses escales, han estat elements centrals en les lluites actuals per la reproducció social per tal de desenvolupar processos de politització, d'empoderament col·lectiu de grups vulnerables i d'autodefensa de drets socials bàsics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the 8th of September 2010, Lluís, a 52-year-old man from La Bisbal del Penedès (in the south of Catalonia), received an eviction notice. Only three years earlier he had refinanced his mortgage in order to buy the motorcycle repair shop where he had been working for years. When the crisis hit in 2008, however, he lost his job, so he and his 9-year-old son had to scrape by on a 426€ per month unemployment benefit. Eventually, Lluís fell behind on his mortgage repayment, and could not afford to pay his water and electricity bills. The mortgage belonged to a savings bank whose CEO earned nearly 1.4 million Euros in 2010, and soon after had to be bailed out by the Spanish government for 12,676 million Euros. The bank began then a process of foreclosure and the property went to auction. Besides losing his home, Lluís would still owe the bank 100,000 Euros to cover default interest, court costs and negative equity caused by falling property prices; and he could even lose custody of his son after being evicted.

Feeling ashamed and powerless, he sought help from the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Barcelona. This group of activists had organised multiple demonstrations in defence of affordable and decent housing. They also offered legal advice to people at risk of eviction or property repossession due to financial problems. On the scheduled day of eviction, around thirty members of the PAH carrying homemade placards and wearing the green t-

shirts that have become closely associated with the housing movement went to La Bisbal and, together with some neighbours, stood in front of Lluís's home. Using non-violent civil disobedience, they stopped the police and the judicial commission with their own bodies, and managed to resist the eviction. Almost ten years later, Lluís is still living in his house and keeps fighting to stop evictions with PAH Baix Penedès, the local group of the Platform that he helped to build. This first action showed hundreds of thousands of people facing repossession and eviction processes in Spain that they were not alone, and that their collective actions could be extraordinarily powerful. It was the starting point of PAH's *Stop Desahucios* (Stop evictions) campaign, which has since stopped 50.000 evictions throughout the country.

More than 1,000 kilometres away, in Newham, East London, Jasmin received her own eviction notice in September 2013. She was only 19 years old and had a 13-month-old daughter. Having lost her job at a nursery two years before, the then-pregnant Jasmin moved in to the Focus E15 Hostel, which sheltered hundreds of homeless young people in vulnerable situations. However, the pressure for welfare reform led the Newham London Borough Council to suddenly cut the housing support funding for young parents. As a result, Jasmin and the other 28 young mothers and mothers-to-be who lived at the hostel were threatened not only with eviction, but with being moved out of London, to Hastings, Birmingham or Manchester, where they had no family network or friends to count on for support.

It was then when Jasmin's mother, Janice, suggested her daughter to start a petition: she would not be separated from her grandchild. Jasmin knocked on the other Focus E15 mothers' doors and, although they barely knew each other, they decided to come together to fight against their eviction. Their first action was collecting signatures on Stratford Broadway in what later on became the Focus E15 Mothers weekly street stall. To attract public attention, they also organised several direct actions, including temporary occupations of council flats, demonstrations and protests inside the Newham Council's housing office and several housing associations. Finally, Jasmin and the other mothers and children from Focus E15 managed to be re-housed in London. In spite of their victory, they have kept campaigning ever since to defend social housing and to raise awareness around social cleansing and mental health issues in their local community and all around the UK.

The cases of Lluís and Jasmin have occurred in different contexts and have been lived by very different people. However, they raise many similar themes. Facing common threats to their everyday lives, both of them managed to mobilise in spite of the frustration and confusion caused by their insecure housing situations. So, what brought Lluís and Jasmin to overcome their feelings of isolation and hopelessness and fight back? And, even more importantly, how did they organise collectively to defend their shared interests and secure their basic means of existence? These are some of the questions that

led me to the overarching theme of this doctoral thesis: the ongoing crisis of social reproduction and its resistances.

1.1 Social reproduction as an arena for resistance

Recent accounts in the field of feminist political economy have returned and developed the concept of social reproduction to reflect on the relationship between gender and capitalist domination, in an attempt to integrate the analysis of the social processes of production and reproduction of material life under a unitary approach (Vogel 1983; see also Bakker and Gill 2003; Federici 2012; Bhattacharya 2018). These approaches conceive social reproduction as a vast and heterogeneous complex of everyday activities, social practices and institutions that are central for sustaining and renewing life, both daily and generationally. In their seminal work on the topic, Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner define the notion of social reproduction as:

> "the activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. Social reproduction can thus be seen to include various kinds of work-mental, manual, and

> emotional-aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation" (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 382-383).

From this perspective, although the activities involved in social reproduction are often undervalued and marginalised because of their, generally, unpaid and invisible nature, they are fundamental for the maintenance of the labour force and the capitalist system in its entirety.[2] This way, as Cindi Katz puts it, social reproduction involves all those "material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis and through which the social relations and material bases of capitalism are renewed" (2001: 709).

Furthermore, this socially necessary work covered under the term social reproduction is secured through a changing and historically-contingent balance of different institutional sources, comprising the state, the household or family unit, the market, and the civil society (Bezanson and Luxton 2006). Under the current neoliberal regimes, in particular, the responsibility over social reproduction has been increasingly transferred from the state to the market and the

[2]Laslett and Brenner establish a distinction between social reproduction and the broader notion of *societal reproduction*. The latter comprises all those processes and practices, including social reproduction, that are necessary for the perpetuation of the whole mode of production and system of social relations inscribed in it (Laslett and Brenner 1989: 383).

households, thus allowing capital to increase its control over new territories, resources and relationships. Moreover, the debt crisis that exploded in 2008 has triggered a new process of welfare state dismantling and has privileged market mechanisms through the increasing privatisation and commodification of social reproduction (Arruzza 2016). Often justified as a matter of economic necessity (Bruff 2014), activities, spaces and institutions of social reproduction have been reconfigured in order to generate new opportunities for capital accumulation.

The mutation of neoliberalism into the imposition of widespread austerity in the post-2008 period, however, has been opposed and disrupted by a vibrant wave of contention. Across the world, a broad range of anti-austerity mobilisations and struggles emerged aiming to resist the withdrawal of welfare support that threatened their social reproduction, and to destabilise the new attempts at capital domination and exploitation. These collective endeavours have not been merely defensive (as it had often been the case previously), but have strived to articulate a new contestation *from below* that put the reproduction of life at the centre of their practices and demands (Arampatzi 2017). Through their own self-activity and organising strategies, these transformative agencies have contributed to the construction of autonomous forms of social reproduction and to the material reorganisation of social relations along more egalitarian lines (Wigger 2018). Thus, these interrelated autonomous and prefigurative dimensions have been essential for the development of processes of politicisation and empowerment

among those whose everyday lives have been most affected by the crisis of social reproduction.

It is in this sense that this doctoral thesis considers the ways in which disruption and resistance emerge in the sphere of social reproduction, as well as to explore the means by which grassroots movements over social reproduction are trying to reshape social and material relations beyond the state and the market. Accordingly, the main research questions addressed are: ***How can the sphere of social reproduction offer new opportunities for autonomy and social struggle?*** And ***how do these struggles for social reproduction connect with state rescaling processes?***

1.2 Analytical framework

As presented in the previous section, this doctoral thesis seeks to answer two related research questions: How can the sphere of social reproduction offer new opportunities for autonomy and social struggle? And how do these struggles for social reproduction connect with state rescaling processes? In order to address these questions, it focuses on the interplay between *experience* and *space* in the creation of the everyday. Specifically, it traces four connected factors that struggles over social reproduction explore in their search for autonomy, as well as how these factors relate to each other in different institutional and social contexts. The four interrelated analytical categories, which represent complementary routes for resistance, are:

Defence of the social commons. In line with social reproduction theorising, this research explores the strategies for the collective reorganisation of the material conditions of life outside of patriarchal and competitive market relations, and of state-imposed, charity-based welfare provisions. These strategies include, therefore, *the communal preservation, production and (re-)appropriation of basic rights and means of existence, as well as the construction of autonomous and bottom-up spaces from where ongoing processes of commodification and marketisation of social reproduction can be resisted and subverted.*

Material basis for solidarity. This thesis explores the material grounds for the political (re-)articulation of social solidarity within neighbourhoods and local communities. It is argued in the thesis that, by raising awareness on the commonality of their particular everyday needs, *struggles over social reproduction can transform individualised and fragmented grievances into collective demands for social and political justice*. This way, these struggles may not only become platforms for mutual help and cooperation between people who are exposed to similar forms of material deprivation, but also spaces that contribute to the re-politicisation and empowerment of previously excluded groups.

Shared experiences and connection to the everyday. Linked to the previous point, a third factor considered is the role that continued day-to-day practices and experiences of activism can have in building more egalitarian social relations and constituting broader projects of social transformation. Through the organisation of 'common spaces' (Stavrides 2016), that is, spaces built for and by creative encounters and communal practices, *these struggles have the ability to unite the times and activities of social reproduction with those of political engagement*. This may be an essential element in the resistance and subversion of current debt- and market-based relations of domination and exploitation, and from where to regain power over our own everyday lives.

State rescaling strategies. Drawing from recent debates over scale in geography and global political economy, the thesis argues that, although state rescaling practices or 'scalar fixes' (Brenner 2004) have frequently responded to attempts secure and expand the conditions for capital accumulation, *the resulting institutional configurations are necessarily incomplete and unstable, since they are concrete manifestations of broader social processes and power relations*. It is in this sense that the production and transformation of scalar structures is considered as a strategic field in which social struggles can unfold.

1.3 Methodology

Aiming to disentangle the interconnections between social reproduction, everyday experiences and resistance to austerity, this thesis focuses on several struggles over social reproduction that have emerged in Spain and the United Kingdom in the wake of the crisis. To do so, I adopt a non-positivist and critical approach to social sciences. These approaches challenge the presupposition that social reality is entirely knowable and can be observed objectively and without interference by the researcher (Della Porta and Keating 2011: 23). Instead, following critical methodological approaches, researchers are considered here to be "active and imaginative agents" (Mason 2011: 80). These methodological approaches conceive research as a social practice that attempts to produce knowledge about the social reality, understood as an unstable and provisional balance of antagonistic power relations. Its goal is thus to provide a comprehensive and historically contextualised account of complex phenomena, as well as to explore potential strategic avenues for the articulation of new forms of resistance and emancipatory projects (Jäger *et al* 2016). In sum, following the methodological reflections of Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, this thesis aims to "think about social struggles from the struggles themselves" ("*conocer las luchas desde las luchas mismas*"; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017: 21). Therefore, it focuses the attention on the everyday practices, forms of organising and associational dynamics developed by social struggles, alongside the instability they bring to current attempts at domination.

The research design followed an abductive path aimed at "thinking with theory" (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). This means that by departing from existing social reproduction theories and disruption-oriented approaches to political economy (Huke *et al* 2015; see also Chapter 2), the first step of the research process consisted in outlining the analytical framework and the specific categories that would guide the development of the thesis. As a set out in the previous section, the result is an open and flexible sketch of the general and interrelated factors from which to consider the potential ways in which current struggles over social reproduction can open up new routes towards resistance and emancipation in the post-2008 crisis context. The final theorisation, however, has been done throughout the whole research process, and completed during the analysis of the fieldwork data. While the initial theorisation has informed the observations, the further construction of theoretical ideas has been in turn aided by the careful analysis of empirical evidence (Timmermans and Tavoy 2012).

Towards a Critical Comparative Methodology

The methodology employed follows a comparative case-based approach. The present research provides an intensive analysis of a small number of processes and events in order to profoundly understand and give meaning to their complex configurations and processes of change (Ragin 2004). In this sense, case studies are particularly suited to address research questions formulated through "how" and "why" questions (Yin 1994: 5). In particular, I develop two paired comparisons, each of them belonging to one of the

empirical chapters of the thesis (Chapters 3 and 4), aimed at generating situated knowledge about a diversity of social struggles, as well as at learning from the historical and contextual backgrounds in which they are embedded and which they co-constitute.

The comparative endeavour is here, therefore, directed towards the understanding of the contradictions, conflicts and inequalities that lie at the root of particular spatial and temporal differences (Bruff and Ebenau 2014). More specifically, the thesis approaches social and political relations precisely "from the perspective of social struggles" (Weber 2007: 566), and contributes to making visible the role of the latter in the co-production of institutional arrangements and their significance for political and social change (Poulantzas 1978). The reason for the choice of a comparative methodology is twofold: (1) it allows to develop a deep and historically grounded understanding of diverse experiences of social and political activism, as well as the meanings given to them by their participants; (2) it provides a sound analytical ground for exploring the different ways in which prefigurative social agents attempt not only to resist but also to transform institutional forms across a variety of scales and in different contexts.

In doing so, this research tries to overcome two main limitations of the formal or conventional comparative approach. On the one hand, a common methodological problem when pursuing experimental or quasi-experimental comparative research strategies concerns the

tendency to oversimplify reality in order to unravel causal mechanisms and provide law-like generalisations. This can be done, for instance, by relying on methods of 'control' that often implicitly or explicitly conceal relevant differences between the cases being compared (see, for example, Sartori 1991; for a critical discussion of the use of this type of 'matched comparisons', see Locke and Thelen 1995). On the other hand, this thesis also aims to avoid falling into the trap of 'methodological nationalism', that is, of giving ontological primacy to the nation-state and its institutional configurations over the unstable and historically-contingent balance of social forces for and by which they are constituted (Brenner 2004; Jessop 2008). Instead, I place the diverse experiences of struggle and their everyday practices at the centre of analysis, and I study them not as abstracted from their time and space, but as historically situated social phenomena that are integral to process of social and political change (McMichael 1990; Halperin 2004). Hence, I avoid taking the territorial state as the unit of analysis and, alternatively, use the comparative method as a way to explain the limits and possibilities of multiple patterns of contestation and emancipatory strategies in different contexts and around a diversity of issues. For this reason, thesis often goes back to the 1970s and 1980s in order to offer an in-depth situated analysis of each struggle's historical background and contingencies, as well as of their relational dynamics with state institutions.

Case studies

The specific cases analysed in the thesis are four instances of social struggles over social reproduction in Spain and the UK. These countries offer two exceptional – and, to an extent, contrasting – scenarios for exploring the severe effects of the socio-economic crisis on the material conditions of extensive parts of their populations, as well as for analysing the emergence of new demands of social justice in the post-2008 global financial crisis era. Although both countries suffered a deep recession after the financial collapse, important differences can be observed in the severity of the crisis. In terms of economic growth, for instance, Spain's GDP fell by 3.6 per cent in 2009, and continued to decrease until 2014. The UK suffered an even deeper initial contraction, with a GDP fall of 0.3 per cent in 2008 and 4.2 per cent in 2009, but recovered immediately afterwards (OECD 2019a). As for the labour force, the unemployment rate in Spain rose to an average of 26 per cent in 2013 (55.5 per cent if we only take into account the youth labour force), and stood over 20 per cent between the third quarter of 2010 and the second quarter of 2016. In the UK, unemployment rates peaked in 2011 at 8% (21% for the youth labour force), and decreased consistently in the following years (OECD 2019b).

Another fundamental difference between these countries is their approach towards European integration: whereas Spain is a member of the Eurozone, the UK had control over its own currency and monetary policy, and was less subject to EU-level control. Moreover, the UK chose not sign the 2012 Treaty on Stability,

Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, which bounded the signing countries (including Spain) to strict structural deficit caps.[3] These characteristics make the comparison between these two countries pertinent, as they enable me to explore the development of various projects of class emancipation and the identification of their political demands, disruptive strategies and contradictions in (at least in appearance) dissimilar post-crisis contexts.

Departing from this general contextualisation, the two comparative analyses developed in the thesis aim to shed light upon two of the essential aspects of social reproduction that have been most affected by the crisis: housing and health care. This case-oriented methodology allows for an analysis based on the commonalities and differences in the patterns of resistance and contestation deployed by two pairs of social struggles, as well as of their historical and contextual backgrounds. First, the choice of **housing** as one of the elements of social reproduction studied in the thesis has been motivated by its centrality to contemporary dynamics of financial expansion, capital accumulation and social disciplining (Saad-Filho 2011, Montgomerie 2009), as well as by the importance of housing movements in current processes of contestation from below. Thus, on the one hand, housing has not only been one of the main drivers of the crisis, but also one of the economic sectors most affected by

[3] The UK's finances were, however, constricted by the 3 per cent budget deficit ceiling and the 60 per cent debt limit established in the Stability and Growth Pact.

its consequences. From the mid-1990s on, both Spain and the UK have experienced extreme cases of housing financialisation, and house prices more than doubled throughout the real estate boom (López and Rodríguez 2011; HM Land Registry 2019). When, in 2008, the shortage in credit led to the collapse of housing and mortgage markets, the impact on the wellbeing of their populations was devastating. During the period 2008-2018, more than 750,000 households have had their houses repossessed due to mortgage arrears, and at least 412,000 have been effectively evicted from their mortgaged or rented homes in Spain (*Consejo General del Poder Judicial* 2018). In the UK, repossessions affected 180,000 mortgaged properties and 390,000 rented houses (Ministry of Justice 2019).

On the other hand, and precisely because of this, housing has also been one of main drivers to the current wave social and urban unrest. Widespread popular dissent emerged in opposition to the willingness of their governments to bail out the crumbling financial system but not people who were struggling because of it. In this context, the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Spain and Focus E15 in the UK, are the two everyday movements for decent housing explored in the thesis. These two cases have been selected because they are the most notorious examples of grassroots struggles that have effectively managed to politicise and empower parts of the population that were previously excluded and vastly disaffected. The PAH is a housing movement created in Barcelona in 2009 and that currently has more than 250 local nodes

in Spain. Combining direct actions to stop evictions and re-house people with more conventional forms of political activity, they have fought for over ten years to protect the right to decent and affordable housing. Focus E15 is a campaign initiated in 2013 by 29 young single mothers threatened with eviction from the hostel were they were temporarily accommodated. The campaign has managed to mobilise thousands of people around London and beyond to demand secure and social housing and to stop the city-wide processes of gentrification and social cleansing.

The second area to be analysed in the thesis, **health care**, has traditionally been one of the main areas of social protection in welfare states. However, in the last twenty years, and particularly after the beginning of the crisis in 2008/9, public health care systems have suffered a broad restructuration that has not only implied severe budget cuts and a reduction of treatments covered by governments, but also the progressive privatisation and corporatisation of the service in many industrialised countries. For instance, after a period of increasing public health care spending as a share of GDP, between 2009 and 2016 the level decreased 7.1 to 6.6 per cent in Spain, and passed from 8 to 8.5 per cent in 2014 in the UK (Eurostat 2018).[4] What is more, during the same period, the number of hospital beds per thousand inhabitants has dropped from 3.2 to 3 in Spain and 3.3 to 2.6 in the UK (OECD 2019c). This

[4] Nevertheless, as explained in Chapter 4, in the UK an increasing part of this budget is needed to meet rising PFI (Private Financial initiatives) obligations.

sphere moreover, allows me to explore one of main analytical dimensions identified in the previous section, namely the deep transformations in the state scalar configuration experienced during the post-Fordist regime of accumulation.

The selection of health care as one of the areas of social reproduction researched in this thesis also responds to the fact that social movements in health have remained largely unexplored (Lethbridge 2009). This type of struggles, however, have been important driving forces for changes in the access and quality of health care, as well as to fight against health inequalities (Brown and Zavestoski 2004). Nowadays, the processes of outsourcing and privatisation, as well as the increasing reliance on executive public bodies and agencies rather than on government departments for the management of the public health services – more pronounced in the UK –, have reduced their public accountability and increased social unrest (Pollock and Price 2011; Tailby 2012). In this sense, *Marea Blanca* and Keep Our NHS Public, the two health social movements analysed in the thesis, have been the two largest examples of resistance to healthcare commodification, privatisation and de-democratisation in Europe during the crisis, both in terms of duration and widespread implication of workers and civil society. In Spain, *Marea Blanca* emerged in 2012 during the 15-M cycle of struggle to fight against the Madrid Regional Government's plan to privatise six public hospitals in the area. From then on, it extended throughout the country, creating numerous groups in defence of a universal and free public healthcare system. The UK case, Keep

Our NHS Public, is an example of a campaign organisation fighting since 2005 to reverse the ongoing processes of privatisation and marketisation of the National Health Service. Although it was initially created by a variety of NHS workers' associations, it has developed into a network of community struggles and support groups organised around different NHS hospital and health centres.

Qualitative research

Following what I have previously called a critical comparative methodology, the thesis uses a qualitative approach in order to understand complex and relational dynamics, to raise awareness of the historical context and the processes of change, and to uncover the meanings and motivations that lie behind particular behaviours. More specifically, it employs three complementary qualitative research methods: (1) *activist participant observation,* (2) *in-depth semi-structured interviews*, and (3) *document and media content analysis*. These methods are essential tools to unpack the different ways in which social struggles over public healthcare provision and housing that have emerged in Spain and the UK after 2008 are challenging the wave of austerity and articulating alternative, collective projects to secure basic means of existence and reproduction.

Activist participant observation

The first qualitative research method used in the thesis is *activist participant observation*. This type of ethnographic research consists in the direct engagement of the researcher in the scenes and spaces

analysed, and the interaction with individuals and social groups that are being studied. Thus, it allows for a grounded and intimate connection between the researcher and the researched people and institutions, as she "embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do" (Wacquant 2003). For this reason, this method is particularly convenient to explore the emergence and functioning of forms of resistance, social movements and autonomous institutions, for it allows the researcher to approach the subjects of study in their own space and time, that is, through the researcher's participation in their everyday lives (Burawoy 1991).

Engaged ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in an extended period of time that started in 2013 and continued until (and beyond) the completion of the thesis. In particular, it involved *participant observation* in multiple spaces of social reproduction, key organising meetings and assemblies, direct actions and mobilisations (see Table 1.1). Furthermore, rather than adopting a non-obtrusive and detached position in the investigation, I chose to take an active and engaged role (Cole 1991). In the same way as activism blurred the limits the spaces and times between political action and social reproduction for the other campaigners (see Chapter 2), in my case the connections were also extended to my work as a researcher. This decision entailed several advantages: I gained access to a wide range of organisational activities, it provided me with internal data and it allowed me to establish contacts with other participants that were later on interviewed for

the thesis. My participation as both an activist and a researcher was overt and acknowledged at all times, and I granted to guard the secrecy and anonymity of the participants and planned actions.

Table 1.1: List of events, actions and spaces attended during fieldwork

PAH: Local PAHs: PAH Barcelona's welcome and internal coordination assemblies (June-December 2013), PAHC Sabadell assembly (July-September 2013), PAH Girona (June-July 2013) Catalan PAHs regional assembly (July, September and October 2013) Spanish PAHs state-wide assembly (February 2014) Direct actions to block evictions (May 2013, October 2013, Abril 2017) Bank occupations (July, September and October 2013) Marches & demonstrations (February 2013, May 2013, March 2014, December 2014)
Focus E15: Weekly street stall (March-April 2016) Radical Housing Network workshop (July 2016) Internal campaign meeting (March 2016) March against the Housing and Planning Act (March & June 2016)
Marea Blanca: March "Our Health is not for Sale", organised by the EU Health Network (April 2017) "National day against waiting lists" (December 2018) Protest meetings (July 2016)

Keep Our NHS Public:

National Day of Action (December 2016)

Public meeting Tameside Keep Our NHS Public – Greater Manchester (May 2016)

Junior Doctors strikes (March-April 2016)

Save Our NHS Greater Manchester 'die-in' campaign action (January 2017)

Moreover, in an effort towards a *collaborative production of knowledge*, I also participated in several self-managed debates, internal meetings and thematic workshops in order to contribute to a collective process of self-reflection. The main goals of these events that joined both activists and researchers were, therefore, sharing varied experiences of activism, producing autonomous spaces mutual learning and, ultimately, organising trans-national networks for the exchange of information, resources and supports. The collaborative processes of understanding built in these contexts were essential to the final development of the present thesis.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

The second main data-collection strategy employed in the research is the *in-depth semi-structured interview* with selected activists involved in the social struggles being investigated. This method sought to explore the dynamics of organisation and mobilisation deployed by the different instances of social struggle, at the same time as understand the subjective experiences of activism of those involved in them and the meanings and interpretations attributed to such experiences (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 7).

With the exception of a few interviews performed at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the University of Manchester campuses, the vast majority of them took place in cafes or spaces of activism, and lasted on average between one and one-and-a-half hours. They followed a pre-elaborated script with a list of topics and specific questions that was consistent throughout the different cases studied, but that was open and adaptable in order to explore particular experiences, representations and interests of the interviewees. The questions focused mainly on the following elements: previous experiences of activism and politicisation, socioeconomic situation and reasons behind their current mobilisation, types of engagement and participation in the social struggle, meanings and impacts of this activism on their daily lives. As for the selection process, an initial 'snowball sampling' in which previous interviewees recommended was complemented with an additional non-random 'quota sampling' in order to guarantee a broader capture the diversity of profiles (in terms of gender, age and origin when possible) of those participating in the struggles (Weiss 1994; Small 2009).

In total, I interviewed 42 people (see Table 1.2), of which 20 (corresponding to the members of the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages) were carried out in collaboration with other researchers from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra as part of the project AJOVE12 titled 'Social Inequality and Youth Political Participation during the Crisis", funded by the Catalan government. After obtaining the permission of the interviewees, the majority of

interviews were recorded. Additionally, although it was not initially planned, four of the interviews were performed in small groups of two to three respondents. The addition of this method responded to an explicit demand of a few activists, as it made them feel more confident and comfortable, and therefore improved the trust relationship between the interviewees and the interviewer.

Table 1.2: Profile of the respondents

PAH: 20 interviews (in 7 Barcelona, 7 in Sabadell and in 6 Girona) Gender: 12 women, 8 men Age: 1 (20-25), 4 (25-30), 6 (35-40), 3 (40-45), 5 (45-50), 1 (60-65) Nationality: 13 Spanish, 2 Ecuadorian, 1 Peruvian, 2 Argentinean, 1 Colombian, 1 Moroccan
Focus E15: 9 interviews (2 of them to members of the Radical Housing Network) Gender: 6 women, 3 men Age: 4 (20-25), 1 (30-35), 4 (55-60) Nationality: 7 British, 2 Irish
***Marea Blanca:* 8 interviews** (2 of them to members of *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal*) Gender: 6 women, 2 men Age: 1 (30-35), 1 (40-45), 5 (45-50), 1 (55-60) Nationality: 1 Argentinean, 7 Spanish
Keep Our NHS Public: 5 interviews (1 Save Our NHS) Gender: 3 women, 2 men Age: 2 (20-25), 1 (40-45), 2 (65-70) Nationality: 4 British, 1 Chilean

Document and media content analysis

Throughout the thesis, *document and media content analysis* is used as an additional source of information that allows to corroborate and complement the evidence obtained through the interviews and activist participant observation, that is, to triangulate the results and achieve a 'more comprehensive understandings of phenomena' (Lambert and Loiselle 2008: 273; see also Snow and Trom 2002). In spite of being relevant sources of additional information, the use of this type of content in social research has to be done carefully and accurately. It is in this sense that John Scott suggested that "the interpretative meaning of the document which the researcher aims to produce [is] a tentative and provisional judgement constantly in need of revision" (Scott 1990: 35). In order to address this issue, I included two complementary sorts of materials: content generated by the social struggles and content produced by media companies.

Thus, on the one hand, I also gathered a myriad of documents encountered during fieldwork and produced by the struggles themselves, comprising:

- Websites and social media profiles (Facebook pages and Twitter accounts)
- Video footage
- Internal documents from the social movements
- Blogs and Internet forums
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Information leaflets and pamphlets

On the other hand, I periodically collected press articles and interviews from multiple Spanish and British newspapers and magazines, including La Vanguardia, El País, La Directa, eldiario.es, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, Financial Times and Manchester Evening News. This provided a broader understanding of the socio-economic and political contexts in which the struggles unfolded, as well as the varied portrayals that different media (mainstream and other) offered of the researched social struggles.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in five chapters. Following the present introduction, Chapters 2 to 4 function as three stand-alone papers. Chapter 2, entitled "Defying the Crisis of Social Reproduction: Practices, Lessons and Experiences of Resistance in Spain and the United Kingdom", focuses on multiple emancipatory struggles that have emerged in Spain and the United Kingdom to reject fiscal austerity and subvert the growing financialisation of everyday life in the wake of the 2007/8 global crisis. Specifically, by exploring their communal self-organisation and autonomous management of reproductive activities, spaces and institutions, the chapter considers the opportunities for resistance and the transformative potential offered by current struggles over social reproduction. The final goal of this piece is thus to offer a theoretical and analytical framework to be used as a departure point for the two subsequent empirical chapters.

Chapter 3, named "'Social Housing, Not Social Cleansing!' Prefigurative Politics and the Struggle for Housing in Spain and the UK", investigates the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages and Focus E15, two community-based housing struggles that emerged in Spain and the UK in order to mitigate the impact of the crisis on highly vulnerable individuals and families and to actively contribute to the construction of grassroots and self-managed spaces of social reproduction. In particular, it examines in what ways their autonomous, prefigurative politics and forms of organising, their multi-scalar dynamics and their adoption of pragmatic methods of institutional (dis-)engagement have been used to open up new opportunities for political mobilisation in their respective contexts.

Under the title "Rescaling the State, Rescaling Resistance: Health Social Movements Contesting the Dismantling of Welfare States in Spain and the UK", Chapter 4 gives attention mainly to the fourth analytical category proposed in this introduction, namely, state rescaling strategies. On the one hand, it explores how the functional rescaling of health care policies and services has been used in Spain and the UK in order to rearticulate political economies during the global financial crisis. On the other hand, it analyses the scalar strategies developed by two social struggles against the privatization of hospitals and health centres in these countries: *Marea Blanca* and *Keep Our NHS Public*. In this manner, it explores how autonomous struggles can exploit the potential dysfunctions produced by these scale shifts in order to transform certain institutional levels into centres of resistance.

Finally, the concluding chapter, Chapter 5, presents a summary of the main theoretical and empirical findings of the thesis. Returning to the four analytical categories offered in this introductory chapter, it discusses the contributions offered by the thesis, addresses its main challenges and limitations, and identifies avenues for further research.

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2. DEFYING THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: PRACTICES, LESSONS AND EXPERIENCES OF RESISTANCE IN SPAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Abstract:

In the context of the post-2007/8 global crisis, the imposition of severe austerity programmes, combined with a drastic curtailment of social and labour rights, has triggered a wave of dissatisfaction throughout the European Union. Numerous emancipatory struggles have emerged to reject fiscal austerity and subvert the growing financialisation of everyday life. This paper analyses the relationship between capitalist accumulation, social reproduction and resistance to austerity in Spain and the United Kingdom in the wake of the crisis. Drawing on in-depth interviews and activist participant observation, the paper explores how different movements and struggles over social reproduction are articulating contestation from below and developing alternatives to the housing crisis, to austerity measures in healthcare provision, and within spaces of everyday life. By analysing these experiences of collective self-organisation, their renewed interest for 'the commons' and their development of innovative spatial practices, this contribution reflects on the centrality of social reproduction in the resistance and contestation against neoliberalism in the current age of 'permanent austerity' (Pierson 2001).

Key words: Social reproduction; austerity; resistance; Spain; UK

2.1 Introduction

Since the 1970s, there has been a notorious shift towards financialisation and the establishment of a 'debt-based' economy across the globe (Soederberg 2014). Particularly in the transition to the twenty-first-century, the limiting of state's capacity for (re)distribution and welfare, and a stark (re)privatisation and financialisation of spheres of social reproduction have been used to foster capital accumulation and domination in arenas that had previously been located outside the market economy to an extent. This attempt to reconstruct social life and reproduction by progressively incorporating all social relations under a capitalist logic has attracted considerable attention in the academic literature (see, among others, Fraser 2015; Caffentzis 2002; Federici 2014, 2018; Bakker and Gill 2003).

The deepening privatisation and financialisation in the sphere of reproduction has provoked fundamental changes in everyday life and reproduction strategies. Households, students, medical patients, pensioners, and unemployed as well as precarious workers have become increasingly dependent on credit and market relations to meet basic material needs. This has become particularly evident in the context of the post-2007/8 global crisis. The imposition of far-reaching fiscal austerity programmes – involving among other measures growing labour market flexibility and deregulation, severe cuts to pensions, public education and health systems, and a drastic reduction of welfare benefits – have had a significant impact on individuals, households and communities, and could become the

final *coup de grace* to the welfare state as we know it. The drastic curtailment of social and labour rights contributed not only to the exacerbation of social inequalities, the precarisation of everyday life and the immiseration of broad sectors of the population, but also to a further displacement of the responsibility for social reproduction from the public to the private sphere (LeBaron 2010).

This crisis of social reproduction has not gone uncontested. From quasi-spontaneous massive mobilisations and occupations to more organised and durable social and political movements such as the '15-M' or 'Occupy', emancipatory struggles have sought to reject fiscal austerity and subvert the growing financialisation of everyday life. Despite taking multiple forms across various contexts and scales, these resistance practices have opposed established forms of representative democracy and prompted processes of empowerment and grassroots protection of social rights, at the same time as they have striven to generate new spaces for both political action and the material organisation of social reproduction (Della Porta and Mattoni 2014). This way, as the disciplinary practices put into effect under the neoliberal rule encompass a broad curtailment of not only labour but also civil, social and reproductive rights, the disruptive strategies and acts of resistance adopted in the post-2007/8 context have taken various fronts in the productive and in the reproductive spheres, in work and in the everyday (Huke *et al* 2015).

Drawing on qualitative research, including in-depth interviews and activist participant observation developed between 2015 and 2018,

this paper explores how different struggles over social reproduction in Spain and the United Kingdom are articulating new forms of contestation *from below* and developing alternatives to market-mediated social reproduction in the household, the local community, and the everyday. It also analyses these experiences as part of a broader anti-austerity wave of contention that has fought for the defence of social, labour and civil rights, and for the collective (re)appropriation and self-management of privatised, financialised and precarious means of existence and reproduction in the current age of 'permanent austerity' (Pierson 2001).

The paper is structured as follows: The first section begins by reflecting on the different perspectives that examine the connections between capital accumulation and the financialization and privatisation of social reproduction. Following on from social reproduction theories and disruption-oriented approaches to political economy, I argue that social reproduction is not only an arena for domination, but also and most importantly, a field where struggle and prefiguring alternatives to capitalism can be articulated. In the second and third sections of the paper, I explore different case studies of grassroots struggles over social reproduction. On the one hand, I focus on several instances of resistance that appeared in defence of public healthcare provision, including *Marea Blanca*, *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal*, Keep Our NHS Public and Save Our NHS. On the other hand, I analyse housing struggles which have disrupted the consolidation of a debt-based and property-led model of accumulation, namely the *Plataforma de*

Afectados por la Hipoteca and Focus E15. By analysing these multiple experiences of collective self-organisation of social reproduction, their renewed interest for 'the common' and their development of innovative spatial practices, the paper reflects on the centrality of social reproduction and everyday politics in the resistance and contestation against contemporary forms of financialised capitalism.

2.2 Social Reproduction: From an arena for accumulation to a battlefield for contention

After the start of the global financial crisis in 2007-8, a rich body of literature has emerged investigating the ways in which contemporary capitalism is seeking to enhance accumulation and to discipline key social agents and sites – including states, households, workplaces and urban spaces – through the institution of a *debt-based* economy (Federici 2014; Bruff and Tansel 2018). These accounts have emphasised not only the growing shift towards the use of financial tools for increasing capital profitability and expropriation and the 'constitutive role of finance in the capital relations under neoliberalism' (Saad-Filho 2011:243; see also Soederberg 2014), but also the ways in which livelihoods, households, communities and societies are reproduced on a daily and generational basis, that is, with social reproduction (Bakker and Gill 2003; Roberts 2016; Katz 2001).

This body of literature is helpful in documenting how, in order to open up new sources of profitability, capital has been seeking to reconfigure reproductive activities, spaces and institutions in ways that make them more compatible with capital accumulation (De Angelis 2001). Debt – in forms as varied as student loans, consumer and credit card debt, medical debt or mortgages, and many others – has had a central role in the rising attempts by capital to accumulate by dispossession (Harvey 2004). Fuelled by the precarisation of working and living conditions, by the withdrawal of support from the state through the imposition of fiscal austerity and welfare retrenchment, and by the privatisation of social insurance and pension mechanisms, credit has increasingly become the primary means for people to meet the costs of their basic material and reproductive needs. In this manner, under neoliberal economic governance, the costs and risks of social reproduction have been displaced from the public to the private sphere, that is, to the market and the home (Bruff and Wöhl 2016). Thus, financialisation has been used as a means not only to transform reproductive activities into '*immediate sites of capital accumulation*' (Federici 2014: 233, emphasis in original), but also to undermine social solidarity and to enhance the fragmentation and isolation of the working class (Lazzarato 2011).

The great majority of these debates have highlighted how disciplining strategies promoted through the processes of financialisation and privatisation of social reproduction have heightened domination and attempted to narrow down the scope for

resistance. However, less attention has been paid to disentangle the concrete and multi-form practices and repertories in which social struggles are attempting to resist and even subvert these processes (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz 2017). Following recently developed disruption-oriented approaches to political economy (see Huke *et al* 2015; Wigger 2016; Bailey *et al* 2018a; 2018b), this paper argues that despite the intensity of its self-expanding tendencies,[5] capital's attempts at securing domination and exploitation through the commodification and financialisation of social reproduction are necessarily porous, contradictory and incomplete, and therefore subject to resistance and contestation.

Rethinking social reproduction as a terrain for resistance

In order to discuss the potential for resistance outside, and beyond, the workplace, this paper draws upon critical insights developed by contemporary feminist political economists by conceptualising the complex ensemble of social relations and material practices that are necessary for the daily and generational reproduction of life. Following this line of analysis, activities as diverse as the provision

[5] By self-expanding tendencies of capitalism, I refer here to the constant attempt by capital to enlarge the reach of accumulation through the continual expropriation and commodification of new territories, resources and relationships. However, I do agree with Fraser's idea that, despite this drive to foster accumulation on a progressively expanding scale, commodification in capitalist societies is not only far from universal, but they actually depend for their very existence on non-commodified zones (Fraser 2014: 66).

of food and shelter, housework, care for the sick and elderly, child-care and education, or the organisation of sexuality, among many others, can be gathered under the notion of *social reproduction*, which reflects "the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life [and] a set of structured practices that unfold in dialectical relation to production, with which it is mutually constitutive and in tension" (Katz 2001: 710).

From this perspective, therefore, social reproduction goes beyond the biological reproduction of humankind and entails the maintenance and reproduction of productive labour power, the creation of social bonds, and the sustainment of whole communities. As such, capitalist societies depend on it, for it provides particular material conditions that are indispensable for their own functioning. This reveals, according to Nancy Fraser, one of the profound contradictions of contemporary capitalism:

> "On the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies. This 'social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism' lies at the root ... of our so-called crisis of care" (2018:22).

From Fraser's point of view, therefore, destabilising social reproduction can imply weakening certain processes and capacities that are essential to sustain the capitalist economy. What follows from this is that social reproduction constitutes not only an arena for

accumulation and financialised exploitation, but also a terrain of struggle where social relations of capital can be destabilised and disrupted. Understood in this way, the processes, activities and spaces of social reproduction become 'key points of contestation' (Mohandesi and Teitelman 2018: 45) from where to resist capital's attempt at appropriating our means of existence, new battlefields from which emancipatory avenues can be opened up.

Therefore, building on both social reproduction theories and disruption-oriented approaches to political economy, I argue that the forms of anti-austerity contestation that have emerged, especially after 2010, to disrupt relevant 'everyday forms of neoliberal governmentality' (Ribera-Almandoz et al forthcoming) have been striving to put social reproduction, care and welfare back in the centre of political – and social – life. In this sense, current grassroots struggles over food, housing, water or fuel security, for refugees and migrants' rights, in defence of public and welfare services, or against urban dispossession are some of the manifold collective expressions of social conflict that have arisen as a response to the current crisis of social reproduction. Taking different forms across various contexts and scales, these community-based and everyday forms of resistance are acting as mechanisms not only to mitigate, where possible, the impact of austerity, but also to articulate a new contestation *from below* (Arampatzi 2018). In such a way, not only does the household, the local community, and the everyday offer important new opportunities for resistance and struggle but they also provide key

spaces for autonomous activity and for the reorganisation of common life.

Accordingly, this paper suggests that we can locate the ability to resist and the transformative potential of the struggles over social reproduction within four strategic horizons. First, as neoliberalism intensifies, it is essential for the forms of autonomy concerned with social reproduction to generate alternative, bottom-up social infrastructures that secure the direct access to the material conditions of life. The notion of **social commons** employed by authors such as Federici (2014; 2018) or De Angelis (2003) is particularly useful in this respect, since it refers to the collective reorganisation of the means of existence outside of patriarchal and competitive relations, and in ways that are non-dependent on private property regimes or on state-imposed, charity-based welfare provision. This includes, on the one hand, the collective (re)appropriation and self-provision of the increasingly privatised, financialised and precarious means of existence while on the other hand, the communal self-organisation and autonomous management of reproductive activities, spaces and institutions (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017).

Second, these struggles for better lives have the capacity to bring together a broad range of individuals and families through the commonality of their particular everyday needs and reproductive demands, the fulfilment of which can constitute the **material basis for solidarity**. In the face of the state's ongoing divestment from

social welfare and the commodification and privatisation of social reproduction, these forms of resistance and contestation can reinforce the reliance on networks of mutual aid to provide care and social protection. Experimenting with alternative and collective modes of living and organising, they attempt to generate common spaces where more egalitarian and solidaristic social relations can emerge. Thus, the social relations built through day-to-day praxis and experiences of activism facilitate the generation and strengthening of community relations, and can establish a base for forging new collective political subjectivities (Stavrides 2011). Related to this, the solidarity, interdependence and reciprocity practices developed by these movements can help overcome the individualising and guilt-inducing narratives that portray debt-based social reproduction as a form of entrepreneurship or "self-investment" (Federici 2014), and articulate fragmented experiences into collective demands.

The third strategic horizon opened up by these struggles is based on **shared experiences** and their potential to connect particular territorially anchored resistances **rooted in the everyday** and the community to broader projects of political action and social transformation. In Federici's words, this reflects an understanding of politics "that refuses to separate the time of political organizing from that of reproduction" (Federici 2018:5). This way, the spaces linked to social reproduction activities and mobilisations can turn into organising centres for resisting and subverting the far-reaching relations of domination and exploitation, and from where to regain

power over our own everyday lives (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017; De Angelis 2003). Moreover, by rethinking everyday life as essentially political, they open the possibility of addressing the crisis of social reproduction as a systemic crisis that needs to be resisted politically, and in common. At the same time, they can offer a renewed conception of the public sphere that rejects formal political institutions of representative democracy and embraces values such as horizontality, self-determination, direct action and collective decision-making.

As such, struggles over social reproduction combine more conventional everyday demands for voice and for the redistribution of material resources, while simultaneously developing a strong sense of **prefiguration**; that is, an imaginative embodiment in their lived experiences, acts of solidarity and mobilisation practices of the principles they are seeking to institute (Maeckelbergh 2011). As defined by Dinerstein (2015:14), "prefiguring is about anticipating the future that is *not yet* in the present" (emphasis in original). Through their autonomous self-activity in spaces that combine both political action and the material organisation of social reproduction, they can foster processes of collective empowerment and grassroots protection of social rights, with the ultimate design of disrupting established relations of domination and gradually provide the foundations of a new world. The prefigurative character is therefore reflected in their values and everyday practices, including the self-provision of everyday and reproductive needs, the promotion of collective forms of living, caring and socialising, the adoption of

multiple forms of horizontal organisation, direct action and radical democracy, or the attention to emotion and inclusiveness, among many others.

Hence, through prefigurative principles and forms of organising, these grassroots forms of organisation can become laboratories of emancipatory practices and imaginations. In order to illustrate these points, in the following two sections, I present the key ways in which social struggles over public healthcare provision and housing that emerged in Spain and the UK after 2008 are challenging the wave of austerity and simultaneously articulating alternative, collective projects to secure basic means of existence and reproduction.

2.3 'It's our health, not your business': A community-based defence of public health

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the social and economic crisis that unfolded after the 2008 global financial meltdown had enormous repercussions on the scale of public spending and welfare provisions in most European countries. The mix of internal and external pressures to lower public debt and comply with budget stability strengthened the process of neoliberal disciplining not only by imposing considerable budget reductions and cost-containment measures that undermined the fiscal capacity of public institutions, but also by deregulating, corporatising and outsourcing key public services – while also limiting the access to

public and social provisions to important sectors of the population. As one of the largest policy areas in terms of social spending, national health systems experienced a broad restructuring as a result of fiscal austerity. Measures ranged from severe budget cuts to multiple forms of privatisation, outsourcing and reductions of healthcare services (Borosch *et al* 2016).

These reforms had also significant impacts on public health. Spain, for instance, experienced a significant increase in the prevalence of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety and alcohol-related disorders (Karanikolos et al 2013). Furthermore, the *Real Decreto-ley 16/2012, de 20 de abril, de medidas urgentes para garantizar la sostenibilidad del Sistema Nacional de Salud y mejorar la calidad y seguridad de sus prestaciones* (Royal Decree-Law 16/2012, of Urgent Measures to Guarantee the Sustainability of the National Health System and Improve the Quality and Security of its Benefits), reduced the health coverage for elderly patients, low-income households and other vulnerable groups as it introduced co-payments for certain healthcare services and pharmaceutical products and shifted health coverage from universal to employment based. In the UK, health budgets and hospital beds suffered important cuts and salaries of health professionals were frozen, while the 2012 *Health and Social Care Act* opened up substantial opportunities for private health providers (Pollock and Price 2011). In addition, large cuts to public spending and the growth in precariousness had appalling effects on the most vulnerable people, who witnessed an increase in depression and

suicides that was significantly associated with the steep rise in unemployment and indebtedness in the UK (Reeves et al 2013).

The defence of public services and welfare provisions has been central in the subsequent anti-austerity wave of contestation aiming to raise awareness and protest against the increased everyday vulnerabilities and social inequalities. Multiple instances of disruption developed to confront these major threats to public health. *Marea Blanca* (White Tide) and *Yo SÍ, Sanidad Universal* (YOSI, I Say YES to Universal Healthcare) in Spain are two instances of grassroots struggles mobilising in defence of a free, universal public healthcare system, and against austerity-driven spending cuts and privatisations. Organising through horizontal assemblies that gathered health care workers, users and activists, these movements consisted of different autonomous local nodes that coordinated in regional and state-wide platforms, such as the *Plataforma Asamblearia de Trabajadores y Usuarios de la Salud* (PATUSALUD, Platform of Health Workers and Users) (Sánchez 2013; Ruiz-Gimenez 2014). Similarly in the UK, a series of protest events and mobilisations sought to contest the imposition of austerity and the welfare retrenchment agenda. Keep Our NHS Public (KONP), a community-based campaign organisation struggling to reverse the ongoing corporatisation and privatisation of the NHS, is one of the most prominent anti-austerity campaigns. Together with Save Our NHS, other national and local health campaign groups and unions, and the People's Assembly Against Austerity, they organised large demonstrations, celebrated national

days of action and developed community-based, local campaigns to struggle for free at-the-point-of-use universal healthcare.

In order to gain high levels of popular support, these struggles and campaigns were able to link their collective activities and practices of resistance with communal **everyday needs and aspirations**, and organised around social reproduction problems. On the one hand, they managed to represent the material impacts of spending cuts and privatisations on the population, and to portray healthcare as a public good that needed to be protected. As one of the interviewed activists puts it, "we want to engage everybody: workers, activists, students, fire-fighters, teachers. Because we are all patients: patients now or patients in the future" (interview with a retired orthopaedic consultant and member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016). On the other hand, they combined the movements' defence of welfare and public health services with a direct organisation around the everyday needs and demands of local residents and communities, seeking to forge solidarities and broad alliances of public workers, neighbours and users of the services. As one of the members of KONP explains:

> "How I see it, they are trying to replace the welfare state by a series of budgets. [Welfare] services will be largely privately provided, and there will only be a public safety net of free medical care ... What we are doing is approaching it from the community: we support workers in the health service who are in various struggles, mental health movements, we work with anti-austerity movements, Junior Doctors, or where there's a threat of a hospital or an A&E

> closing." (Interview with a social worker and founding member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016).

Similar to other contemporary experiences developed in contexts of austerity (see, for instance, Arampatzi 2017; Wigger 2018), the development of this pragmatic, needs-based approach was combined with the adoption of open assemblies and occupations as the means by which their activity was coordinated. In the case of *Marea Blanca,* for example, the different local groups used *encierros* or occupations of public hospitals and health centres as nodal points for place-based forms of self-organisation and collaboration that helped normalise the principles of direct democracy, inclusiveness, horizontality and participation. Most interestingly, these forms of organisation contributed to the opening and transformation of public (but ready for privatisation) hospitals into '**common spaces**'; that is, in spaces built for, and by, creative encounters and communal practices (Stavrides 2016). The *encierros* became a powerful strategy that allowed for the (re)appropriation of public buildings and for the creation of spaces of unmediated physical interaction, which were essential in the establishment of social networks of mutual solidarity and cooperation with neighbours and local communities. Thus, the construction of these meeting places helped overcome the prevailing dynamics of fragmentation and social isolation, enhanced community bonds and collective intelligence, and empowered its participants. An activist in *Marea Blanca* explained the importance of these common spaces:

> "The *encierro* was the beginning of our protest. We took turns, I spent many nights in the hospital meeting room making banners, organising demonstrations. We didn't sleep much! ... Even if the primary care and emergency departments of the hospital had been finally closed, at least we felt the affection, the solidarity and the warmth of people, and this remains with us." (Interview with a nurse and participant in *Marea Blanca*, May 2016, author's translation).

These examples of grassroots organising actively contributed to the politicisation of welfare reforms and austerity measures, and challenged the limits of both the state and civil society (Bailey et al 2018a; 2018b). Moving away from hierarchical and charitable views of the state and public services, they reframed welfare in general and healthcare in particular as collective practices that go far beyond the productive sphere and involve the community. Through their promotion of autonomous and community-centred strategies for the (re)appropriation of basic rights and means of existence, these emancipatory struggles became expressions of a broader **defence of the commons** and of the collective and collaborative self-protection, self-production and self-enforcement of social reproduction rights (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017:75). The foremost example in Spain was the struggle of *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal*, an initiative that resorted to civil disobedience in order to vindicate public healthcare through its redefinition as a social commons. YOSI united health sector workers, users, neighbours, activists and migrant support groups in a struggle against Royal-Decree Law 16/2012 that made access to healthcare conditional upon social security contributions, thus excluding 'undocumented'

migrants and other vulnerable and precarious groups from the Spanish National Health System. Organising in multiple local "disobedience working groups", YOSI not only advocated the reinstatement of universal and free healthcare as a right, but also accompanied migrant patients to medical appointments and provided them with medical treatment in defiance of this legal reform, making it *de facto* null and void. One activist in the movement described this prefigurative self-enforcement of the right to health care as follows:

> "The shared conviction that the Royal-Decree is unacceptable is what united us in the first place. Every time a doctor disobeyed and attended to a person that had been excluded, we could feel a great satisfaction. This was an advantage: we generated victories, and victories feed movements ... YOSI was doing in practice what we wanted things to be like, showing that it doesn't matter at all whether you pass this law or not, because politics is done by each and every one of us" (Interview with a doctor, activist in *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal*, February 2017, author's translation).

Through a strategic combination of a needs-based and grounded approach, the opening up of the commons as shared spaces for everyday experiences, and the grass-roots defence of the public against the interests of privatisation, these struggles were capable of attracting broad public attention and solidarity, at the same time putting care, welfare, and more broadly, social reproduction back in the centre of both their everyday practices and their political action. The capacity for self-organisation and the use of direct-action tactics were not only central in these movements' resistance against

austerity-based attacks on welfare, but also represented a step forward in the adoption of practices of self-determination and collective empowerment.

2.4 Reclaiming homes, repopulating neighbourhoods: Housing struggles creating autonomous spaces for social reproduction

If there is one central element in the global crisis and the subsequent recession, it is the housing crisis that followed the bursting of the housing-market bubble after 2008 - and is something that continues to have substantial effects more than a decade later. The pre-crisis shift towards mortgage-financed homeownership collapsed in 2007/8 after the subprime mortgage crisis in the US led to a drastic contraction of credit. This highlighted the limits of a housing system characterised by a liberalised and market-led housing provision and a financialised regime of accumulation (Aalbers 2015). The breakdown of housing and mortgage markets in many Western countries exacerbated the crisis of affordability and the household over-indebtedness that had been building up during the 2000s real estate boom, and not only led to an increase in housing inequalities – principally those between renters and homeowners, and between mortgage-free property owners and mortgaged owners but also to an increase in everyday vulnerability. This was the case in Spain, a country with a growth model deeply dependent on mass real estate construction, particularly in tourist regions, and large-

scale debt-based homeownership (López and Rodríguez 2011). The post-crisis combination of far-reaching austerity measures and the increasing precariousness and mass job losses led to an explosion of foreclosures and evictions of over-indebted households unable to meet their monthly mortgage payments. In the UK, where throughout the 1980s and 1990s successive central governments undertook a series of measures aimed at privileging private homeownership and drastically reducing the supply of social housing by privatising it, the credit crisis also impacted heavily upon the housing market. The acute shortage of affordable and decent homes, especially severe in big cities and metropolitan areas, has triggered processes of housing exclusion, residential vulnerability, unbalanced gentrification and touristification of city-centres, segregation and displacement, with hundreds of thousands of households being pushed into homelessness or being rehoused far from their established communities and support networks (Roberts 2016).

However, the post-2008 scenario has witnessed both moves towards the consolidation of financialised housing provision, and novel forms of resistance that confronted and disrupted the consolidation of this finance-led and property-based model of accumulation and the current housing and social reproduction crisis. The manifold housing struggles that proliferated in the following years were able not only to palliate some of the effects of the housing crisis on the everyday living conditions of the population, but also to politicise housing issues that were previously dealt with in the private sphere.

The *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH, Platform of People Affected by Mortgages) in Spain is probably the most renowned case. With a strategic combination of "collective counselling" assemblies, massive marches, media campaigns, direct actions to stop evictions and relocate homeless people, and collective negotiations with public and financial institutions, this housing movement born in 2009 united activists and people facing evictions in a common struggle in defence of affordable and decent housing and in support of those unable to pay their mortgages. In the UK, a different example can be found in Focus E15, an East London-based community campaign and action group using occupations of empty council estates and evicted tenants' homes to demand better public and social housing provision. Starting as a group of single mothers threatened with eviction from a hostel for young homeless people, Focus E15 managed to gain substantial media attention and place the housing affordability crisis on the public agenda.

Similar to the health struggles described in the previous section, these housing struggles are examples of movements emerging out of concrete social reproduction needs and experiences of everyday hardship (Ribera-Almandoz et al forthcoming). In this sense, the dispute developed by Focus E15 started as a pragmatic reaction against the eviction of 29 homeless single mothers and their children, and for the reoccupation of existing social housing that had been emptied out in order to be sold to a private developer. A year after the start of the campaign, the continued unresponsiveness

of Newham London Borough Council to their initial demands to stop the eviction of the single mothers was the main factor that motivated the occupation of the empty Carpenters Estate with 600 vacant council homes a year later. As one of the campaigners explained, "We started because some of us received eviction notices after Newham Council cut its funding to the Focus E15 hostel. But now we campaign for all people facing the housing crisis" (group interview with Focus E15 activists, March 2016). An analogous sense of **pragmatism and rootedness** in everyday problems and material (social reproductive) hardships was purposefully adopted by the PAH from its creation in Barcelona in 2009. Although this anti-eviction movement started from an initial small group of activists in earlier housing movements, it immediately attracted a broad range of individuals and families affected by foreclosure processes or struggling to keep up with their mortgage repayments (Bailey 2018b). One of the activists and founding members of the movement explains it:

> "We created the PAH on February 2009, when we had our first assembly meeting. We put lots of posters in streets, social service offices and other places where we thought we could find affected people. So the PAH was built with the aim of reaching out to an un-politicised social majority that had severe housing problems … We developed two kinds of goals: short-term goals addressing those problems that were highly urgent, and mid- and long-term goals including changing laws and having a political impact. And we were successful; a lot of people came from the first day." (Interview with an activist and co-founder of PAH Barcelona, June 2014, author's translation).

The realisation of these shared grievances and experiences of material deprivation allowed for **a transformation of individualised aspirations over everyday needs into collective political struggles around the right to decent housing**. The use of slogans such as "Social Housing, Not Social Cleansing" by Focus E15 or "*Stop desahucios. ¡Sí se puede, pero no quieren*!" ("Stop evictions. Yes we can, but they don't want to!") by the PAH draws attention to the systemic and general dimension of the ongoing processes of commodification of social housing, gentrification, and increased housing exclusion and homelessness, and exemplifies these movements' turn towards the collective self-protection and self-enforcement of housing rights. As with other instances of anti-austerity movements, such as *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal*, this self-enforcement of social rights was aimed at promoting people's direct involvement in decisions that affect their everyday lives, and represented an attempt at democratizing the public sphere from below. It was reinforced *in practice* with the movements' self-organisation through open and inclusive assemblies, and their emphasis on 'collective counselling' as opposed to an individualised provision of legal advice and solutions (Colau and Alemany 2012; Macías 2013). Thanks to these everyday practices and experiences of activism, people who arrived at the movement with "marked individual feelings of shame, uselessness, guilt and self-blame" were progressively empowered through *praxis*, which contributed to the creation of new **political subjectivities** willing to challenge and disrupt the current processes of intensified capital

accumulation and domination in the household (interview with an activist in PAH Barcelona, July 2013, author's translation).

The main strategy of resistance developed by both the PAH and Focus E15, however, was the use of disruptive occupation and collective (re)appropriation of homes as a means by which to directly fulfil social reproduction needs. In this sense, the occupation of empty housing blocks owned by financial institutions, as well as evicted or foreclosed homes, served as the basis for the construction of relatively autonomous spaces and models of social reproduction and care zones based on self-organisation and communalisation (Caffentzis and Federici 2014). This **prefigurative dimension** therefore connected everyday demands with the active creation of radically egalitarian social relations that were not dependent on or mediated by competitive market relations. Instead, they were based on a strong sense of solidarity, horizontality and interdependence which extended not only between the people participating in the campaigns, but also with neighbours, local communities, and other anti-austerity and socio-political struggles. In the case of Focus E15, for example, the occupied Carpenters Estate was converted for two weeks into a community centre, with daily events including open meetings, workshops, activities for children, comedy shows and music gigs. The use of disruptive, prefigurative tactics continued in the following months, with occupations of unused housing stock and evicted tenants' homes. One of the activists supporting Focus E15 explains the importance of these practices of prefiguration:

> "Because it's OK – and it's necessary – to go to a meeting and protest with a banner, or organise marches or whatever; but that won't convince people. What will convince people is to have the real experience of what's going on, and a good argument to say: look, there's a better way." (Group interview with Focus E15 activists, March 2016)

Likewise, the *Obra Social* campaign launched by the PAH, which also occupied empty bank-owned housing blocks in order to rehouse foreclosed and evicted families, served not only as an autonomous self-enforcement of basic social rights, but also as a means to disrupt established competitive social relations. As a consequence, through different processes of collective experimentation and grassroots creativity, these movements have put community-building and social reproduction at the core of their everyday practices and struggles. Their pro-active generation of shared spaces for collective, self-managed and inclusive care have blurred the limits between the spaces and times for political action and the spaces and times for social reproduction. An activist in PAH and organiser of the *Obra Social* campaign argued:

> "We have these ideas of autonomism, of trying to be self-sufficient from the system. When we occupy a housing block, on the one hand, we are questioning the private property model; we're saying that our right to housing prevails over their right to speculate. And on the other hand, generating new ways of living together, new housing models, new social relations. This way, we're indirectly attacking capitalism, and we're already building alternatives." (Interview with a PAH activist, August 2013, author's translation).

Hence, the complex intertwinement of pragmatic, needs-based demands and prefigurative methods of struggle allowed these movements to question the current competitive and market-based model of housing provision and a financialised regime of accumulation. Through processes of mutual reciprocity, communalism and the self-enforcement of social rights, they also showed the central role of social reproduction and everyday politics in the subversion of the growing financialisation of everyday life and in the collective articulation of grassroots political alternatives to austerity and capitalism.

2.5 Conclusion

The post-2008 crisis of debt-led growth has precipitated and deepened pre-existing pressures to reduce public spending and either privatise or introduce market performance indicators throughout the public sector. The resulting wave of privatisation and financialisation of key aspects of social reproduction has provoked fundamental changes in everyday life and reproduction strategies. This has also contributed to the erosion of the legitimacy of governments unable to secure the material conditions of their populations. In this context, the aim of this paper had been to disentangle the relationships between capitalist accumulation, social reproduction and resistance to austerity in Spain and the United Kingdom.

Drawing upon both social reproduction theories and disruption-oriented approaches to political economy, I concur with Dinerstein

(2015:46) and Bailey *et al* (2018b:18) on the need to generate new analytical accounts that shed light on the multiple ways in which grassroots movements and moments of contestation are organised in, against and beyond capital. Crucially for this purpose, the paper focused on the role of reproductive activities, spaces and institutions not only as arenas for capital accumulation and financialised exploitations, but also as a battlefield where social relations of capital can be destabilised and disrupted, as well as a fertile terrain for the emergence of autonomous activity and for the reorganisation of common life. In this sense, I suggest that struggles over social reproduction offer four interconnected strategic avenues to broaden our ability to resist and confront the capitalist assault on everyday lives. First, they can create grassroots and territorially-specific social infrastructures to secure the direct access and self-organisation of the means of existence and reproduction. Second, they place community building and solidarity practices at the core of their struggles for everyday needs and demands. Third, they blend the spaces and times of social reproduction and those of political action, thus transforming everyday lives into spheres of social transformation. Finally, they have the potential to become platforms of prefiguration for more egalitarian, interdependent and horizontal social relations.

Moreover, the paper has presented different autonomous struggles that emerged during the anti-austerity wave of contention in Spain and the UK. Responding to the increasing degradation of the conditions of existence and reproduction, these grassroots forms of

organising have struggled to actively provide and self-enforce social rights – such as the right to adequate and affordable housing and the access to free at-the-point-of-use universal healthcare – and to experiment with emancipatory everyday practices and imaginations. With varying degrees of success, these community-centred movements have become expressions of a broader defence of the commons, and have created spaces of encountering from where political struggle and social reproduction could be autonomously organised outside debt and market relations.

On a final note, the experiences of struggle and the emancipatory practices that have been explored here are not free from challenges and contradictions. On the one hand, while prefigurative forms of resistance have been effectively adopted, they have been widely combined with a sense of pragmatism that limited these movements' capacity to generate entirely autonomous spaces and forms of social reproduction. It was in the name of this pragmatic willingness, for instance, that some forms of anti-austerity disruptive agency have opted for a re-connection with (and even a return to) formal institutions of representation (on this point, see Chapter 3; also Ribera-Almandoz *et al* forthcoming). The initial success of *Podemos*, *Ahora Madrid* or *Barcelona en Comú* in Spain, and Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party in the UK show the reach of these anti-austerity discourses and initiatives, while generating important ambivalences and obstacles to the construction of community-based and self-governing everyday forms of resistance. On the other hand, the global rise of

authoritarian and extreme right-wing initiatives shows that the crisis of social reproduction is not necessarily solved in emancipatory ways. The resurgence of far-right nationalist and populist parties and movements throughout and beyond the EU shows that the increasing material deprivation, popular disaffection and legitimacy crisis can also be channelled through forms of selective solidarity, racist and anti-immigrant discourses, and welfare exclusion. It is, therefore, urgent to continue producing analytical and practical tools to help us understand how day-to-day *praxis* and experiences of activism can strengthen egalitarian social relations, forge collective political subjectivities and generate inclusive and prefigurative strategies of social reproduction in the household, the local community, and in everyday life.

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3. "SOCIAL HOUSING, NOT SOCIAL CLEANSING!" PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HOUSING IN SPAIN AND THE UK

Abstract

After a state-backed period of growing property and financial market expansion, promotion of mortgaged homeownership and abandonment of social housing policies, the collapse of housing and mortgage markets in 2007/8 aggravated a crisis of social reproduction that had been decades in the making. Both in Spain and the UK, housing inequalities were exacerbated and hundreds of thousands of households unable to pay their rents or mortgages faced repossession and eviction. In following years, numerous community-based struggles mobilised to fight against the resulting rise in homelessness and housing exclusion, and to defend the right to decent and affordable housing. This paper analyses the cases of the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Spain and Focus E15 in the UK, two anti-evictions movements that have been able to provide grassroots housing solutions to affected people. It explores these housing struggles' autonomous, prefigurative politics and forms of organising, their multi-scalar dynamics and the pragmatic (dis-)engagement with institutional politics in the midst of the ongoing processes of welfare state dismantling, financialization and privatisation of everyday lives.

Key words: austerity; resistance; housing social struggles; UK; Spain

3.1 Introduction

The neoliberal restructuring initiated in the 1980s in most industrialised countries has launched a state-backed process of financial expansion and consolidation of market logics in the provision of housing (Aalbers 2015). As mortgage-financed private homeownership increasingly replaced other types of tenure, and social housing policies and welfare provisions were progressively abandoned or reduced, highly indebted and increasingly precarious households became more and more exposed to the risks of housing market and financial collapse (López and Rodríguez 2011; Whitehead and Williams 2011). The eruption of the global financial crisis in 2007/8 brought a sharp decrease in housing transactions and a sudden drop in housing prices due to a credit shortage and a subsequent decrease in mortgage advances. In addition, the escalation of unemployment and job precariousness facilitated by years of steady labour market deregulation and flexibilisation, and the imposition of drastic pro-cyclical austerity measures to reduce government budget deficits contributed to a fall in living standards and a growth in everyday vulnerability.

These trends were particularly significant in Spain and the United Kingdom. In Spain, failure of an economic model based on mass housing construction and real estate speculation accelerated the destruction of jobs and the decrease in salaries, and led hundreds of thousands of over-indebted households unable to repay their mortgages to foreclosure and eviction. As a result of the Spanish

mortgage law, which states that repossessions of properties do not necessarily imply a full discharge of the debt for mortgage holders, homeowners got trapped in livelong debt burdens even after repossession. In the UK, the crisis of housing affordability already started during the early 2000s property boom. However, the situation became critical after 2008 both for private rental and for owner-occupied households all over the territory, and particularly in the Greater London and the South East areas. Moreover, after the introduction of the 'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy' (commonly referred as the 'bedroom tax') in 2012, which included an under-occupancy penalty for social housing tenants, especially vulnerable social housing claimants suffered an increase in net renting costs generated by the reduction of their housing benefits.

In consequence, in the last ten years, both countries witnessed an explosion of housing evictions, homelessness, housing exclusion and rising social inequality. This sparked a wave of community-based struggles that emerged to defend and self-enforce the right to decent and affordable housing. Through the adoption of practices of civil disobedience and direct action to stop evictions and re-house homeless people, these housing struggles became platforms for mutual help and solidarity between affected people, and they contributed to the re-politicisation and empowerment of previously excluded groups. This paper builds on the qualitative research performed with two anti-evictions movements, the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) in Spain and Focus E15 in the UK, including interviews with key members and activist

participant observation of actions and campaign meetings. It explores these housing struggles' autonomous, prefigurative politics and forms of organising, their multi-scalar dynamics and the pragmatic (dis-)engagement with institutional politics in the midst of the ongoing processes of welfare state dismantling, financialization and privatisation of everyday lives.

3.2 The centrality of housing in the neoliberal project

After the start of the global financial crisis in 2007-8, a growing political economy literature has attempted to unpack the interconnections between debt, capital accumulation dynamics and ongoing changes in individual and aggregated housing patterns. In particular, literature on financialisation and debt has highlighted how, with the advance of neoliberalism, most industrialised economies underwent gradual processes of consolidation of debt-based economies and market competition as mechanisms to discipline labour, attain greater social control and enhance productivity. Succeeding cycles of welfare reforms between the 1980s and the early 2000s prompted the state de-investment from social welfare and the privatisation of public services in areas as diverse as healthcare, social housing, education or pensions. These parallel developments have contributed to the increasing replacement of public spending and demand management by private debt – including housing mortgage and consumer credit – as a means of stimulating domestic consumption, in a new economic

model that Crouch has named “privatised Keynesianism” (Crouch 2009).

As a result of these neoliberal reforms, therefore, welfare systems were progressively substituted by a privatisation or individualisation of risk, that is, there was a displacement of pressures and responsibilities for social reproduction from the state to individuals and families. In this sense, these practices were employed not only to “further protect spaces and circuits of accumulation” (Bruff and Tansel 2018: 7), but also to expand them to domains that, at least in part, had until then been located outside the market economy. Through these newly financialised dynamics of capitalist accumulation, the relations between individuals, households, enterprises and even national economies are increasingly mediated through financial channels and markets (Roberts 2016; Montgomerie 2009). In this context, the liquidity surplus and availability of credit fostered the creation of real estate and stock market bubbles. Rising house prices and living costs, stagnant real wages growth and a generalised assault on welfare, together with a curtailment of collective workers’ rights and structural power through an extensive deregulation and flexibilisation of the labour market, led numerous low-to-middle income households to resort to mortgage borrowing and debt-financed consumption to (temporarily) preserve their living standards and address their everyday needs in spite of the contraction of household budgets (Montgomerie 2009).

As for housing, the period of property and financial market liberalisation leading up to 2008 facilitated the consolidation of the market logic in the provision of housing in most industrialised countries. This allowed for a considerable expansion of property development and real estate speculation, as social housing policies were gradually abandoned and mortgage-financed private homeownership increasingly replaced other types of tenure. Thus, since the expansion of mortgage finance concurred with rising house prices, increasing loan-to-value ratios for mortgage holders (reaching more than 100 per cent), and a generalised erosion of working conditions and welfare provisions, mortgaged homeownership became the preferred form of investment for many low-to-middle income individuals and families. In this manner, households become more integrated into capital markets, which boosted the exposure of highly indebted and precarious households to the risks of housing market and financial collapse (López and Rodríguez 2011; Whitehead and Williams 2011). At the same time, the financialisation of housing further linked national economies to global financial flows through secondary mortgage markets (Montgomerie and Büdenbender 2015).

These transformations in tenure patterns, however, could not be thoroughly expanded without the development of a general narrative that stigmatises social and rental housing and portrays owner-occupation as economically advantageous and real estate as secure assets. These narratives were part of a broader "ideology of home ownership" (Ronald 2008) and "marketisation" (Aalbers

2015), widely spread by financial institutions, mainstream media and policy makers, which held households and markets responsible for housing provision, and presented going into debt to provide for the means of social reproduction as a fitting form of self-investment for individuals and households. This has introduced important changes in the relations between capital and labour, insomuch as it increased the households' dependence on waged labour and debt to fulfil basic everyday reproductive needs and has made "exploitation more self-managed" (Federici 2014). The emerging power relations in financialised societies are, in consequence, characterised by more fragmented, individualising and concealed mechanisms of exploitation, making resistance more diffused and collective action more difficult to organise.

Alongside these developments, the growing dependence of most industrialised economies on domestic consumer spending and property markets pushed governments to reinforce these tendencies with policies that facilitated the financialisation process. As Susanne Soederberg skilfully outlines, neoliberal states have played an essential role in generating and expanding the conditions for capital profit and credit-led accumulation (Soederberg 2014). Through legal and regulatory practices, ideological support, coercive mechanisms and the commodification and privatisation of public goods and services, a system of *debtfare* has increasingly substituted *welfare* and has naturalised the reliance on credit to access the means of subsistence. The result is a system that is

"inherently asymmetrical and deeply exploitative nature" (Roberts and Soederberg 2014: 663).

The collapse of housing and mortgage markets in 2007/8, on the other hand, deepened a crisis of social reproduction that had been brewing in previous decades and that rendered many individuals and households unable to absorb the impact of the socioeconomic crisis and the far-reaching austerity programmes (Bruff and Wöhl 2016). The sudden drop in house prices, the restrictions in individual and household credit and the further decline in social support left many mortgaged owner occupiers with negative equity, and led numerous low-income households to fall behind on their property loan repayments, thus resulting in a wave of repossessions and evictions. Nonetheless, in the event of the financial crisis, the decision in several countries of intervening to bail out distressed financial institution and large corporations with public money while many homes were being foreclosed showed not only the ability to adapt and endurance of neoliberalism, but also how – once more – crises can be useful tools to re-construct and/or consolidate power relations (Harvey 2005; Aalbers 2013). Accordingly, as the emergence of new forms of contestation that challenge the growing precarisation of working and living conditions demonstrates, these new attempts to discipline labour and enhance profitability through further financialisation and privatisation contain both the potentials for domination as well as for resistance (Huke *et al* 2015; Bruff and Tansel 2018).

As already noted, the development of the financial crisis into a housing crisis triggered the appearance of pockets of discontent. The novel instances of mass protests, activism and social movements that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the crisis pushed for the re-politicisation of housing issues and welfare reforms, and generated spaces of empowerment in the sphere of social reproduction (Mohandesi and Teitelman 2018). In this sense, a central element of these struggles has been their conscious attempt to uncover and challenge the hidden and removed mechanisms of exploitation produced by the increasing financialisation of housing and the everyday. This way, they have strived to transform individualised and fragmented grievances into collective demands for social justice. Through the commonality of everyday housing needs and experiences, these struggles have been able to mobilise previously disengaged and disaffected low-to-middle income individuals and families, and to produce significant instances of mutual aid, solidarity relations and cooperation (Arampatzi 2018; see also Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Moreover, these forms of community organising have adopted collective acts of civil disobedience as a means by which to de-legitimise, block and subvert processes of financial expropriation. By using direct action and prefigurative practices, such as occupations, horizontally-organised assemblies, collective self-organisation occupations, these struggles have sought to build (more) egalitarian social relations through *praxis*. In doing so, they have put particularly vulnerable groups in charge of the defence and

enforcement of their social rights – including the right to decent and affordable housing –, and have affirmed their collective self-determination (Dinerstein 2015). At the same time, they have promoted the collective re-appropriation of means of subsistence and social reproduction that had been commodified, privatised and financialised by successive neoliberal reforms. As a consequence, they have developed autonomous and sustainable forms of housing and, more broadly, social reproduction, outside money- and debt-relations (Federici 2014), thus disrupting the structural and material foundations of current forms of housing exclusion and everyday precariousness.

3.3 From the housing bubble to the housing struggle: housing provision in Spain and the UK

As highlighted in the first part of this paper, the household appears as a key societal site for capital accumulation, as well as for the development of continuous struggles around issues of social justice, inequality and marketisation. To understand how households are simultaneously sites of capital accumulation but also of struggle, this section historically contextualises the evolution of housing in Spain and the UK, particularly with the advance of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s.

Preparing to burst. The housing market at the turn of the century

In Spain, the cycle of economic growth experienced between 1995 and 2007 settled domestic consumption, tourism and property development as the most important sectors for the country's economy. In particular, the housing market found a particularly advantageous policy and financial environment for promoting housing construction and real estate development (López and Rodríguez 2011). On the one hand, a prolonged period of low interest rates and generous tax incentives for owner-occupiers facilitated access to individual and household credit and to private homeownership for large parts of the Spanish population. On the other hand, the Land Law passed in 1998 and the urban policies promoted by different regional and local governments substantially increased the amount of land made available for housing construction and developed large scale transport infrastructures, at the same time as they reduced tenants' rights and privatised the already residual stock of public housing. Throughout the intervening decade between 1997 and 2007, the seemingly endless rise in the value of real estate financial and property assets – with housing prices increasing at an average 12 per cent per year, considerably above inflation–, led to a construction boom that expanded the housing stock by 30 per cent, or 7 million units, with private homeownership accounting for 87 per cent of all dwellings and social housing accounting for less than 2 per cent by 2007 (López and Rodríguez 2011). These developments were reinforced

with a widespread narrative shared by mass media, financial institutions, property developers and even public administrations that portrayed mortgaged homeownership as the most secure form of (self-) investment for 'housing prices always rise', while other types of tenure were depicted as a 'waste of money' (Garcia-Lamarca and Kaika 2016; Palomera 2013).

Notwithstanding, the 2000s real estate boom faced resistance from neighbourhood assemblies and grassroots movements. The *Plataforma por una Vivienda Digna* (Platform for Decent Housing), born initially as an Internet forum, and *V de Vivienda* (H for Housing, an allegory for the graphic novel and film 'V for Vendetta'), were two of the main initiatives denouncing the growing number of over-indebted households and the lack of affordable and decent housing, particularly in metropolitan areas, and advocating for a more just and sustainable urban development. With direct communication campaigns and powerful slogans – such as the famous "You are not going to have a house in your whole fucking life" or "We can't go home for Christmas because we haven't left it yet" –, these two connected struggles mobilised tens of thousands of people all across Spain, alerting of the negative effects of the speculative bubble on the right to housing (Colau and Alemany 2012). Additionally, multiple environmental groups and activist organisations raised awareness about the severe and long-lasting landscape degradation and despoliation caused by the construction frenzy, and confronted the uncontrolled urban sprawl

in areas such as the Mediterranean coastline, rural sites and even previously protected territories.

In the United Kingdom, a similar move towards increased private homeownership, a rise in the households' mortgage debt and a decline in private rental and social housing had already been experienced during the 1980s and 1990s. The prime example of this transformation of housing patterns was the Right-to-Buy scheme, introduced in the Housing Act 1980 under Margaret Thatcher's government, which gave the legal right to council tenants to buy their council homes at a large discount. This initiative not only reduced the public authorities' involvement in housing provision to favour owner-occupied dwellings, but also undermined the responsibilities and size of local authorities through what has been considered "the most important privatisation of all those introduced by the Thatcher Government" (Jones and Murie 2006: 5). As a result, in the following decades, the role for the market in the provision of housing was heightened, and the large volume of social housing in the UK shrunk dramatically. Between 1980 and 2007, the number of public sector dwellings passed from 6.499 million to 2.561 million, which meant a decrease in public sector housing as a percentage of the dwelling stock from 33% to 19% (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2018). During the same period, the formerly strong and active squatters' movement, which by the end of the 1970s had more than 50,000 people squatting all over the UK (30,000 of them in London), suffered a significant decline due to the increasing levels of repression,

dispersal and occasional co-operation (and co-optation) deployed by the central government and local authorities (Reeve 2009).

These generalised changes in housing tenures facilitated by the flexibilisation and expansion of the financial system, and especially of mortgage finance, strengthened the ties between the housing market and wider economic dynamics, and increased the vulnerability of the former to economic downturns (Gentle *et al* 1994: 185). This was made evident in the early 1990s in the UK, when in a context of a housing boom with spiralling house prices and rising household and personal-sector debt, a sudden rise in unemployment and an increase in interest rates aiming to control inflation had severe impacts in the housing market. In consequence, a subsequent fall in house prices trapped hundreds of thousands of highly mortgaged homeowners in negative equity, and more than 345,500 went into mortgage arrears with their lenders and had their properties repossessed between 1990 and 1995 (Ministry of Justice 2019a). In sharp contrast, the period of steady economic growth and low interest rates experienced in the late 1990s and early 2000 contributed to a growth in private homeownership investment and a new real estate boom in the UK, with average nominal house prices rising from around £90,000 in 2000 to more than £190,000 in 2007, just before the collapse of the housing bubble (HM Land Registry 2019). As a result of rising house prices and the residualisation of social housing, the country witnessed an increase in housing inequalities and homelessness that would boost in the following years.

Developments in the Post-2008 Context

The housing situation changed drastically after the crash of 2007. The shortage in credit that followed the collapse of the secondary and subprime mortgage markets in the US drastically reduced the capacity to borrow for both property developers and potential buyers. House prices fell sharply as both real estate transactions and mortgage advances decreased and unemployment skyrocketed in most European countries. Despite large injections of liquidity into European financial systems as means to stimulate the housing market, the number of highly indebted homeowners, especially in low-income households, unable to maintain mortgage repayments increased dramatically (Aalbers 2015).

In Spain, where the housing boom and bust were particularly extreme, the difficulties to access credit, the decrease in salaries and the accelerated destruction of jobs – more than 3.4 million between 2007 and 2013 – brought the burst of a housing bubble that had been under construction since the 1990s. The drastic decrease in demand and the inability of property developers and real estate companies to return their loans left the Spanish banking system saturated with debt (López and Rodríguez 2011). In this context, the pressure of international investors and EU institutions led the Spanish government to, on the one hand, bail out banks and *cajas de ahorros*,[6] and on the other hand, restructure the financial system

[6] The *cajas de ahorros*, or savings banks, were semi-public financial institutions specialised in savings deposits and loans, and were the main mortgage lenders in

through the creation of the Fund for Orderly Bank Restructuring (FROB, *Fondo de Reestructuración Ordenada* Bancaria) and a "bad bank" (SAREB, *Sociedad de Gestión de Activos procedentes de la Reestructuración Bancaria*, or Management Company for Assets Arising from Bank Reorganisation), which assumed the management of toxic assets from over-indebted financial institutions. The funds used for this process of restructuring were partly provided by the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). As part of the deal, Spain signed a Memorandum of Understanding introducing a series of far reaching austerity measures and labour-market restructuring programmes that aggravated the already intensified everyday precariousness.

The effects of the housing crisis and resulting austerity in the wellbeing of the population were devastating. Over-indebtedness and housing inequalities, deteriorated living conditions and significant increases in the prevalence of mental health disorders (including anxiety, depression and alcohol abuse) became everyday phenomena for important sections of the population (Karanikolos *et al* 2013). In addition, hundreds of thousands of households fell behind on their debt payments and were forced to terminate their

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the country before the burst of the housing bubble. The surpluses of these formally non-for-profit institutions were put into reserves and used for social welfare, cultural and educational projects through what was called the *Obra Social*.

mortgages and return their properties, resulting in a large wave of evictions and repossessions in the country. According to data provided by the Spanish Judiciary, between 2008 and 2018, more than 750,000 households lose their homes to foreclosure, and at least 412,000 families unable to pay their rents or mortgages were effectively evicted, although there were almost 3.5 million of empty homes – of which 700,000 were newly-built – unevenly distributed throughout the territory (*Consejo General del Poder Judicial* 2018; Bailey *et al 2018b*). To make matters worse, Spanish mortgage law ensured that debtors were the main carriers of financial risk, as bank repossessions of properties did not necessarily imply a full discharge of the debt for mortgage holders. This way, homeowners unable to repay the full amount of their mortgages in a context of declining property prices and negative equity could be trapped in lifelong debt burdens even after losing their homes.

The UK, where there had also been a remarkable housing and private consumption boom in the years prior to the global crash, witnessed a similar downturn. Real estate construction fell strikingly, shifting from nearly 200,000 newly built homes a year in the period leading to the crisis, to less than 100,000 a year in 2008-2010. This rapid downfall in residential construction was paralleled by a drop in housing transactions, as the previous availability of easy and affordable credit collapsed in 2007 and mortgage lending criteria became more stringent, mainly through higher deposit requirements for home buyers. In consequence, from the third

quarter of 2007 to the middle of 2009, real house prices decreased by 21 per cent (Jones and Richardson 2014).

Moreover, bearing in mind the devastating effects experienced in the late 1980s and early 1990s housing crisis, in 2008 the then Labour government adopted a series of temporary measures seeking to minimise the number of potential repossessions and subsequent evictions to repay mortgage debt. To this purpose, before bringing a repossession claim for mortgage arrears to court, lenders were required to demonstrate that all other options had been ineffective and that property repossession was being sought only as a last resort. Even though the measure seemed to have some initial success, as only 180,000 mortgaged properties were repossessed by country court bailiffs in England and Wales in the period 2008-2018, the pressure of the crumbling housing market was mainly transferred to renters, with almost 390,000 cases of landlord possession actions taking place during the same period (Ministry of Justice 2019b).

Thus, although the decrease in affordable housing already started in the early 2000s during the property boom, the situation became critical after 2008 both for private rental and for owner-occupied households all over the UK, and particularly in the Greater London and the South East areas. The impact of the economic crisis, the growing income inequalities, the continued reduction of social housing and the fiscal austerity package introduced after the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition

government in 2010 were some of the main factors that exacerbated this crisis of affordability. Furthermore, as part of a larger reform to reduce the fiscal deficit by reducing public spending, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 was introduced, which included what was called the 'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy' in housing benefits, commonly referred as the 'bedroom tax'. It entailed an under-occupancy penalty that reduced the benefits of social housing tenants by 14 per cent if they had one spare bedroom and by 25 per cent if they had two or more. The measure not only reduced the weekly incomes of around 660,000 social housing tenants by £12-£22 on average, but also threatened them with the possibility of being evicted if they could not pay rent (Moffat *et al* 2016).

The reform, which was targeted towards particularly vulnerable housing benefit claimants, was widely perceived as punitive and regressive, and sparked a wave of protests and campaigns across the UK. These grassroots Anti Bedroom Tax groups focused on a wide range of tactics, including the blockade of houses to prevent evictions, the provision of technical and legal support for affected households, the organisation of demonstrations and a partial rent strike. The protests not only generated important public support throughout Britain, but also resulted in the decision by the Scottish Parliament to allocate extra funds to fully mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax in Scotland. Nevertheless, after a ruling of the Supreme Court, in 2017 the British Government introduced exemptions to the bedroom tax for households with members in need of care due to a disability or health related issues.

3.4 Methodology

This paper presents a comparative study of two examples of current community-based struggles for the right to decent and affordable housing in Spain and the UK: the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) and Focus E15. Aiming to uncover the potential routes for resistance and emancipation opened up by these struggles, it offers an in-depth analysis of their use of prefigurative politics and forms of organising, and complements it with an exploration of the subjective meanings and understandings that people participating in them associate with their experiences of activism. The choice of a critical comparative methodology responds to a double objective. On the one hand, it allows to place social struggles at the centre of analysis, and to explore the relevance of social agents in the co-production of institutional arrangements. On the other hand, it provides a sound basis for the development of a historically-grounded and context-sensitive analysis of broader social processes (McMichael 1990). This way the thesis allows to make visible aspects of social and political relations that are otherwise made invisible and inexplicable (Weber 2007:561).

To achieve this, the research builds on the triangulation of supplementary qualitative techniques as the basis for the comparison. The data-collection strategies include semi-structured in-depth interviews, activist participant observation, and document and media content analysis. In Spain, fieldwork has been conducted between 2013 and 2015 in three different local nodes of the PAH:

Barcelona, Girona and Sabadell. This was complemented by activist participant observation of three assemblies the Catalan nodes of the Platform, one assembly of the totality of Spanish nodes, and multiple demonstrations and direct actions, including the occupation of a bank office and an apartment building in Girona and El Raval (Barcelona). In the UK, data has been gathered between 2015 and 2016. The chosen movement is Focus E15, located in Stratford, East London. Data comes from group interviews, activist participant observation in the Focus E15's weekly street stall, attendance to internal campaign meetings, and participation in the protest march against the Housing and Planning Act[7]. In total, 20 individual and 4 group interviews with PAH and Focus E15 members (including activists and people threatened of or affected by eviction) were carried out.

The Cases

The two cases chosen for this paper have emerged to respond to the housing crisis and to challenge the austerity policies enforced in Spain and the UK. On the one hand, the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH; in English, Platform of People Affected by Mortgages) is a movement created in 2009 in Barcelona to struggle against the eviction of hundreds of thousands of heavily indebted households unable to repay their mortgages. Having its roots in different experiences of activism from the pre-crisis period, mainly

[7]For more information on the Housing and Planning Act, see http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/22/contents/enacted.

the aforementioned *V de Vivienda* and *Espai Social de Madgalenes* (a squatted social centre in Ciutat Vella, Barcelona), soon spread throughout the country creating a strong network of autonomous local assemblies coordinated in regional and state-wide meetings. The strategies displayed by the PAH combined direct actions to stop evictions and relocate people who had been evicted, with more conventional forms of political activity, including mass demonstrations, media campaigns and citizens' legislative initiatives, as well as collective negotiations with banks and financial institutions to restructure mortgage debts and transform mortgaged houses into reduced rental agreements. Through the socialisation of experiences, mutual acts of solidarity and everyday practices of self-organisation and activism, this movement has been able to politically empower its participants and ensure a bottom-up protection of basic social rights. In this manner, the PAH united activists and a broad range of people directly affected by foreclosure processes, eviction threats and precarious economic situations in a common struggle in defence of affordable and decent housing. Through continued acts of civil disobedience, in the period 2009-2018 the movement has managed to rehouse more than 4,000 people in empty apartments owned by banks and financial institutions, and has helped a large number of households to stay in their homes after processes of foreclosure.

On the other hand, Focus E15 started in 2013, when a group of 29 young mothers living in a hostel for homeless people in East London received eviction notices after the Newham London

Borough Council sold off the property to a private developer due to cuts to social housing subsidies. The local authority offered them private rented accommodation outside London, in Manchester, Hastings and Birmingham. The campaign prompted out of anger as this group of young mothers were facing eviction, but their aims were soon broader. On its first anniversary in 2014, Focus E15 started a protest staged against the annual MIPIM (*Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier)* real estate trade fair and occupied empty houses on the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, East London. The estate, situated in an area deeply affected by the Olympic-led redevelopment, had nearly 600 vacant council homes despite the 24,000 households waiting for a place to live and people being forced out of London due to a lack of affordable housing. Using slogans such as "These people need homes. These homes need people" and "Social Housing, Not Social Cleansing", the campaigners of Focus E15 draw attention to the ongoing processes of commodification of social housing, gentrification and growing homelessness. For two weeks, they converted the Carpenters Estate into a community centre, with daily events including open meetings, workshops and gigs. In the following months, the use of disruptive tactics continued with a campaign for the re-population of the whole Carpenters Estate, multiple anti-eviction actions, and the organisation of weekly information stalls and open campaign meetings.

3.5 Autonomous struggles and the right to decent housing in Spain and the UK: PAH and Focus E15

The goal of the paper is to analyse how the PAH and Focus E15 mobilise to contest the current wave of austerity and disrupt the ongoing financialization and privatisation of housing and social reproduction. This section examines the main political strategies developed by these housing struggles in their attempt to self-enforce the right to decent and affordable housing and to construct alternative spaces of social reproduction that are autonomous from both the market and the state. It analyses their autonomous, prefigurative politics and forms of organising, their multi-scalar dynamics and the pragmatic (dis-)engagement with conventional and institutional politics.

Prefiguration and the alternative construction of the Commons

The first major element that defines most of the anti-austerity struggles born during the crisis, including the housing movements studied in this paper, is their prefigurative conception of democracy and political action. The prefiguration adopted by these movements refers to the idea that both their internal organisation and their repertoire of action should embody the principles they are pursuing. In this manner, by creating spaces of alternative and egalitarian social relations, they expect to gradually replace the existing political order and to contribute in the creation of a new society

(Graeber 2009). As defined by Yates (2015:3), "rather than ends justifying means, the means of prefigurative politics reflect, or are somehow equivalent to, the ends". This is the case of PAH and Focus E15, which use their everyday activity to disrupt established social relations and generate autonomous and de-commodified forms of social reproduction.

Thus, on the one hand, these movements are experimenting with collective and self-organised means to fulfil a basic social reproductive need, that is, the access to (decent and affordable) housing. Both PAH and Focus E15 they have adopted of **civil disobedience and direct action** forms of disruption reframed as a grassroots assertion and self-enforcement of basic reproductive rights. In this sense, they have used their political activity to prevent evictions from people's homes by using their own bodies to blockade the entrances of houses and to oppose the police and judicial delegations in a non-violent but effective way. A second significant tactic has been the occupation of unused housing stock and evicted tenants' homes as a method to confront the financial and political elites while simultaneously returning these homes to their social function. These occupations, conceived as 'collective acts of self-determination' (Dinerstein 2015: 139), served at the same time to open autonomous spaces where collective and less market- and debt-dependent forms of social reproduction could be developed in the household and the local community, thus transforming these homes into **social commons**. For the PAH, the occupation of empty homes owned by banks and other financial

institutions, promoted through their *Obra Social* campaign,[8] was a way not only to give material responses to the urgent need of housing, but also to contributed to the generation of community-based and self-managed spaces of social reproduction that often included care zones and nurseries, kitchens and vegetable gardens. As an activist participating in PAH Sabadell described:

> "We are working for the self-provision of rights, the generation of alternatives, even of alternatives models of living together [*convivencia*]. The *Obra Social* has to be more than providing housing solutions; it has to involve an alternative model of communal living. In my view, this alternative model has to include community gardens to guarantee food security, the use of solar panels to guarantee energy security, etc." (Interview with a PAH Sabadell activist, August 2013, author's translation).

Some of the occupations soon developed into spaces where cooperative systems of social reproduction and communal relations of mutual support and solidarity were established, as well as places for grassroots community organising. This was also the case for Focus E15. The occupation of the Carpenters Estate, a council estate that had been progressively emptied out as part of a regeneration project that started in 2005 and was never completed,

[8] The name *Obra Social* (literally in English, "social work") has historically been associated to the charity projects performed in Spain by savings banks and other financial institutions (see footnote 6). By calling *Obra Social* its campaign to re-house evicted individuals and families into housing blocs owned by banks, the PAH assigned a new and empowering meaning to this concept.

turned an empty block of flats into an open community centre serving the neighbours. For two weeks, while the occupation lasted, the Carpenters recovered its social usefulness and hosted daily events, including open meetings, arts workshops, activities for children, comedy shows and music gigs. The success of these disruptive, prefigurative tactics was confirmed some weeks later, when the Newham London Borough Council announced that some of the Carpenters' empty houses would be socially rented to homeless people. In 2018 the Council initiated a new project to redevelop the estate that will allocate new homes and involve the residents in its management.

A second prefigurative feature is shown in the practices of **cooperative learning and knowledge-sharing** exercised in their grassroots assemblies. This practices, that the PAH has renamed 'collective counselling', consists of giving legal advice and psychological support through sharing previous particular experiences and giving collective advice on solutions for individual cases. In doing so, the PAH and Focus E15 not only a practical procedure for producing aid while refusing to "become a charity" (field notes from a Focus E15 meeting, March 2016), but also involve individuals and families threatened by homelessness and processes of foreclosure and eviction in the search for collective solutions to common problems affecting their everyday lives (Colau and Alemany 2012). Thus, legal and psychological help is enacted in a communitarian, horizontal, direct and autonomous manner that gives voice, empowers and politicises previously excluded groups.

The collectivisation of cases is also an effective way of demonstrating that housing problems, initially perceived as individual failures by those who suffered from them, are in fact the result of generalised and systemic relations of debt- and market-based domination and exploitation, and in consequence, need to be contested through collective political action. This process of empowerment is described by one of the PAH Girona members in the following manner:

> "Here in the assembly people receive advice from other people who have experienced the same situation before them. Here is where those who are having a bad time see that it is an alternative, and little by little, they start feeling stronger, they find the tools to overcome their situation. That's what we call empowerment: they start growing inside, strengthening, stabilising psychologically and emotionally. And the time comes when they become activists, because they stop searching for a solution to their specific situation and they start struggling against the system that's squeezing us" (Interview with a PAH Girona activist, July 2013, author's translation).

Finally, both housing struggles concur in their **prefigurative methods and organisation dynamics**, mainly represented in their regular assemblies and open meetings. Showing a radical and direct/participatory understanding of democracy, the PAH and Focus E15 developed their own horizontal and consensus-seeking practices, which they complemented with the *ad hoc* designation of assembly moderators and with the establishment of mediation procedures for cases of internal conflicts. This commitment with

first-person politics or with a ‘presentist democracy’(Lorey 2011), exercised by and for directly affected people, is one of the main factors distinguishing these autonomous movements from the more conventional types of politics frequently adopted by the institutional left (Flesher Fominaya 2015; on the ambivalences and pragmatic engagements with institutional politics, see following sections). In addition to being their decision-making body and coordinating collective action, the grassroots assemblies also serve as open spaces that bring together different anti-austerity and community-based groups in search for support for their actions and demands (field notes from a Radical Housing Network seminar, July 2016).

‘Breaking from below, breaking from above’: Rescaling Contestation

Similar to other urban-based movements developed in recent decades (see for example Mayer 2013), another characteristic feature of the housing struggles analysed in this paper is their development of complex and selective multi-scalar internal practices and strategies of mobilisation. This strategic use of scale, which aimed to expand their chances of resisting and challenging power relations, has had two main expressions: a multi-layered internal reorganisation of the movements themselves, and a diversification of their targets and actions. In this subsection we will explore them in more depth.

As a first aspect of this dual strategy, these movements have adopted a series of internal dynamics that allowed them to

simultaneously organise in different scales. In this sense, on the one hand, they have established down-scaling practices and alliances with local groups in order to ground their demands on the everyday material needs and vulnerabilities of communities and neighbourhoods, as well as to strengthen grassroots solidarities and localised social relations. On the other hand, they have organised in higher scales to generate broader networks of struggle and coordinate political action.

The case of the PAH is paradigmatic in both directions. This housing movement is actually a network-based, grassroots collective movement that functions through a complex net of solidarities and mutual support between different local nodes. Each node is autonomously managed through an open and horizontal assembly in which housing activists, individuals and families threatened with eviction and mortgage debt can share their experiences, give and receive collective advice for their particular cases, and organise collective mobilisations. Moreover, in addition to the local assembly, where internal organisation, mobilisation strategies and campaigns are discussed and decided upon, each node can generate its own organisational configuration. PAH Barcelona, for example, developed a complex and dynamic organic structure that evolves according to the movement's needs, but that is mainly composed of five main parts: the General Assembly, as its central space for deliberation and decision-making; a Welcome Assembly, for those people getting in contact with the PAH for the first time; multiple collective bargaining groups, formed by those who have

mortgages with the same bank or financial institution; the *Obra Social* working group, which helps to reallocate evicted households with no other possibility of housing; and a changing variety of smaller commissions and working groups on specific issues such as communication, juridical work, action organising, finance and merchandising, or mutual help and psychological aid (for a more nuanced analysis of the functioning of PAH Barcelona, see Bailey *et al* 2018b).

Moreover, the local nodes of the PAH meet periodically in regional and state-wide Assemblies. These larger meetings are essential for the establishment of common guidelines, the diffusion of ideas, experiences of activism, and strategic tactics, and the organisation of coordinated political mobilisations and demands. Nevertheless, each local PAH remains autonomous and can develop additional connections and networks with other grassroots social struggles. In the case of PAH Barcelona, important alliances have been built with the *Aliança contra la Pobresa Energètica* (APE, Alliance against Energy Poverty), *Sindicat de Llogaters* (a recently created Tenants Union), the *Mareas* in defence of public services, and numerous workers campaigns and strikes, including *Panrico en lucha* and *Huelga Movistar*. These up-scaling strategies not only helped them attract considerable attention from mass media and public institutions, but also to generate a sense of solidarity and collective empowerment. One of the activists describes:

> "We have been articulating with neighbourhood movements and with struggles that emerged from the 15M: the *Mareas,* the

> *Iai@flautas*... We knew from the beginning that we needed to coordinate all our forces against the elite in power in order to fight for our health, education and basic rights. Only if we manage this articulation of struggles we will be able to mobilise a social majority ... and empower ourselves in the context of this unfair and unequal capitalist society". (Interview with an activist and co-founder of PAH Barcelona, June 2014, author's translation).

These multi-tiered organisation practices can also be seen in the case of Focus E15. Through the organisation of a two-hour weekly street stall in Stratford Broadway, in which they engage with activists and neighbours, E15 managed to build a localised space of physical and symbolic continuity (Watt 2016). Although temporary and semi-regular, the opening of this point of encounter within the public space has become essential, for it allows them to give information to passers-by, to get in touch with other people affected by the crisis of affordability and housing-related distress, to reinforce community bonds and to share experiences and coordinate actions with other campaigns. Moreover, in order to reinforce these community-based social relations and to facilitate wider processes of grassroots organising, in 2016 they rented an office space to be used as a social and political hub. Naming it Sylvia's Corner after the East Ender suffragette and socialist organiser Sylvia Pankhurst, the new space was meant to link and coordinate multiple contemporary feminist and progressive local campaigns, and to revive the historical memory of past revolutionary struggles. As one of the activists explained at the time when they were organising the action, "it is going to be a space to promote the campaign, but we

aren't going to call it 'Focus something'. We want to create ties with other social movements and neighbours, so this space should eventually have a life on its own" (field notes from a Focus E15 meeting, March 2016).

At the same time, Focus E15 contributed to the creation of the Radical Housing Network (RHN), a London-based horizontal network of more than thirty groups and campaigns fighting for the right to the city and housing justice from below. Bringing together housing activists, social housing tenants, private renters and many others, this cross-tenure network uses direct action and disruptive strategies to struggle for a wide range of housing issues, including the defence of housing co-operatives and council estates, the end of housing insecurity, evictions and homelessness, or the protection of squatting initiatives. Through the periodic publication of a common newsletter and, most importantly, through the organisation of joint meetings, direct actions and national marches against austerity, the RHN has been able to increasingly (re)politicise the housing question, as well as to highlight the devastating effects of the growing housing financialization and the destruction of the welfare safety net on our everyday lives. As an activist and coordinator of the Radical Housing Network puts it:

> "Some of our members are national campaigns, local groups, students, private renters, housing co-ops, voters... Anybody experiencing any kind of housing stress can become a member of the RHN. And that's an interesting perspective for organising because, even though the housing market in this country is cut up

> into different types of tenure and each of them seems to have their own internal problems, you are able to see the way in which they are affecting one another. So when a council estate in south London is being demolished, this will have knock-on effects for private renters in the area, rough sleepers, or other people in the housing waiting lists; all this things are kind of connected. Organising together helps us to make those connections, and think about the way in which housing as a whole is being managed in this country." (Browne 2018).

The second multi-scalar aspect of these housing struggles has been the development of **multi-targeted struggles and diversified actions**. Although their main concern was the promotion of social justice and the right to decent and affordable housing, they have been using multi-layered and contextually-adapted strategies in their search to deepen their capacity of political influence and, ultimately, to transform social relations. More or less successfully, they targeted multiple decision-making arenas simultaneously and perform actions at different scales focusing particularly on those deemed more permeable and responsive to their demands in an attempt to create a strategic selectivity of institutional arrangements more favourable to the fulfilment of their primary demands (Jessop 2008).

The PAH has proven to be, again in this dimension, highly sophisticated and farsighted. The first state-wide campaign initiated by the movement was the organisation of a petition for a change in the Spanish mortgage law in order to support of social housing, stop evictions from residential property and recognise the cancellation of

debt in exchange for the property being returned (*dación en pago*). In spite of collecting over 1,400,000 signatures and having the support of the main trade unions and neighbourhood associations in the country, the Spanish Congress of Deputies – with an overall conservative majority – refused this citizens' initiative in 2013. This was a turning point for the PAH. Given the continuous lack of response to their demands from the national level, the movement started two new simultaneous campaigns: *Romper por abajo* (Break from below), aiming to reinforce local and regional governments and force a confrontation between them and the then central government, and *PAH Internacional.*

The Break from below campaign was highly successful. At the municipal level, and with occasional alliances with different left-wing local parties, the PAH was able to force hundreds of local councils to pass motions containing (generally non-binding) disciplinary proceedings against financial institutions owning long-term empty homes, and to publicly support the *dación en pago* (Romanos 2014). At the regional level, they started new citizens' initiatives to pressure Autonomous Communities' legislatures into passing regional housing laws within the limits of their own competencies. In Catalonia, where the movement had been particularly strong and it could take advantage of the ongoing political conflict between the Government of Spain and the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, the PAH promoted a law that compels large landlords and real estate owners to offer social rents to individuals and families facing eviction processes, and secures the

access of vulnerable households to basic supplies like water, energy and gas. The law was temporary suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Court after the petition of the Conservative central government, but it went back into effect after the Socialist party came to power in 2018.

In parallel to this, *PAH Internacional* has celebrated multiple encounters and has coordinated numerous of trans-national mobilisations with other housing and anti-austerity movements in Europe, the Mediterranean area and all around the world. It has organised, for instance, several global actions against the New York-based, multinational private equity firm Blackstone.[9] These mobilisations united several housing collectives and grassroots community members and activists that mobilised simultaneously in Barcelona, Madrid, New York, San Francisco and London under slogans such as "Stop evictions! Stop Blackstone" or "#StopBlackstone, Our Homes are not a Commodity". Among their requests, they entreated this Wall Street giant to stop purchasing

[9] In 2013, Blackstone took its first steps into the Spanish housing market by purchasing almost 2,000 social housing properties owned by Madrid's highly indebted City Council. A year later, it paid 3,600 million Euros in exchange for 40,000 high risk mortgage loans (with a nominal value of 6,400 million Euros) from Catalunya Caixa, one of the savings banks bailed out by the state with 12,000 million Euros. It also purchased real estate assets and hotels from other banks and financial institutions, including Banco Popular and Sabadell. Currently in 2019, Blackstone owns over 100,000 properties in Spain, valued in nearly 20,000 million Euros.

social and foreclosed housing, to cease to evict and harass vulnerable tenants and to end abusive speculative practices that are contributing to the creation of a new property boom in the global housing market.

In recent years, Focus E15 has also diversified its actions and joined different international mobilisations and networks of struggle. An example of this is the coordination, through the Radical Housing Network, of several trans-national actions against the MIPIM property fair. This annual event brings together international investors, property developers, local authorities and financial institutions and, according to one of the activists in Focus E15, "is where Boris [in reference to Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London] and 20 other Councils are selling public land and making regeneration plans. They are selling our homes!" (Group interview with Focus E15 activists, March 2016). Also through the RHN, it has become a member of the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City, in which PAH also participates. This coalition unites independent European campaigns and offers them a platform to facilitate the adoption of common positions, the creation of trans-national solidarities, the co-organisation of joint actions – either simultaneously in several cities or centralised in one place –, and the exchange of their knowledge and experiences of struggle.

Therefore, by diversifying the targets and developing multi-scalar acts of resistance, these struggles have attempted to exploit the

potential dysfunction produced by the institutional separation of the different state levels, and use the different institutional logics, forms and functions to increase structural contradictions. In this sense, rescaling can become a key tool in order to increase the capacity for resistance of social struggles, and it can open new strategic fields and opportunities for attaining social change.[10]

Embracing pragmatism: The (im-) possibilities of conventional politics

As Bailey, Clua-Losada, Huke and I have argued elsewhere (Bailey *et al* 2018a; 2018b; Ribera-Almandoz et al forthcoming), the prefigurative aims and practices developed by anti-austerity movements emerging in the post-2008 context have, at least in part, been adopted for pragmatic reasons. In an unresponsive institutional environment where the demands for voice and material resources were repeatedly frustrated, opting for more autonomous and radical forms of disruption was not only a political but (rather) a practical choice.

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[10] However, the adoption by social struggles of multi-scalar strategies not only makes their internal organisation and political activity much more complex and arduous, but also exposes them to new threats and contradictions. These difficulties include, for instance, the complexity of articulating a strategy that combines common-ground aspirations and demands with a rootedness in a myriad of local contexts, as well as the increase in participation costs which can lead to the underrepresentation of specific viewpoints, particularly of more vulnerable groups. This point is explored in more depth in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

In Spain, the incapacity or unwillingness of a weakened institutional left to organise an increasingly precarious and fragmented population and to provide adequate responses to the crisis, especially during its initial years, was one of the main triggers for the adoption of alternative methods of struggle (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz 2017; Las Heras and Ribera-Almandoz 2017). In the case of the PAH, the refusal of the citizens' initiative by the Congress of Deputies increased the disengagement from conventional politics, and transferred most of the movement's efforts towards the *Obra Social* campaign, particularly in some of its local groups. One PAH Sabadell activist described this turn towards more self-managed and direct action-oriented forms of resistance as follows:

> "I think we have exhausted the institutional channels, the so called "democratic" institutional channels. So we have entered into a new phase, a phase where we are self-enforcing our rights. There are no alternatives, the situation is critical and we can't wait: we have to create the alternatives" (Interview with a PAH Sabadell activist, July 2013, author's translation).

However, the use these prefigurative methods, contrasted with the movement's deliberate use of words like liberate [*liberar*], recover [*recuperar*] and re-house [*realojar*] instead of opting for much more radically charged concepts such as occupation or squatting [*okupación*], in an attempt to detach from widespread prejudices and build larger popular support to their campaign (Abellán *et al* 2012). The rationale behind some of these choices could be seen,

therefore, as more strategic than idealistic. As a members of PAH Barcelona puts it: “we are not here just to stop evictions, we want to change the law and we want to have political impact” (Interview with a PAH Barcelona activist, October 2013, author’s translation). These examples illustrate the PAH’s pragmatic willingness to contribute to the opening of new political opportunities and channels for resistance, and exploit multiple possibilities to boost the responsiveness of the state to popular demands.

It is also in this pragmatic lens that we can understand the **(re-)engagement with formal political institutions** carried out by the PAH at the regional and local levels – exemplified in the *Break from Below* campaign (see section above) –, and at the European level, showing once more the movement’s multi-scalar strategic insightfulness. An example of the latter was the 2013 appeal to the European Court of Human Rights to stop the eviction of Bloc Salt, an empty block of apartments in the hands of the “bad bank” SAREB that had been occupied by the PAH to re-house adults and families with children in extremely vulnerable situations. The Court ruled the precautionary cancellation of the eviction to avoid a potential violation of the European Convention of Human Rights, particularly focusing on the prohibition of “inhuman or degrading treatment” (Article 3 ECHR) and the right to “private and family life, and home” (Article 8 ECHR). Thanks to struggle carried out by the PAH and the inhabitants of *Bloc Salt*, in 2016 the local government accepted to transform the 40 apartments in Bloc Salt

into rental homes with limited rents.[11] Moreover, in 2019, and together with 77 housing groups and organisations in 20 EU countries, PAH launched a European Citizen Initiative 'Housing for all'. The petition urges the European Union to take the initiative in the protection of the right to housing and to collaborate in the enlargement of the stock of social and affordable housing in Europe.

Nevertheless, the last and foremost example of this pragmatic turn towards institutional politics is, of course, Ada Colau's election as Mayor of Barcelona in 2015. Since its creation, the PAH had insisted upon its non-partisan strategy, that is, its lack of affiliation or public support to any specific political party. In spite of this, Colau, the main spokesperson of the movement until 2014, and a number of social and political activists –including other key members of the PAH - launched the citizen platform *Guanyem Barcelona* (Let's win back Barcelona), later transformed into the political party *Barcelona en Comú* (Barcelona in Common). Upon taking office and forming a minority government, *Barcelona en Comú* needed the occasional support from other parties to pass new legislation, which highly limited its capacity to act. In 2018, more than three years after the beginning of her mandate, Colau was able to pass her flagship policy, an urban modification measure that will

[11] In addition to this case, in multiple occasions the Court of Justice of the European Union has ruled that the Spanish mortgage law does not provide sufficient consumer protection against the presence of abusive clauses in mortgage contracts.

force the allocation of 30 percent of all new homes and major renovation projects to social housing, of which the PAH was one of the main proponents. However, and despite its deep social roots, Colau's government has been widely criticised for its inability to use the institutions to further mobilise and organise the neighbourhoods, or to substantially reduce the housing affordability crisis, the incessant wave of evictions and rising rental prices in Barcelona.

The attempts at establishing pragmatic connections with several formal institutions observed in some of the multi-scalar strategies developed by the PAH cannot be found to the same degree in the case of Focus E15. Indeed, right after receiving their first eviction notice in 2013, the E15 mothers did seek the support of the directly-elected Mayor of the Newham Borough, the Labour Party member Sir Robert Andrew Wales. When approached by the young mothers, however, Wales allegedly replied: "If you can't afford to live in Newham, you can't afford to live in Newham" (Group interview with Focus E15 activists, March 2016). Following this frustrated attempt and seeing the unresponsiveness of established institutions, the Focus E15 mothers adopted **more militant forms of opposition**. As one of the campaigners stated:

> "We are in direct opposition with the Labour Newham Council. Robin Wales has cut millions from our services and has always been against social housing. Now Newham has the highest homelessness record in London and working class people are being

> pushed out of it every single day. We need to take back our borough!" (Field notes from a Focus E15 meeting, March 2016).

Thus, as they realised that conventional channels would not help them to cover their urgent material needs, and seeking to build community support, the campaigners started a petition and collected signatures in the area. It was in this context that, through regular encounters when campaigning in Stratford Broadway, they established a strong connection with East London node of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), an anti-racist and anti-imperialist Marxist-Leninist political organisation that occasionally displayed a stall in the area to campaign against welfare austerity and the 'bedroom tax'. Their mutual solidarity and cooperation reinforced Focus E15 campaigners' critical consciousness and political subjectivities, and resulted in what became the Focus E15 Mothers weekly street stall. At the same time, this unexpected alliance was also a powerful source of knowledge transfer, material resources and practical aid, and allowed for the emergence of more prefigurative strategies.

An example of this could be seen in 2014, when the campaigners of Focus E15 started the two-week action aimed at re-populating some of the empty houses on the Carpenters estate in Stratford, and transforming them into open spaces of encounter for the community. In this case, this move towards more disruptive tactics was an effective strategy to attract media attention and place housing affordability on the public agenda. During the action, the campaigners received the support of the popular English comedian

and activist Russell Brand, who took part of the protest on the estate and filmed it to help foster its visibility. The adoption of occupation as a method of disruption had an undeniable and rapid impact. In October 2014, the then still Mayor of Newham, Robin Wales published an open letter in the Guardian, where he apologised to the Focus E15 families and announced the Council's plan to make available forty of the Carpenters' empty flats to relocate homeless families.[12]

Through their struggle and the activation of class- and gender-based solidarities, the Focus E15 mothers and activists managed to bring to the fore the injustices and contradictions of a system that renders people homeless while it leaves thousands of homes in good condition empty, some of which are social or public housing. In addition, and contrasting with the less radically-charged language used by the PAH, Focus E15 activists framed these and subsequent direct actions as occupations, although they even led to the arrest of one of its campaigners on suspicion of squatting in 2015. What is more, as their main slogan ("Social housing, not social cleansing") illustrates, it was precisely through the occupations that the campaigners managed to strengthen their social bonds with the

[12] In the letter, the Mayor maintained: "Although the decision [of moving 29 families from the Focus E15 Foyer in Stratford] was the right one, the way both their landlord and the council initially dealt with the Foyer families was unacceptable, and for that I apologise". To read the whole letter, see: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/06/apologise-focus-e15-london-housing-crisis-newham.

Carpenters estate residents and the local community. One of the campaigners explained “that’s what sticking together gives you. It gives you hope that things can be different. This campaign made me feel so brave! I don’t care if the police comes, we will be standing side by side” (Brand 2014). These actions marked the transformation of an initial fight of 29 homeless young mothers to stay in their hostel accommodation into a grassroots, autonomous social movement that defends not only the right to decent housing, but also a collective ‘right to the city’, understood as the capacity to remain in their neighbourhoods and communities in a context of state-led gentrification (Watt 2016: 302).

3.6 Conclusion

This paper started by showing how the neoliberal reforms initiated in the 1980s and 1990s in most industrialised countries have witnessed a growing use of private debt as a means of stimulating domestic consumption. In this sense, the consistent assault on real wages and welfare has provoked an increase in consumer spending sustained by debt – in form of mortgages and individual credit – to compensate for a declining purchasing power and to address everyday needs. Both in Spain and the UK, the context of financial expansion and a favourable policy environment provided their housing markets with an exceptional opportunity for housing construction and real estate development, which facilitated a move towards mortgage-financed private homeownership for most low-to-middle income households. After the financial collapse of 2007/8, however, many European governments deliberately stepped

in to bail out banks in order to restore confidence in the financial system, but not to rescue indebted individuals and households in financial distress. In this manner, the costs and risks of the collapsing housing market were socialised and transferred to mortgaged homeowners, renters and taxpayers, whereas eventual profits remained privatised. As a result, we have witnessed alarming growth in over-indebtedness, homelessness and social inequalities.

The cases of PAH and Focus E15 have been used in the paper to exemplify new instances of grassroots struggles that emerged to resist the housing crisis and to contest the imposition of austerity upon Spanish and British societies. As other anti-austerity movements born during the crisis, these housing struggles have responded to the double goal of mitigating the impact of the crisis on highly vulnerable individuals and families while actively contributing to the construction of community-centred and self-managed spaces of social reproduction. Through the use of civil disobedience and direct action, they have fostered a grassroots enforcement of the right to decent and affordable housing. Although in different degrees, their development of sophisticated multi-scalar strategies and adoption of pragmatic methods of institutional (dis-)engagement allowed them to diversify their targets and terrains of action, and open up new opportunities for political mobilisation.

The effects of these struggles have been noteworthy. Their participatory and prefigurative practices have proven a great success in overcoming the disempowering feelings of shame and self-blame

generated by debt, as well as in generating solidarity ties between people affected by common housing and everyday problems. Moreover, they have shown a high capacity to transform spheres dominated by dynamics of capital profit and credit-led accumulation into arenas of resistance and contestation. Thus far, their grounded strategies based on common everyday needs and reproductive activities have effectively bolstered mobilisation and solidarity bonds. Yet, the question remains open whether these struggles will be able to articulate and sustain broader processes of grassroots community organising and alternative forms of reproduction once the period of housing emergency has passed. Notwithstanding these reasonable apprehensions, the political subjectivities, processes of empowerment and networks of mobilisation generated in the current wave of struggle are undoubtedly paving the ground for future struggles for housing rights and social justice.

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4. RESCALING THE STATE, RESCALING RESISTANCE: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN HEALTH CONTESTING THE DISMANTLING OF WELFARE STATES IN SPAIN AND THE UK

Abstract

After the outbreak of the global financial crisis that started in 2007/8, different rescaling processes have been promoted in many European countries. Frequently justified as a form of crisis-management, these measures have been used to further privatise and deregulate welfare systems, as well as to reinforce the isolation of certain decision-making arenas from democratic processes (Brenner 2004). At the same time, however, they have also generated new strategic opportunities for resistance to different forms of anti-austerity disruptive agency. The paper analyses the rescaling strategies implemented in public health services in Spain and the UK during the current economic crisis, and analyses the scalar dynamics and strategies of two social struggles against the privatisation of hospitals and health centres in these two contexts: *Marea Blanca* in Madrid and *Keep Our NHS Public* in Greater Manchester. Thus, it explores the different ways in which social agents can exploit these scale shifts and potential dysfunctions in their articulations in order to transform certain institutional levels into centres of resistance.

Key words: scale; agency; welfare state; austerity; health social movements; UK; Spain.

4.1 Introduction

Since the 2007/8 global financial crisis, most European countries have experienced a growing contradiction between a rising need for social protection measures and increasingly indebted states with declining revenues. As a result, most governments undertook fiscal-austerity measures that limited the scope of their social and welfare provisions, thus increasing social inequalities and vulnerability among their populations. These reforms, which reinforced and accelerated a variety of pre-existing dynamics, are characterised by welfare retrenchment and the growing replacement of universal risk-prevention programmes by selective social protection measures and activation policies that make welfare provision conditional on doing (or being willing to return to) paid work (Borosch *et al* 2016). In health policy, measures have been directed towards a broad restructuring of public health systems that entailed, in addition to severe budget retrenchment, multiple forms of privatisation, through the introduction or increase in co-payments, the reduction of treatments covered by the public health services, and the outsourcing of staff and medical services (Borosch *et al* 2016).

In this context, different state rescaling processes have been promoted as a form of crisis-management across Europe (Brenner 2004; Keating 2013). During the last decade, the majority of European states implemented functional rescaling processes to reorganise and redistribute the boundaries and functions of certain territorial authorities, thus creating important shifts in international, national, regional, and local institutional settings. In Spain, the

imposition of severe austerity measures and debt ceilings for each institutional level, together with the centralised reform of the national health system implemented through the *Royal Decree 16/2012*, has significantly reconfigured the state scalar organization. Similar examples can be found in the United Kingdom with the approval of the *Health and Social Care Act* in 2012, the reductions in local councils and authorities spending power and the health and social care devolution plan in Greater Manchester. Although these measures have been justified as means to reduce public spending and increase competitiveness in times of crisis, they have frequently responded to both global and internal pressures to further privatise and deregulate welfare state services, as well as to increase the insulation of certain decision-making arenas from democratic processes (Bruff 2014).

However, the attempts at welfare retrenchment have been responded to and resisted through different forms of anti-austerity disruptive agency. Expressing demands for social justice and civil rights, multiple grassroots struggles emerged with the explicit goals of stopping the privatization of social services and the cuts in public spending (Della Porta 2012; Bailey *et al* 2018a). Some of these grassroots movements have adopted strategies that show a selective use of scalar practices in order to alter social and power relations and confront the new spatial and scalar fixes of the state (Mayer 2013). Drawing on recent debates over scale in geography and global political economy, this paper thus conceives scale neither as something fixed nor as unilaterally established by states and

markets to favour capital accumulation, but as something relationally produced and permanently contested by multiple social forces (Jessop *et al* 2008; Swyngedouw 2004).

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it explores the contextually specific forms in which state rescaling strategies have unfolded over the last decade in two western European countries. In particular, it focuses on the transformation of health policies and services in Spain and the UK during the recent economic crisis. Second, and most importantly, it analyses the scalar dynamics and strategies of different social struggles against the privatisation of hospitals and health centres in these countries. Thus, it explores how social agents can mobilise in multi-scalar ways and exploit the potential dysfunctions produced by these scale shifts in order to transform certain institutional levels into nodes of resistance. The paper consequently contributes to ongoing debates on the disruptive political subjectivities that have emerged with the onset of the crisis in 2008, as well as their emancipatory potential and impact on current capitalist political economies (Huke *et al* 2015; Bailey *et al* 2018b).

Based on the above, the paper compares the cases of *Marea Blanca* in Madrid and *Keep our NHS Public* in Greater Manchester in order to investigate these multiple ongoing dynamics. These are two examples of 'social movements in health' (Brown and Zavestoski 2004) resisting processes of commodification and corporatisation of healthcare. Their significance as case studies lies not only in the

broad levels of public support that they received, but also on their capacity to go beyond traditional frames of public sector workers' struggles (Luque Balbona and González Begega 2016). They represent novel instances of collaboration between healthcare sector workers, users and community organisations struggling against the loss of social and health care rights and defending the maintenance of universal and free at-the-point-of-use public services. Furthermore, responding to the attempts of different government levels to impose significant welfare retrenchment measures, they enacted flexible and complex multi-scalar strategies and practice of mobilisation that resisted, disrupted and subverted contemporary forms of austerity.

4.2 Rescaling domination/Rescaling resistance

The construction and contestation of scale

In order to explain the processes of (re)production and contestation of geographical scales, recent debates in critical political economy and radical geography have built upon relational conceptualisations of space that analyse the constant interaction and mutual influence between scalar structures and social struggles. From this perspective, on the one hand, scalar structures are seen as historically and contextually embedded crystallisations of broader social relations and processes, that is, they are conceived as (temporary) material expressions of power relations constructed and contested through processes of social production, reproduction and struggle (Brenner 2001; MacKinnon 2010). On the other hand,

scales constitute the frameworks in which renewed political, economic and cultural processes and relations unfold and they significantly influence the development of multiple aspects of everyday life (Smith 1995). Accordingly, scalar configurations are built upon the permanent interaction of pre-existing scalar structures – inherited from past processes of social production – and manifold organisational, material and discursive projects and struggles.

The relational approach suggests that these projects and struggles do not need to be directly concerned about the production and transformation of scales themselves in order to have scalar consequences. As MacKinnon (2010: 31) argues, "particular projects tend to privilege some inherited scales over others and reshape inherited scalar arrangements in line with their ideology and sociopolitical outlook". By modifying the organisation and hierarchisation of scale structures – or, in Brenner's words (2004: 34), by "the systemic privileging of some locations, places, territories, and scales and the marginalization or exclusion of others" – political and social projects and struggles attempt to open new spaces and structures of empowerment and mobilisation, to facilitate or hinder particular strategies of control or resistance, to promote certain alliances between social agents at expenses of others, and ultimately, to reinforce or reshape societal power relations.

Rescaling social policies as a form of crisis-management

Ongoing efforts to conceptualise the production and restructuring of space within capitalism provide a framework which facilitates the exploration of the role of scale and scalar architecture in the processes of crisis management and resolution. In his geographical analysis of capitalism, Harvey (1982) uses the concept of 'spatial fix' to describe how geographically mobile capitals seek spatial solutions to overaccumulation through geographical restructuring and expansions towards regions with most favourable institutional, legal and infrastructural arrangements. Silver (2003) also identifies the 'spatial fix' – here defined as the reduction of labour costs through relocation – as one of the available managerial mechanisms through which capital attempts to control labour and enhance profitability. In both cases, the authors describe the deliberate attempts of corporations to relocate to places with low corporate taxes, accessible natural resources, infrastructural services, flexible labour markets and fragmented labour relations, among others, in order to absorb capital surpluses, reduce labour costs and curtail structural labour power. To facilitate and secure this process of corporate relocation, states – including regional and local governments – develop proactive spatial policies aiming to attract global capital investment to their own territories and to promote economic development and competitiveness, in what has been termed 'entrepreneurial governance' (Harvey 1989).

Building on Harvey, Smith (1995) and Brenner (2001) conceived the notion of 'scalar fix' with which they explain the specific crystallisations that result from processes of scalar structuration, that is, the temporary but relatively stable layered geographical hierarchies in which socioeconomic, political and cultural activities are organised. Such hierarchies are constituted through multiple – and frequently contending – rescaling processes aiming at privileging some subnational, national and/or supranational scales over others and reorganizing their functional, institutional and geographical articulations in order to secure, facilitate, obstruct or disrupt the conditions for capital accumulation and relations of exploitation. These rescaling processes can therefore be applied not only to generalised institutional realignments affecting the territorial structures of government, but also to specific reorganisations of the boundaries and functions of certain territorial authorities (Keating 2014). It is in this latter functional sense that the state can strategically employ changes of scale to promote territorial cohesion and policy standardisation or, contrarily, to reinforce inter-territorial competition and enhance place-specific regulatory conditions for capital investment and accumulation, as well as to shape the material conditions of social reproduction through the provision of welfare services and policies, among other possibilities.[13] Thus, according to Brenner's account of contemporary capitalism,

[13] For an illustration of how the transnational capitalist class has sought to use European integration as a tool through which to exert further market discipline, particularly through processes of market-based competition, see Buch-Hansen and Wigger 2012.

functional rescaling of social and public policies has become a key instrument of the state for rearticulating political economies in contexts of socioeconomic instability and systemic crisis (Brenner 2004).

Rescaling resistance

While state rescaling has been used as a response to socioeconomic instability and the crisis tendencies of capitalism, the resulting scalar configurations cannot be understood as perfectly coherent and stable structural platforms for capital accumulation, but rather as spatial overlapping institutional frameworks for conflict and compromise (Swyngedouw 2004: 133). As concrete manifestations of broader social processes and power relations, complex scalar articulations are never completely integrated and consolidated, but necessarily unstable, provisional and incomplete (Brenner 2004). As Bruff highlights, "any attempted reshaping of the legal framework is a multilinear, uneven, and contradictory process" (2014: 116). Consequently, processes of state rescaling can generate dysfunctional outcomes and produce incoherent or even conflicting institutional and policy scalar articulations. As a result, geographical scales and scale structures are constantly both (re)produced and contested, and they always contain potential for resistance and for emancipatory social change (Las Heras and Ribera-Almandoz 2017). The production and transformation of scalar structures thus generate new strategic fields in which social struggles unfold. Hence, not only scale configurations structure social movements' everyday practices and organisation but also, in

their pursuit of influencing public policies and disrupting different forms of domination, social movements can reshape scale configurations. In this sense, MacKinnon (2010: 31) suggests that, even though scale itself might not be the direct object of their struggles, the social activity and the power relations that emerge from social movements' practices "have scalar dimensions and repercussions that became apparent as they come into contact with inherited scalar structures". Therefore, scalar configurations offer new opportunities (as well as potential risks) for social movements and consequently, can become a key element of their political activity and repertoire of action (see Table 4.1). Most crucial among this strategic use of scale, social movements can reorganize in multiscalar ways and target multiple decision-making arenas simultaneously (Mayer 2013). In addition, they can rescale their activity in order to target those scales that are more permeable and open to their demands (and evade less responsive ones), use discourses and practices that aim to legitimise or privilege certain scales or scalar configurations over others (MacKinnon 2010), or to prefigure radically different scalar arrangements that attempt to create alternative social relations based upon logics of egalitarianism, social justice and radical democracy instead of capitalist accumulation (Brenner 2001).

Table 4.1: Analytical framework: Potentialities and risks of rescaling practices in social movement mobilisation (based on Mayer 2013)

	Scaling upwards	**Scaling downwards**
Strengths and opportunities	Construction trans-local networks of struggle that can overcome the fragmentation and isolation of local movements, favour their consolidation and facilitate the coordination of political action. Mutual learning process and trans-scalar diffusion of knowledge, experiences, ideas and discourses. This includes transferring repertoires of action, organizational and professional skills. Gain visibility and influence through the attraction of public and mass-media attention, reach the agenda of certain political parties and actors, and help spread the movements' messages and discourses.	Develop distinct contextually-based, territorially anchored campaigns, actions, movements and discourses that account for particular material needs, power relations and institutional structures. Generation of local networks and alliances rooted in everyday community relations.

	Scaling upwards	Scaling downwards
Weaknesses and threats	Need to find common-ground demands with other movements creates the risk of watering them down, that is, depoliticising them and eventually losing the initial purpose of the movement. Underrepresentation of certain viewpoints or particular lower-scale movements that lack the capacity to participate (in equal conditions) in higher mobilisation levels / domination by certain activists of the information flows and upper decision-making arenas.	Generation of potential conflicts derived from the difficulties of adapting to multiple and heterogeneous local contexts with different movement cultures, ideologies, practices, material needs and demands. Excessive actions diversification and over-fragmentation of movements.
	Challenges of maintaining a complex multi-scalar strategy that combines diverse demands, actions and targets in every scale (for example, by generating more pragmatic material demands in the local level while developing a more radical, prefigurative, anti-neoliberal agenda in upper levels).	

4.3 Methodology

The methodology employed in this research follows a qualitative path, and aims to intensively analyse a small number of cases in order to gain a holistic understanding of the subject of inquiry. Adopting a critical approach to social sciences, the paper considers the researcher as an insightful and active agent that attempts to capture meaningfully the complex, relational and contingent socio-political dynamics (Mason 2011, 78). In particular, the goal here is to generate situated knowledge about diverse of social struggles, as well as at learning from the historical and contextual backgrounds in which they are embedded and which they co-constitute (Poulantzas 1978).

In seeking to analyse ongoing processes of institutional reorganisation and social policy rescaling that emerged in response to the global financial crisis that started in 2007/8, as well as the scalar dynamics and strategies of social struggles contesting these current trends, the empirical part of the paper is divided in two sections. First, the paper explores the functional policy rescaling of the health services in Greater Manchester in the UK and the Community of Madrid in Spain. These two countries have been selected because they offer exceptional and scenarios for exploring the severe effects of the socio-economic crisis on the material conditions of extensive parts of their populations (see Table 4.2). Second, the paper offers a comparative case study of two social struggles against the privatization of hospitals and health centres in these regions: *Marea Blanca* and *Keep our NHS Public*. The

comparative approach, in this case, is directed towards exploring the development of various projects of class emancipation and the identification of their political demands, disruptive strategies and contradictions in two dissimilar post-crisis contexts. What is more, it does so by focusing on an area of social reproduction, health care, that has remained mostly unexplored (Lethbridge 2009).).

The aim of the critical comparison established in the paper is thus to investigate the multi-scalar ways in which these social movements mobilise and how they exploit the potential dysfunctions produced by contextually specific rescaling trajectories in order to transform certain institutional scales into nodes of resistance. As the basis for the comparison, this research uses complementary qualitative techniques, including semi-structured in-depth interviews with activists in *Marea Blanca* and *Keep our NHS Public*, activist participant observation in key events and actions, and secondary texts such as internal documents and video footages produced by collective actors, political statements, and media content.

Table 4.2: Summary of contextual country-level characteristics

	ECB imposed austerity	Crisis-period unemployment (2008-2014)*	Crisis-period change in GDP (2008-2014)[14]	Decentralised public healthcare system	Widespread and sustained popular dissent?
Spain	Yes	20,81%	-1.6%	Yes, symmetrical at the 17 Autonomous Communities [15]	Yes
UK	No	7.22%	12.5%	Yes, asymmetrical at the 4 constituent countries [16]	No

[14] Source: OECD (2015).

[15]In Spain, responsibilities for health care provision are symmetrically distributed across the different intra-national scales as follows: the central government is responsible for establishing basic health-related rights and principles and coordinating central and regional health authorities, foreign health affairs, pharmaceutical policy and management of INGESA (Instituto Nacional de Gestión Sanitaria, which manages healthcare services in the autonomous cities of Melilla and Ceuta). The 17 autonomous Communities, which have their own Health Service, are in charge of health planning, public health and healthcare services, facilities and centres management. Finally, local councils cooperate in the management of public healthcare services and public health and sanitation (Ministry of Health and Social Policy 2010).

[16] In the UK, the health care system has been highly decentralised in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since the start of devolution in the late 1990s. However, the lack of an overall legal framework means that, in practice, the

4.4 Functional policy rescaling: healthcare services and policies in Spain and the UK

National health systems are one of the largest policy areas in terms of social spending allocation in industrialised countries, and one of the public programmes that generates greater consensus and support both in Spain and the UK. This section offers a historically contextualised account of the development of the National Health Services in these countries from their creation, as well as the effects on their governance of changing centre-periphery relations. In particular, it analyses the different paths through which these countries' public health care services evolved from Keynesian (or semi-Keynesian in the case of Spain) welfare settlements to growingly corporatised and privatised services, while also focusing on the tensions between centralised control, equalisation and standardisation, on the one hand, and local and regional autonomy, on the other.

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devolved governments differ in their legal and practical autonomy. England, on the other hand, is directly ruled by the UK central government and has a degree of administrative deconcentration in local governments. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, however, has paved the ground for a potential (limited) political decentralisation in different English regions. Greater Manchester has been the first English region to which the power to set and deliver health care policies has been delegated, although the central government is ultimately accountable for these policies.

Historical background: Health policies and scalar politics before the financial crisis

In Spain, the extension of welfare during the highly corporatist Francoist regime was by no means universal. Public healthcare provided coverage for limited periods of time and was conceived as a system to treat injured and ill workers in order to hasten their return to work. This scarcity of welfare provisions by the state reinforced the reliance on intergenerational family solidarity networks to provide care and social protection (Bailey *et al* 2018b). However, the democratisation process carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s was paralleled by an extension of welfare provisions and the implementation of some redistributive programmes. The *General Health Law* passed in 1986 under the government of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) guaranteed near-universal access to public healthcare and established the legal framework for the National Health System in Spain, at the same time that the responsibility for the provision of social and health care was progressively decentralised and transferred to the Autonomous Communities. These dynamics were to a large extent a reaction to public pressure for redistribution of wealth and for improving living conditions, particularly from neighbourhood assemblies and associations, which had been very active during 1960s and 1970s. Regardless of this expansion of welfare provisions, however, it has been consistently argued that Spain continued to be an underdeveloped welfare state, with levels of government expenditure in social

protection and healthcare less generous in comparison with other European countries (Navarro 2006). Thus, although the public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP increased from 3.8% after Franco's death in 1975 to 5.9% by the end of Socialist government in 1996, it was still far from the average 6.9% in the EU-15.[17] [18]

Throughout the 1990s, Spain gradually abandoned Keynesian strategies and favoured fiscal austerity and economic competition. As in other European states, one of the main motivations for this contraction of welfare spending provisions was the need to reduce the size of the government deficit in order to comply with the convergence criteria established in the Maastricht Treaty. This provided the means by which the Socialist government justified the retrenchment in welfare provisions initiated in the early 1990s as an unavoidable and necessary effort to secure the benefits derived from European integration (Greer *et al* 2016).

[17] Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all the data used in this paper come from Eurostat's statistics on government expenditure (Eurostat 2018).

[18] As Vicenç Navarro (2004) notices, this difference is even more acute considering that, together with Italy and Portugal, Spain is the European country with highest levels of pharmaceutical public spending. According to data from the Spanish Ministry of Health, Public Policy and Equality (2008, 179), in 1996 the pharmaceutical spending accounted for 19.8% of total public health spending, a percentage that increased in the following years.

The scale of the reforms escalated after the conservative Popular Party (*Partido Popular*, PP) came to power in 1996. As a result, the universal healthcare system suffered a process of neoliberal restructuring based on budged cuts, cost-containment measures and market liberalisation programmes. Most noticeably, the *Law 15/1997*[19] on the authorisation of new forms of management of the National Health System allowed the government to transform public hospitals and healthcare centres into foundations, consortiums and state-owned companies, thus having to operate in accordance with business principles. These first steps towards the development of a mixed public-private healthcare system had already been tested in Catalonia, where, after passing the *Healthcare Organisation Act of Catalonia* (LOSC) in 1990, private companies were allowed to enter into the public healthcare system as managers of public facilities and direct providers of medical services (Sánchez 2013). These initial attempts to privatise and corporatise healthcare faced a broad-based campaign that united health workers, professional associations and trade unions in defence of public health in different Autonomous Communities, particularly in Galicia, and gathered 400,000 signatures in a citizens' initiative to reverse the commodification of the public healthcare sector (Lethbridge 2009). In spite of the grassroots mobilisations, which helped to partially mitigate its effects – such as the closure of beds in public hospitals

[19] The law was passed with the support of PP, PSOE and the main right leaning regionalist parties, *Convergència i Unió (CiU), Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (EAJ-PNV) and *Coalición Canaria* (CC).

and the deterioration of working conditions – the law was not repealed.

In 2003, in its last year in office, the Conservative government passed a new *Law on the Cohesion and Quality of the National Health System*, which aimed to reinforce geographical standardisation in treatments and health protection, and to strengthen the centralised coordination of the service through the creation of an Interterritorial Council of the Spanish National Health Service. The same law was also used to encourage the collaboration between the public and private sector in the delivery of healthcare services. The general election of 2004 led to the formation of a new Socialist government under the presidency of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The new executive was initially committed to the introduction of new expansionary welfare measures, such as social protections for the elderly and dependents, and paternity leave. In the case of health care, in the period 2004-2009, public health spending as a share of GDP increased from 6.1% to 7.1% (the EU average rose from 7.3% to 8.2%). The Socialist government, however, did not put an end to the privatising tendencies started in the previous decade. Starting in Valencia and Madrid respectively, and extending to other Autonomous Communities soon after, the new systems of "administrative concessions" (*concesiones administrativas*) and private financial initiatives (PFIs) began gaining ground as models of private management and funding of public hospitals.

In the case of the UK, the National Health Service was launched in 1948 as part of a broader social welfare programme under Clement Atlee's Labour government (1945-1951).[20] Departing from egalitarian and universal Keynesian welfare principles, the creation of the NHS aimed to establish a comprehensive publicly owned and publicly provided health service that was funded from general taxation and free at the point of access. From 1948 until the end of the 1970s, the governance of the NHS combined a centralised control and definition of health care policy by the state with a high degree of local autonomy and a dependence upon the members of the medical profession for the day-to-day delivery of healthcare services (Tailby 2012). This allowed for "a very large degree of discretion *within* the centrally sanctioned budgetary limits" (Klein 2006: 37, emphasis in original). In 1950, the first year of stability of public health spending, the NHS absorbed 4.1% of GDP and accounted for 25% of total public social spending (Webster 2002). The initial model of mutual dependence between the state and the medical profession for the governance of the NHS resulted in a health service that not only was highly heterogeneous and complex, but also perpetuated certain inherited inequalities in the geographical distribution of NHS resources, medical practices and healthcare performance (Klein 2006; Greener and Powell 2008).

[20] For a detailed overview on the evolution of the NHS since its creation in 1948, see Webster 2002; Klein 2006; Greener 2009).

In 1974, the first substantial administrative reorganisation of the NHS increased the powers of the Regional and Area Health Authorities and consolidated the previous principles of professional self-management and autonomy. The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, however, initiated an entire redefinition of the public sector and led to a profound transformation of the NHS that would be further developed in the 1980s and 1990s. The Conservative Party's efforts to move away from the welfare state and towards managed competition included important restrictions on public spending, a strengthening of central government control and organisation of the health service and a shift in employment to private sector contractors (Tailby 2012). Particularly important were the introduction of rate-capping and budget cuts for local authorities, which forced many UK local councils to enter into PFI arrangements and other types of 'public-private partnerships' (PPPs) for funding –and managing– new projects in the public sector.

Furthermore, attributing a lack of efficiency and the intra-national variations in the quality of care to the ongoing model of local autonomy, two main changes were introduced to the mode of governance in the NHS. On the one hand, professional self-management was replaced with general management, which meant a turn not only towards business-like principles and performance measurements, but also towards a more centralised, top-down management of the service. As Greener and Powell suggest, the governance reforms developed in this period meant the beginning of

"a move from local paternalism with national accountability to its opposite, national paternalism with local accountability" (Greener and Powell 2008: 617-8). On the other hand, an "internal market" was created in 1991 through which health authorities and general practitioners (GPs) became fundholders with a limited budget that purchased care from competing private, public and non-for-profit providers. At the same time, hospitals were transformed into self-governing NHS Trusts competing with each other and with the private sector to provide care. However, far from improving its performance and efficiency, these governance reforms added substantial costs to the service (Klein 2006). Thus, while according to NHS England (2018) the daily number of available beds fell from 299,364 in 1987/88 to 205,614 in 1996/97 – showing a decline of around 31% –, the number of official general and senior managers increased from 1,000 to 26,000 in the same period, which raised the costs of administration from about 5% of the total health service expenditure in 1980 to 12% in 1997 (Webster 2002: 203).

The New Labour government elected in 1997 opted for what has been defined as a policy of continuity rather than change in the governance of the NHS.[21] The internal market established by the previous Conservative government was modified according to the principles of 'partnership and performance' (Tailby 2012). New

[21] After the beginning of the devolution process in 1999 and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies, health and social care became devolved competences. Unless it is explicitly indicated, the account presented in this paper is limited to the NHS in England.

regulatory bodies and agencies were created in order to intensify centralised monitoring and performance management. Under the guise of patient choice and competition, Primary Care Groups – PCGs, later Primary Care Trusts – were introduced to replace the general practitioner fundholding scheme. These newly created bodies took over the purchasing capacity from Regional and Area Health Authorities and gained considerable control over the NHS budget, with which they could either directly provide primary and community care, or commission it to an increasing number of private providers. Regarding public healthcare expenditure, New Labour raised NHS funding by 6 per cent annually during the 2000-2010 decade, which meant an increase in healthcare public spending as a share of GDP from 5.8% to 8.2%, a level of spending similar to the EU-27 average by the time Labour left office. However, they also expanded the PFI programmes as a way of securing NHS capital investment (Greener and Powell 2008). This created not only an important debt burden for NHS Trusts, but also the potential for a 'two-tier' workforce in public services, in which NHS workers with fair working terms and conditions could work alongside new staff recruited by private and other non-state providers with no such protections.

Rescaling health policies during the financial crisis: privatisation through the back door?

In the wake of the 2007/8 global financial crisis, once again, many European countries have resorted to rescaling practices to intensify and accelerate pre-existing processes of privatisation and reduction

of welfare provisions. This was the case in Spain, where the economic crisis that unfolded after 2008 became a convenient excuse to further curtail socioeconomic rights and welfare provisions. In 2011, still under a Socialist government, an agreement between PSOE and PP led to the amendment of the Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution, by means of which the central state, the autonomous communities and local governments were forced to comply with the principle of budgetary stability and with the debt ceilings established by the European Union (Bruff and Wöhl 2016). Although the reformed constitutional article did not specify the debt caps for each institutional level, the *Organic Law 2/2012 on Budgetary Stability and Financial Sustainability* placed the overall maximum for the national debt at 60 per cent of GDP - giving a debt limit of 44 per cent of GDP for the central state, 13 per cent for autonomous communities, and 3 per cent for local entities.

In order to comply with these sets of fiscal discipline measures, the Organic Law also introduced a set of preventive, corrective and coercive mechanisms for the control and supervision of the autonomous communities and local governments. These included the monitoring and financial stewardship of sub-national government tiers by the State, the creation of a conditional loan system for public entities in need of financial assistance, and even the capacity to suspend regional taxation competences and to dissolve local government bodies responsible for persistent non-compliance with the objectives (Hernández de Cos and Pérez 2013;

Díez Sanchez 2017). The recentralising consequences of this devolution of budgeting authority to the central Government created important constraints on regional and local fiscal autonomy and self-government, which is particularly relevant considering that between 2012 and 2016, the autonomous communities accounted for 92% of total public health spending (Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality 2018).

Moreover, the Spanish government used the economic crisis and the deployment of the structural deficit caps from the 2012 European Fiscal Compact[22] to impose severe austerity measures, particularly after the PP gained an absolute parliamentary majority and formed a government in November of 2011. Between 2009 and 2013, the budget cuts implemented by the different institutions represented a reduction in public healthcare spending of 10,059.75 million Euros at current prices (15,280.49 million Euros in constant prices of 2010), which meant a decrease in spending as a share of GDP from 7.1% to 6.5% (the EU-27 average stayed constant at 8% throughout this period). Furthermore, the *Royal Decree-Law 16/2012*, of *Urgent Measures to Guarantee the Sustainability of the National*

[22] For more information on the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, also known as the Fiscal Stability Treaty or the European Fiscal Compact, signed in 2012, and other measures of national economic policy surveillance and control adopted by the EU, see Oberndorfer 2014. On the effects of the EU Fiscal Governance on healthcare, see Greer *et al* 2016.

Health System and Improve the Quality and Security of its Benefits, introduced co-payments for certain healthcare services and pharmaceutical products,[23] and replaced access to healthcare conditional upon residency and social security contributions, thus moving away from the notion of free universal healthcare. As a consequence, at least 873,000 people were excluded from access to healthcare (Ministry of Labour, Migrations and Social Security 2013). Those excluded comprised: 'undocumented' migrants, long-term unemployed, those working in informal employment, pensioners and young people over twenty-one years of age who had never paid social security contributions. The approval of this legislation by royal decree removed any possibility of parliamentary deliberation on one of the major reforms in the Spanish national health system since its establishment in the late 1980s.

Similarly to the Spanish case, the financial crisis has served as an excuse to deliver a large-scale top-down reorganisation of the NHS in England. The election to office of the Coalition Government formed by the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats in 2010 marked the beginning of a period of heightened austerity and comprehensive welfare reform. Using a narrative representing public debt as excessive and attributing it to over-spending by the

[23] According to a recent survey conducted in 2016 by the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (2016, 21), 4.4% of Spanish population (which represents around 2 million people) could not afford to take the medication prescribed by their consultants.

Labour government, the Coalition Government proclaimed the need for fiscal orthodoxy to restore international investor confidence and stimulate the UK's competitiveness in the global market (Tailby 2012). Although the UK refused to sign the European Fiscal Compact in 2012, its finances were limited by the ceilings of 3 per cent of GDP for budget deficit and 60 per cent of GDP for public debt established in the Stability and Growth Pact (Greer *et al* 2016). The commitment of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government to austerity prompted a major reduction in public spending and a variety of welfare reforms, including cuts in social security benefits and a rise in the qualifying age for a state pension after retirement. It also implemented new workfare schemes through which access to unemployment benefits were made conditional upon active job searches and employment requirements, while for-profit private providers and third sector organisations became progressively more involved in the delivery of employment services.

In the NHS, the approval of the new *Health and Social Care Act* in 2012 with the opposition of all healthcare trade unions and most of the Medical Royal Colleges brought substantial changes to the service. A new nationwide executive non-departmental public body, the NHS Commissioning Board (later renamed NHS England) was established to supervise the budget, planning and commissioning of health care services in England. This new institution took over important operational powers and duties previously owned by the Secretary of State for Health, thus weakening the responsibility of the Department of Health and Health and Social Care for providing

a comprehensive health service (Pollock and Price 2011). At the local level, the Primary Care Trusts created under the previous government were abolished, and replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). With a budget assigned by NHS England and unclear public accountability, their main responsibility was to open up the provision of health services to 'any qualified provider', opening up the NHS even further to private for-profit and non-for-profit providers. At the same time, hospitals were entitled to become NHS Foundation Trusts (FTs), which meant that they could earn up to 49 percent of their income from private patients and were obliged to be financially viable or face closure. In terms of funding, although the Coalition Government agreed on regular year-on-year increases of 0.8 per cent during their period in office (Baggott 2016), the level of spending as a share of GDP decreased from 8.7% in 2011 to 8.4% in 2014 (still above the 8% EU average). The need to meet rising PFI obligations, on the other hand, increased the level of financial pressure on the NHS and threatened and continues to threaten the continuity of Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments, hospitals and other health centres (Pollock and Price 2011).[24]

[24] As shown in a recent study carried out by the House of Commons' Committee of Public Accounts, given the current level of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) debt – including 716 ongoing contracts that have been used to finance public projects, mainly schools, hospitals and roads – public bodies will have to pay £199 billion to private companies between 2017 and 2040s, in addition to the already paid £110 billion. Only in the period 2016-17, public bodies paid £10.3 billion under this type of contracts (Committee of Public Accounts 2018). This

In parallel, the Coalition government developed an emphatic discourse on 'localism' and decentralisation that was essential to build support for a deregulatory anti-statist agenda (Featherstone *et al* 2012). This narrative, however, contrasts with the severe cuts to local government budgets implemented by the central government. Between 2010 and 2017, local councils and authorities in England saw an overall real-terms loss of 27 per cent of their spending power. This led to a real-terms average reduction of 3 per cent in local authority spending on social care services, and around 33 per cent in non-social care services, which placed even more acute financial stress on social care services and on the NHS (National Audit Office 2018). In order to deal with this dramatic spending curtailment, local councils are developing a stronger dependency on the private and the voluntary sectors for the delivery of services, thus redefining the local level as a "crucial site for the promotion of market-based initiatives" (Featherstone *et al* 2012: 178). Nevertheless, in its last year in office, the Coalition government agreed on the devolution of health and social care to Greater Manchester (a process also known as 'Devo Manc'). The project has been presented as a decentralisation or transfer of powers from the central government to the regional authorities in Greater

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includes not only PFI schemes, but also PF2, a new type of PPP contract introduced by the Coalition Government in 2011 to reform PFIs. The major part of PFI and PF2 liabilities are kept off the public sector balance sheet in the National Accounts, and therefore they do not count in the national debt figures.

Manchester, as well as an opportunity for the region to take full control for the £6 billion combined budget for health and social care. The final responsibility for this budget and for the strategic development of the devolution scheme, however, rely upon the new Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSC), which is formed by local authorities, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), and NHS foundation trusts working in partnership with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector and the pharmaceutical industry, among others. This top-down healthcare devolution in Greater Manchester is part of a larger plan aiming to progressively transfer £22 billion of public funding to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in order to commission transport, strategic planning, housing and other services. Devo Manc is designed as the initial trial of a broader UK government devolution agenda that will potentially be extended to other English regions, including London, Liverpool, Cornwall and the North East Region.

4.5 Scales of resistance: *Marea Blanca* and Keep Our NHS Public

The reforms carried out in Spain and the UK in order to further privatise their public healthcare systems and to take them away from universalism have been obstructed and contested by multiple forms of disruptive agencies that have emerged in different European countries. Mass protests and anti-austerity social movements have struggled to oppose the implementation of welfare

retrenchment measures, challenging – with varying degrees of support and success – the authority of the state in different scales and contesting the shifts in its spatial organisation. The cases of *Marea Blanca* (White Tide) in Madrid and Keep Our NHS Public in Greater Manchester, exemplify this grassroots resistance opposing the privatisation of hospitals and health centres, and protesting against the government cuts in public spending.

Marea Blanca, a movement inspired by the 15-M cycle of struggle, embodies the widespread dissatisfaction that emerged after the PP government of the Community of Madrid made public a plan to radically privatise the health care sector in the region. After this announcement, the workforce of the six affected hospitals occupied their workplaces to make visible their opposition to the project. The campaign soon extended to hospitals and health centres in other autonomous communities, creating a myriad of local nodes coordinated in regional platforms for the defence of a universal and free public healthcare system (Sánchez 2013). As in the case of other 15-M inspired struggles, the protesters organised open, horizontal assemblies in which not only the vast majority of hospital workers participated, but also concerned neighbours and public healthcare users, thus going beyond traditional frames of public sector workers' struggles (Köhler y Calleja 2013; Luque Balbona and González Begega 2016). The use of prefigurative assemblies to organise the broad public support and the campaign's success in framing healthcare as a public good worth preserving, alongside a court verdict in 2013 ruling on precautionary measures due to

irregularities in the process, led to the abandonment of the privatisation plan.

Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) is a non-party-political campaign organisation created in 2005 as an initiative of the NHS Consultants' Association, the NHS Support Federation, and the pressure group Health Emergency to defend NHS England and its associate services from the ongoing processes of marketisation and privatisation (Cassidy 2011). Keep Our NHS Public Greater Manchester (KONP Greater Manchester) is one of the multiple local and regional groups that emerged across England in the following years, and particularly after 2011, when the plans for the new Health and Social Care Bill were announced by the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government. KONP Greater Manchester is organised as a network of the multiple support groups that exist in every NHS hospital in the area, and created alliances with health trade unions and other community struggles. In the last few years, one of the main focuses of the campaign has been to publicise the potentially harmful effects of the devolution in Greater Manchester on the functioning and budget of the region's health and social care system.

Building on the local, empowering the community: Health social movements scaling downwards

One of the key spatial strategies of these social movements was the downscaling of their practices and actions in order to ground them

to multiple local contexts. This not only allowed them to bring their campaigns closer to the concrete material needs and cultural dynamics of particular local communities, but also to reinforce localised social relations and articulate mutual solidarities and alliances across old and new local initiatives.

Marea Blanca and KONP are two instances of struggles organised through multiple regional, local and sub-local campaign groups set up across Spain and England. For example, KONP Greater Manchester was formed by the regional campaign, its local groups – including Bolton, Bury, Manchester Central, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan – and a variety of organisations struggling against the process of privatisation of the English National Health Service. This is the case, among others, of Save Our NHS, a campaign created by medical and non-medical students from the University of Manchester to fight for free-at-the-point-of-use universal healthcare. Through the combination of a myriad of fragmented groups, these movements were able to **embed their campaigns in the local communities**, establishing a nexus between the needs of the local residents and the movements' demands. As one of the organisers of KONP Greater Manchester and participant in the Trafford local group set out:

> "So here what we've got is Greater Manchester KONP. We have supporters in Bolton, Wigan, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford... So we are active in each area and we try to maintain community campaigns. In Stockport they've got a lively campaign with consultants of the NHS. Tameside, where the hospital is facing

> closure, has got a very active group around that. Bolton has had its own campaign about their mental health services … So we formed Keep Our NHS Public to go against the cuts that were coming and because of all the dangers of the privatisation that we knew was coming under the Health and Social Care Act … But we have decided that in the present situation we will support the local struggles, we will support the Junior Doctors and we will also explain the implications of Devo Manc for the NHS to other activists, workers and people in the community." (Interview with a social worker and founding member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016)

As living conditions deteriorated and austerity programmes threatened the social reproduction of important sections of these countries' populations, particularly for those social groups with higher levels of everyday life vulnerability and precariousness, these downscaling and localisation practices were essential for the emergence of a '**politics of encounter**' (Arampatzi 2017). This was clear in the case of *Marea Blanca*, which used the *encierros* or occupations of public hospitals and health centres in Madrid to protest against the regional government's plan to privatise the healthcare sector in the city. These *encierros* provided a space of physical interaction for all of those who would be affected by the plan – that is, health sector workers, users, neighbourhood residents and activists – thus overcoming internal divisions and fragmentation that prevented cooperation in the past. The organisation of regular open assemblies and the visibilisation of common claims expressed in these shared spaces united them in defence of healthcare, which

they framed as a public good that needed to be protected (Ribera-Almandoz *et al* forthcoming). As one of the participants put it,

> "We are not only medical and non-medical workers, but also groups of users, activists in defence of free, public healthcare, members of different the 15M assemblies... We joined together inside these buildings, which are public and therefore ours, and there we made our assemblies and we made our proposals. Everything was open, everything was done in the assemblies. We were aware that we needed strength. And the more people we were, and the more united we were, the stronger." (Interview with a nurse and participant in *Marea Blanca*, May 2016, author's translation)

Indeed, occupations of both private and public spaces became a key strategy of disruption for many anti-austerity movements that emerged around 2011 (Street 2015). In the cases analysed here, the spatial appropriation of public hospitals was not only an opportunity to gain public attention, but also an act of defiance against regional and national authorities and a **vindication of the power of the local communities**. The processes of localisation and downscaling through the creation of spaces where social relations could take place made it possible to generate community relations and solidarity networks based on everyday experiences of activism. These spaces acted as a breeding ground for experimenting with forms of prefigurative action - collective self-organisation, deliberation and horizontal decision making. Both *Marea Blanca* and KONP Greater Manchester thus organised through working groups and open assemblies or meetings, and coordinated with other community initiatives to organise open debates and round tables

and the distribution of informative leaflets and local actions such as demonstrations and traffic blocks. As an activist describes,

> "We set out a constitution about how we were going to run ourselves, and a lot of it was about making our organisation a good one, so one that was fundamentally democratic, that was open, where at meetings we'd rotate who the chair was so that we wouldn't have anyone really in charge ... So part of the movement was about the idea that you can organise in a different way." (Interview to a medical student and member of Save Our NHS Manchester, April 2016)

The non-hierarchical and decentralised organisational forms based on networks of grassroots' platforms and self-organised assemblies managed to break, in a traditionally conservative and corporatist sector, the internal divisions between different health care workers – doctors, nurses, social workers, administrative staff and others– and between them and the population, uniting all of them in a common struggle against the privatisation of the health care system (Ruiz-Gimenez 2014). This unity strengthened the movements, helped mobilise wider sectors of the population in their support, and guaranteed their independence from trade unions' authorities, because it challenged their capacity to reach any agreement with a particular healthcare sector, local group or medical organisation.

Bridging space, scaling upwards: Forging anti-austerity networks of struggles

In parallel with the grounding and localising practices, these grassroots mobilisations have adopted a series of strategies to organise in higher scales, as well as to connect with other movements and build trans-local struggles. This way, what started as relatively spontaneous and isolated protests against the privatisation and closure of different hospitals and health centres was increasingly coordinated in broader movements aiming to challenge the neoliberal restructuring of health and social care.

As we have seen above, both *Marea Blanca* and KONP are multi-scalar movements that organise in trans-local networks of struggle, thus mobilising in the local, regional and national levels and joining similar campaigns in multiple places. In the case of *Marea Blanca*, this was translated in the creation of regional networks, such as the Platform in Defence of Public Healthcare – *Marea Blanca* in the Community of Madrid [*Mesa en Defensa de la Sanidad Pública – Marea Blanca*, MEDSAP], as well as the State-wide Coordinator of *Mareas Blancas* [*Coordinadora Estatal de Mareas Blancas*]. Additionally, *Marea Blanca* is part of a group self-organised initiatives that emerged during the 15-M cycle of struggle and organised around particular areas of social interest, including education (*Marea Verde* or Green Tide) and social services (*Marea Naranja* or Orange Tide) and feminism (*Marea Violeta* or Violet Tide), among many others. Together, they formed a **large anti-**

austerity network of struggle that combined a plurality of protesters and developed coordinated political actions aiming to challenge current models of welfare state dismantling and austerity imposition. Interesting examples of these actions were the Marches for Dignity (*Marchas de la Dignidad*), joint mobilisations organised since 2014 in Madrid and other cities that combined labour, social and political claims under transversal mottos such as "No to debt payment. No to Troika Governments. No more cuts. Bread, Work and Shelter for all". The integration in these higher levels of organisation was fundamental for the development of coordinated demands and mobilisations, and it allowed for activists in the movement to preserve their leading role in collective action despite several attempts by established trade unions to control industrial action and monopolise the negotiations with public authorities (Ruiz-Giménez 2014).

Similarly, Keep Our NHS Public launched the initiative Health Campaigns Together (HCT), an alliance of nearly 110 local campaign groups, grassroots organisations, trade union branches and political parties opposed to NHS privatisations, budget cuts and closure of health care facilities. The main purpose behind the creation of this initiative was to establish mutual solidarities and spread awareness about the general deterioration of health and social care services due to the growing underfunding and privatisation processes involving the NHS, as well as to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and to share the experiences and lessons acquired through their respective struggles. For that purpose, the

platform issues the free online newspaper *Health Campaigns Together*, organises public meetings and conferences and coordinates marches across England. In February 2018, HCT called for a "national day of action", a nationwide coordinated protest that combined a demonstration in London with over 50 other local and regional events. Using common slogans such as "Saving lives costs money, saving money costs lives" and "More staff, more beds, more funds", the protestors rallied simultaneously in multiple English cities in a successful example of **coordinated multi-scalar mobilisation**.

The adoption of these up-scaling practices allowed for other types of coordinated action. One of the most successful ones was the use of the justice system as part of their repertoire of action. In this sense, social movements and campaigns have responded to the growing process of "judicialisation of politics"[25] with a strategic use of courts *from below* in order to challenge the legality of certain public authority decisions, to struggle against the unlawful use of powers by public bodies and to protect social and political rights in what we could call an operation towards a '**judicialisation of resistance**'. In Spain, the Platform in Defence of Public Healthcare – *Marea Blanca*, working with medical associations, trade unions and, later on, the Socialist Party of Madrid, launched a lawsuit

[25] As coined by R. Hirschl, the concept of *judicialisation of politics* describes "the reliance on courts and judicial means for addressing core moral predicaments, public policy questions, and political controversies" (Hirschl 2011: 253).

against the tendering procedure that awarded the management of six public hospital centres to private companies. In the face of some irregularities in the process, the High Court of Justice of Madrid and a Contentious Administrative Court decided to precautionary suspend the privatisation, partially motivated by the lack of evidence regarding the improved efficiency and increased savings of outsourced health care services. The combination of the judicial strategy and a sustained high degree of mobilisation in the streets successfully put an end to the regional government's privatisation plans and even forced the resignation of *Madrid's Regional Minister* of *Health*, the PP member Javier Fernández Lasquetty.

The justice system was also used in England during the Justice for Health dispute, a campaign organised by junior doctors with the support of KONP. The dispute started after the then Secretary of State for Health (SSH), the Conservative Jeremy Hunt, decided to impose a new junior doctor's contract reclassifying evenings and weekends as core hours, and consequently reducing the hourly pay rates for staff working those hours. Through an incredibly successful fundraising campaign, Justice for Health managed to raise more than £300,000 in order to challenge the legality of the new contract arguing that the SSH had exceeded his powers. This time, the unprecedented strike action and the legal battle could not challenge the introduction of the new type of contract and ruled that the SSH had acted within the scope of his lawful powers. However, Mr. Hunt was forced to clarify his position and to publicly admit that he had no legal power to impose – rather than recommend – the

disputed contract, and therefore that employers and junior doctors were free to negotiate the terms and conditions of their contracts. In both instances, therefore, the judicialisation of resistance proved to be an effective strategy for the creation of a climate of legal uncertainty that could, at last, slow down or reduce the scope of certain political processes.

The legal actions undertaken in both countries, as well as the coordinated multi-scalar mobilisations, strikes and *encierros*, had widespread impact in the media and were reported by the local and national press.[26] At the same time, the capacity to act demonstrated by these social movements and campaigns, together with the collective solidarities built in the localised interactions, contributed not only to their popularity and visibility, but also to the **generation of new collective narratives** that soon gained important public support. In this sense, the representation of the material impacts of spending cuts and privatisations on both patients and workers was an important step towards the mobilisation of wider sectors of the population. However, it was by no means an easy task. As one of the activists explains,

[26] See, for example, the vast media coverage of the march organised by Health Campaigns Together (of which KONP is a founding member) and the People's Alliance on the 4th March 2017 in London: https://keepournhspublic.com/news/4-march-nhs-demo-and-rally-london-press-coverage/.

> "To give you an example, in the UK –and across the world- there's a hospital admission avoidance policy. Politicians and big sharks are saying that the majority of people that has got any acute or chronic illness should be treated at their own home. Hospitals are expensive, inefficient… […]And why is it too expensive to have people in hospitals? Because they have cut the capacity of beds by 30 or 40% in the last 30 years, because of bad planning, because of the amount of money that's being spent in marketisation and the PFIs. And this has cost lives of people of all ages. From babies to youngsters to old ages, they could have been saved if they'd been admitted, diagnosed and treated for their acute state. […] Now, those cases get reported in the press, but most people don't make the connection." (Interview with a retired orthopaedic consultant and member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016)

Nevertheless, both *Marea Blanca* and KONP employed significant efforts to contribute to a more informed and politically conscious population, and to increasingly represent health and social care as problems of social justice that needed to be addressed collectively (Sánchez 2013; Ribera-Almandoz *et al* forthcoming). Through the construction of spaces for open discussions, the organisation of round-tables and the distribution of self-produced documents – reports, media footage and leaflets – containing a mix of technical knowledge and personal experiences from patients and professionals, they defied the official discourse depicting the corporatisation and privatisation of public healthcare, as well as the retrenchment of the welfare state, as necessary money-saving and efficiency-enhancing measures, and offered an alternative narrative

portraying public healthcare as a common good worth protecting.[27] As one of the interviewees pointed out, "we were not particularly concerned about our jobs – the majority of us would keep them – it was important to show that the real problem was the introduction of speculation in public healthcare" (interview with an anaesthesiologist and activist in *Marea Blanca*, March 2018, author's translation).

The broad public support that these campaigns were capable of building also had an important impact on left-wing parties and trade unions. In Spain, the strong mobilisation against the RDL 16/2012, the budget cuts and the privatisations implemented by PP led the PSOE, Podemos, Basque and Catalan nationalist parties, and 70 civil society organisations – including medical associations and trade unions – to sign a "Social and political pact for a public and universal NHS" in 2017, where they committed to guarantee the universality of healthcare coverage, and the public nature and financial sustainability of the service. In the same year in the UK,

[27] A survey conducted in England by the independent charity The King's Fund in 2017 shows that almost 90% of the respondents support the founding principles of the NHS, that is, agree that it should be free at the point of delivery, it should provide a comprehensive and universally available service, and it should be primarily funded through taxation (Evans and Wellings 2017). Similarly, data from the Spanish Ministry of Heath suggests that almost 80% of the population consider that public administrations are better than private companies at managing public healthcare (Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (2016, 2).

several campaigns including KONP and Health Campaigns Together sponsored the initiative *We Own It*, demanding to fully recover the public ownership of the NHS. The pledge was signed by 67 (out of 258) Labour Party members of the House of Commons (MPs), as well as the MPs of the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party.

Scaling beyond: Resisting and prefiguring state spatiality

The multi-scalar resistance practices developed by these health social movements are not just a process of adaptation to the scalar organisation of statehood. In addition to the processes of scaling up and down described above, they have also used scalar practices to contest and even disrupt the state's political space. On the one hand, through their everyday organisational and strategic practices – including the use of self-organised assemblies, and the occupation and creative use of public spaces – these struggles have **opened up new spaces** where alternative social relations could take place. In this sense, the turn towards prefigurative values and self-governance practices undergone by these movements has broadened the ways in which space could be understood and experienced. On the other hand, they have purposefully contributed to the development of – or the resistance against – particular state scalar configurations, thus enacting a "politics of scale from below" (Escobar 2008, 32). This way, they have advanced towards the construction of alternative forms of scalar configurations not

mediated by state authorities, through what we could call a prefigurative use of scale.

A key example of these developments can be found in Spain in the grassroots struggles against the Royal-Decree Law 16/2012 introduced by the Spanish government as part of its austerity programmes. As shown in previous sections, the new legislation made access to healthcare conditional upon social security contributions, which in practice contributed to the exclusion of the already precarious and insecure 'undocumented' migrants from the Spanish National Health System. The new legislation triggered a wave of protests that connected migrants in irregular situations, health care sector staff, activists and advocacy groups, migrant support groups and radical left organisations in a struggle for maintaining the universal right to free public healthcare. With the support of the semFYC association (*Sociedad Española de Medicina de Familia y Comunitaria*, in English, Spanish Society of General Practitioners and Community Medicine), more than 2000 doctors, together with social workers, nurses and administrative staff initiated a civil disobedience campaign against this loss of access to healthcare. The call for disobedience was taken up by *Yo Sí Sanidad Universal* (YOSI), a specific campaign with strong connections with *Marea Blanca*. This grassroots initiative included more than 20 support groups in Madrid that treated migrants in spite of the royal decree, thus ignoring and questioning the state authority and opening their own spaces of struggle, thus transforming

hospitals and other healthcare facilities into **centres of resistance**. As one of the doctors involved in the struggles explains:

> "Health care is a universal right. We took an oath that said we'd take care of everyone, without exception. And we decided to keep doing it; we were not going to leave unattended those most in need. Because this isn't austerity, it's xenophobia". (Interview with a doctor, activist in *Marea Blanca*, November 2017, author's translation)

As in the case of *Marea Blanca,* YOSI organised through open decision-making assemblies and what they called "disobedience working groups" that were in charge of registering cases of healthcare exclusion, informing affected people of their medical rights and accompanying migrants to medical appointments that bypassed the exclusionary measures established in the Royal-Decree Law (Ruiz-Giménez 2014: 35). YOSI soon spread to other Spanish regions, forming a network of struggle that in many cases overlapped with the one created by the already existing *Marea Blanca*. The importance of YOSI relies on a conceptualisation of civil disobedience and self-enforcement of social rights not based on the creation of alternative, parallel healthcare services for 'undocumented' migrants, but on the reaffirmation of the principles of equality of access and universality of public health services that had historically defined Spain's welfare state (Sánchez 2013). As a member of *Marea Blanca* and YOSI describes, "we disobey lawmakers who have evidently lost their legitimacy, and can only proceed through imposition. We disobey in order to maintain a system that guaranteed health care to everyone, and in doing so, we

make their crime evident and we shame them for their violence" (Ruiz Gimenez 2014: 35; author's translation). By ignoring the new legislation, nurses, practitioners, administrative staff and users made the Royal-Decree Law in practice null and void, in a clear example of prefiguration of state scalar organisation *by action*.

As a result of these pressures *from below*, in 2015, the PP Government issued a statement readmitting 'undocumented' migrants to primary healthcare, although refusing to issue them new health insurance cards. Furthermore, multiple regional governments –namely, Navarra, the Basque Country, Extremadura, the Valencian Community, Cantabria, Aragon, The Balearic Islands and Catalonia – declared their opposition to the central government's legislation, and passed alternative legal measures that reinstated the universal access to health care in their own communities. These measures were declared invalid by the Constitutional Court, who considered the central government as the only institution responsible for the general coordination of health care. However, the formation of a Socialist government in June 2018 with the support of the left-wing Podemos as well as Basque and Catalan nationalist parties marked a turn of events as a new Royal Decree-Law for the Universal Access to the National Health Service was announced to replace the Royal Decree-Law 16/2012.

A very different example of a politics of scale from below can be found in England, where the announcement of the 'Devo Manc' plan faced strong opposition from medical associations, trade

unions and campaign organisations in the region, and particularly from KONP Greater Manchester. In this case, the struggle focussed on **resisting a particular process of scalar re-configuration** that was perceived as a democratic regression and a new threat against the public ownership of the service. Thus, on the one hand, not only was this top-down reorganisation of the NHS done in complete secrecy and without public consultation, but the resulting organising body – the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSC) – with little presence of elected representatives, was considered as unaccountable, technocratic and inaccessible to local residents and patients. As one of the participants in KONP Greater Manchester put it, "that's what devolution is to them, a local bureaucracy deprived of people's votes" (interview with a social worker and founding member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016).

On the other hand, the transfer of £6 billion to local authorities was considered insufficient for the provision of integrated health and social care in Greater Manchester, particularly because it was announced at a moment when they were struggling to balance their centrally reduced social care budgets. Consequently, it could boost a new wave of reductions in hospital beds and staff, and further open the NHS market to private sector providers. Moreover, as the charity The King's Fund, KONP Greater Manchester and other campaign organisations have warned, 'Devo Manc' should be considered a 'delegation' of functions and a 'transfer' of funding to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), rather than a

real ‘devolution’ of powers and resource, as the nation-wide NHS England (formerly NHS Commissioning Board) retained significant planning and supervisory powers, and no tax-raising powers were given to local authorities. As expressed by one of the interviewed activists:

> “The agreements that they [the local authorities] have signed commit them to all the same policies as the national government. The national government still sets the budget, has to approve any changes to your facilities or your hospitals, imposes privatisation and the internal market, and you can’t do anything about PFIs, you can’t do anything about contracts... It’s really... Basically, it’s all of the responsibility and none of the power.” (Interview to a medical student and member of Save Our NHS Manchester, April 2016)

The struggle of KONP Greater Manchester focused not only on the rejection of ‘Devo Manc’ as planned in the ‘Greater Manchester Agreement’, but also on demanding an alternative devolution project developed with public involvement and scrutiny. For this purpose, they produced a briefing explaining the potential consequences of the plan for patients, NHS staff, medical students and citizens (in terms of accountability and the public ownership of the service). In the words of one of the activists, “our major function is to explain the implication of ‘Devo Manc’ of the NHS to other activists, to patients, to people who want to support the NHS and don’t know what ‘Devo Manc’ will bring with it” (interview with a social worker and founding member of KONP Greater Manchester, April 2016). In 2015 they collaborated with the Manchester People’s Assembly and the Greater Manchester

Association of Trades Union Councils (GMATUC) to launch a grassroots petition for a referendum on the topic. The call was later transformed into a united Greater Manchester Referendum Campaign for Democratic Devolution, which requested the opening of a period of public debate and the formulation of a new devolution proposal, which should be later put to a vote. However, the referendum proposal was soon dismissed both by the central government and local authorities, possibly aiming to prevent a situation similar to that which occurred in 2014, with the central government imposition of a directly elected mayor for the Greater Manchester region.[28]

4.6 Conclusion

In line with previous theories on the social construction of scale, the paper began by arguing that scalar configurations are built upon the permanent interaction between inherited scalar structures and manifold social, economic, political, and cultural projects and

[28] In 2012, a series of referendums for the introduction of directly elected city mayors were held in the English cities of Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Doncaster, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Sheffield and Wakefield. Only Bristol and Doncaster –which already had a directly elected mayor – voted in favour of the proposal. With the opposition of the local authorities, Manchester residents rejected the introduction of a directly-elected city mayor by 53.2% of votes and a turnout of only 25 per cent. In spite of these results, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, announced in 2014 an agreement with the local authorities to introduce an elected mayor for the Greater Manchester region.

struggles constantly unfolding in – and transforming – these pre-existing structures (Brenner 2004; MacKinnon 2010). Thus, scalar configurations are provisional materialisations of broader social processes and power relations in constant reconfiguration and contestation.

The cases of Spain and the UK have been used to exemplify how different forms of functional rescaling of health care policies have been used as proactive spatial strategies in order to rearticulate political economies in the context of the global financial crisis that started in 2007/8. In England, the discursive moves towards localism and decentralisation have allowed for a large-scale top-down reorganisation of the NHS in recent years. The illusion of a transfer of resources and functions to the regional and local levels has responded to deliberate attempts to denationalise health and social care in the country and to undermine the institutional power of the NHS, with its outstanding popular support across the country. Following seemingly the opposite direction in Spain, the central government imposition of severe fiscal discipline measures in compliance with the 2012 European Fiscal Compact has not only created important constraints to local and regional self-government, but also represented an important reduction in public health care spending and a new push towards the privatisation of public health services. In both countries, processes of policy and institutional rescaling –either through re- or de-centralisation – have generated significant dysfunctional outcomes and challenges to democratic accountability, public scrutiny and legitimacy, including the

creation or reinforcement of non-elected organising bodies and the enactment of legislation without parliamentary deliberation.

Furthermore, as demonstrated through the comparative study of social movements resisting the privatisation of health care in Spain and the UK, processes of rescaling generate new strategic fields for resistance and contestation. *Marea Blanca* and Keep Our NHS Public are instances of multi-scalar forms of struggle that made important efforts to bridge the inter-scalar gap between local, everyday life spaces and broader political, socioeconomic and cultural processes. On the one hand, they developed localised, territorially rooted forms of mobilisation, which have been useful means for the construction and strengthening of community relations connecting workers, activists and neighbours through their everyday needs and demands, and have allowed for the experimentation with forms of grassroots organisation, collective deliberation, and horizontal decision making. On the other hand, the progressive formation of trans-local networks of struggle contributed to the development of coordinated political actions, and of alternative collective narratives that effectively defied widespread official discourses. Even more interesting is how the empowering direct action carried out by these instances of social movements was channelled towards challenging and transcending processes of scalar re-configuration of state-based politics, and prefiguring new forms of state spatiality from below.

While the empirical evidence presented in this paper has shown new opportunities and strategic avenues for resistance and disruption, the re-scaling practices can also contain potential threats and limits to social movement mobilisation (for a good analysis of the opportunities and problems of multi-scalar urban movements, see e.g. Mayer 2013). Although an in-depth analysis of these limitations was not the primary purpose of this paper, two fundamental ones deserve mentioning as they would be worthwhile to explore in future research. First, even though the movements' rootedness in everyday problems contributed to the generation of processes of neighbourhood and community empowerment, it also accounted for the emergence of new types of internal fragmentation as a diversity of goals and organisation methods started appearing in different places. As some local groups opted for having closer connections with trade unions and organisations whereas others adopted particularly disruptive tactics, the tensions and contradictions between different sectors of these movements materialised and threatened their unity of action. Second, the attempts to mobilise at higher transnational scales and articulate struggles at the European or global levels have proven to be arduous and rather ineffective so far. The formation in 2014 of a 'European Network against the Privatization and Commercialization of Health and Social Protection', of which both Keep our NHS Public and the Platform in Defence of Public Healthcare – *Marea Blanca* are members, has been an important step in that direction, but its activity has been discontinuous and it has received little media coverage. Notwithstanding these and other potential limitations, the analysis

presented in this paper has proven that scale configurations always remain contested and transformed by struggle, and that the adoption of complex scaling practices can become a fundamental strategic opportunity for challenging and transforming social relations.

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5. CONCLUSION

This doctoral thesis has sought to understand the ways in which disruption and resistance can emerge in the sphere of social reproduction in the post-2008 global financial crisis context, as well as to explore the different means by which grassroots struggles over social reproduction try to reshape social relations and materially reorganise them beyond the state and the market. It started by asking two related research questions: **How can the sphere of social reproduction offer new opportunities for autonomy and social struggle? And how do these struggles for social reproduction connect with state rescaling processes?** Through the development of two parallel comparisons of instances struggles over housing and health care in Spain and the UK, this thesis considers social reproduction in connection to the avenues in offers for autonomy and prefigurative action, thus connecting with a growing scholarly literature on social reproduction, social movements and resistance.

Following an abductive research design, the thesis initially identified a number of connected analytical categories that guided the development of the investigation. This preliminary outline has been revised and completed throughout the process of analysis of empirical evidence. The final four analytical factors that have provided a framework for exploring the particular cases are:

1. the defence of the social commons, that is, the collective reorganisation of the material conditions of life;
2. the material basis for solidarity;
3. the role of shared experiences of activism and the connection to the everyday;
4. the state rescaling processes as new strategic fields for struggle.

Although giving them different emphasis, these four dimensions have guided the development of Chapters 2 to 4 of the thesis. Chapter 2 has developed in more depth the theoretical and analytical framework from which the subsequent empirical chapters have departed. Drawing upon both social reproduction theories (Katz 2001; Federici 2014; 2018; Fraser 2018; Bhattacharya 2018) and disruption-oriented approaches (Huke *et al* 2015; Bailey *et al* 2018a; 2018b), it has endeavoured to show how the processes, activities and spaces of social reproduction constitute an arena for social conflict and contestation. Thus, in spite of capital's efforts to intensify and secure domination by means of increasingly privatise, commodify and financialise the sphere of social reproduction, it has been suggested that the latter offers new opportunities in which space for autonomous self-activity and for the reorganisation of common life can be opened up.

Specifically, the second chapter has focused on understanding how the three first analytical categories interact in the articulation of prefigurative radical forms of disruption. By succinctly presenting

the examples of current social movements that have been further analysed in the following chapters, it has argued that struggles over social reproduction provide new platforms for prefiguring more egalitarian, solidaristic and community-centred social relations through three main processes. First, struggles do this through the collective production of bottom-up, autonomous infrastructures and spaces of social reproduction that secure the direct access to social rights and basic means of existence. Second, and linked to the previous point, these struggles have shown a strong sense of pragmatism and a rootedness in the everyday by placing concrete material hardships and aspirations as the basis from which to build communal practices and relations of solidarity. Third, these struggles have used these communal practices and continued creative encounters to integrate the spaces and times of social reproduction with those of political action. Hence, the social relations generated through day-to-day practices and shared experiences of activism have contributed to a progressive empowerment of their participants, and to the emergence of new collective political subjectivities.

The development of prefigurative politics and forms of organising has been, therefore, central in contemporary struggles over the ongoing degradation of the conditions of existence and reproduction in contexts of austerity. Being prior to this mostly associated with the strategic practices adopted environmental and alter-globalisation movements (Yates 2015), prefiguration has become an essential component in protesting and creating autonomous political

alternatives in current times. This has been the case for the anti-austerity struggles in defence of the right to adequate and affordable housing and the universal access to free at-the-point-of-use healthcare analysed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3 has provided a comparative empirical analysis of housing struggles in Spain and the UK. The cases of the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages and the Focus E15 Campaign have been used to develop and illustrate the renewed approach to prefigurative politics and principles. These movements have adopted a combination of direct acts of civil disobedience, collective learning and counselling processes, and horizontal and consensus-seeking internal dynamics in a collective venture to self-protect and self-enforce social rights. For instance, the disruptive actions to stop evictions and the occupations of unused housing stock to open alternative spaces of social reproduction and political activity can be conceived as examples of contemporary social movements *prefiguring autonomy*.

On the other hand, these struggles also developed sophisticated multi-scalar strategies to diversify their targets and terrains of action, and adopted several methods of dis- and re-engagement with conventional political institutions. It is this latter point that constituted the major difference between the PAH and Focus E15. Although it could seem contradictory with the prefigurative values expressed by these movements, the occasional turn towards conventional politics shown by the PAH – which contrasts with the

militant opposition deployed by Focus E15 – responds to a similar *pragmatic* understanding of social struggle. Thus, in their pragmatic quest for political impact, institutional forms (dis-)engagement are in fact attempts to search for, and contribute to the creation of, new opportunities for political mobilisation in rather different institutional contexts.

Lastly, Chapter 4 has mainly considered the fourth analytical category proposed in the introduction of this thesis, that is, the strategic fields that emerge from state rescaling processes, as well as how it connects to the other dimensions. Building on Brenner (2004), I have argued that different forms of state rescaling have been used in the post-2008 context as part of the neoliberal project to rearticulate political economies. The example of health care has shown how, either through a discursive move towards regional devolution and localism, as has been the case in England, or through a fiscal and policy recentralisation, as has been witnessed in Spain, rescaling dynamics have become a tool in the hands of central governments to promote the privatisation of public services and the reduction of welfare provisions.

However, as these state rescaling processes reflect provisional balances of conflictual power relations, the resulting scalar configurations have to be interpreted as unstable and incomplete attempts at securing domination that remain in constant (re-) configuration and contestation. It is in this sense that I have suggested that the production and transformation of scalar structures

generate new strategic fields in which social struggles unfold. In order to explore these novel opportunities, the chapter develops its particular framework of analysis, which can be summarised as follows:

Table 5.1: Summary of the main opportunities and risks of social struggles' rescaling practices

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Social struggles scaling upwards</th><th>Social struggles scaling downwards</th></tr>
<tr><td>Strengths and opportunities</td><td>Construction trans-local networks of struggle.
Trans-scalar diffusion of knowledge, experiences, ideas and discourses.
Gain visibility and influence.</td><td>Develop distinct contextually-based, territorially anchored campaigns.
Generation of local networks and alliances rooted in everyday community relations.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Weaknesses and threats</td><td>Need to find common-ground demands.
Increase in the costs of participation can overshadow certain viewpoints.</td><td>Difficulties of adapting to multiple local contexts.
Excessive action diversification and over-fragmentation.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Hardship of maintaining a complex multi-scalar strategy.</td></tr>
</table>

The empirical examples of *Marea Blanca* in Spain and Keep Our NHS Public in the UK have been used to illustrate how scaling strategies are employed by grassroots struggles in diverse contexts and in what manner they are related to other strategies of resistance. On the one hand, scaling upwards has permitted the formation of

larger anti-austerity networks of struggle and the of simultaneous mobilisations in different places and scales, as well as the construction of collective narratives that represented health and social care as problems of social justice that required protection. On the other hand, scaling downwards has allowed them to generate spaces of encounter and embed the campaigns in the local communities, thus creating strong ties with the local residents and their needs. Nevertheless, the foremost contribution of these grassroots struggles has been, once again, their use of prefiguration. In this case, civil disobedience was directed towards disrupting and transcending processes of scalar re-configuration of state-based politics, and prefiguring *through action* new forms of state spatiality from below.

Finally, on analysing the relations between social reproduction, everyday experiences and resistance to austerity, this thesis opens up multiple avenues for further research. In the first place, this investigation has covered a limited number of struggles that emerged in the sphere of social reproduction in recent years. However, to continue locating our ability to resist capital exploitation and domination (Cleaver 2003) and to grasp further opportunities for autonomy and prefiguration, other areas of social reproduction need to be explored in depth. Current grassroots struggles over food, water or fuel security, urban enclosure and dispossession, undocumented migrant and refugee solidarity rights, or in defence of public education and social protections, to name only a few, are examples of resistances that have emerged in

response to the current processes of curtailment of social and civil rights and the extension of debt- and market-relations to the sphere of social reproduction. By extending the analysis to other arenas, therefore, this line of research could uncover not only multiple forms of mobilisation and everyday experiences of activism that could not be included in this doctoral thesis, but also the potentials for coordinated action across different issues and contexts.

Secondly, and related to the preceding point, it remains unclear after this investigation whether the contemporary struggles analysed can constitute the foundation for articulating sustained political alternatives, and for prompting wider transformations in the mode of social reproduction after the ongoing state of emergency is mitigated (Federici 2018). What is more, as we have seen throughout the thesis, capitalist societies depend on social reproduction, for it provides particular material conditions that are indispensable for their own functioning. As a consequence, it could be argued that, by acting as buffer mechanisms to alleviate the impact of austerity, struggles over social reproduction are contributing to stabilise a key condition of possibility of capitalism, potentially protecting the latter from its "own internal self-destructive tendencies" (Wright 2019, 21). Social reproductive resistances, therefore, generate ambiguous and highly contradictory tendencies that need to be further explored and unpacked. As is often made evident in the critiques of certain forms of institutionalised volunteering and charity work, for instance, prefigurative struggles act as immediate bridges to access material

and reproductive needs, which can reproduce systemic inequalities in social provisioning and widen entrenched patterns of hegemony and domination. At the same time, if they do not conscientiously and continuously strive to connect their everyday forms of resistance to broader projects of political action and social transformation, they can fall into individualised forms of action and/or into exclusionary understandings of community that undermine their possibilities for emancipation. In this sense, strengthening their ability to forge enduring collective political subjects, strong democratic and egalitarian solidarity relations, and stable autonomous spaces of social reproduction can be essential in order to bring about broader changes in the mode of reproduction that keep defying debt- and market-based forms of providing basic material needs.

A further point that is important to consider in upcoming research is related to the greater move towards formal institutions of representative democracy that we have witnessed in recent years. The initial forms of re-engagement with conventional politics observed in the thesis have been deepened with the creation of *Podemos*, *Ahora Madrid* or *Barcelona en Comú* in Spain, and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the Labour Party leader in the UK. The pragmatic opportunities that have emerged from this institutional jump, as well as their contradictions and potential obstacles to the construction of community-based and self-governing everyday forms of resistance, can be thus an object of further research.

To conclude, this doctoral thesis has combined recent insides in social reproduction theories and disruption-oriented approaches with the empirical illustrations of contemporary anti-austerity struggles to expand our understanding of how the sphere of social reproduction can open new opportunities for social conflict. Mixing creative political actions with self-managed activities and spaces of everyday life, these movements have demonstrated the relevance of generating prefigurative, autonomous structures of solidarity in the development of processes of politicisation and empowerment of vulnerable groups and in the articulation of alternatives to capitalism.

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