

From deviant squatters to moral squatters? Empowerment and participation of Romanian “Roma” in a Spanish anti-eviction assembly

Stefano Piemontese (piemonteses@ceu.edu). Research Associate, Central European University, Center for Policy Studies. Ph.D. student, Autonomous University of Barcelona, EMIGRA.

In the aftermath of the Spanish financial crisis, housing dispossession and homelessness turned from the concern of a relatively small amount of individuals into a national issue. Social welfare institutions experienced a progressive decline of their ability to provide support to a larger amount of indigent people. Progressively, the anti-eviction assemblies that prospered in the aftermath of the *indignados*/15M anti-austerity movement took over the responsibility of pursuing practices and arrangements to deal with a widespread housing insecurity. They started functioning as collective, non-state, transformative social protection mechanisms, aiming toward the enhancement of the social agency of a new class of vulnerable people. In some cases, anti-eviction assemblies became a meeting point for families and individuals with different residential trajectories, such as mortgage debtors from the middle and working class, as well as long-term squatters/homeless people. This is the case of some homeless Romanian “Roma” families living in Madrid, whose residential trajectories I have been following over the last two years as part of my PhD research. Their temporary incorporation into a local anti-eviction assembly can be interpreted as an evidence of the successful attempt to create new forms of solidarity, empowerment, and participation based on the political action of equals, rather than on state-pivoted classifications – such as culture, ethnicity, economic deservingness, and citizenship status. The *indignados* Romanian “Roma” also questions the predominant assumption that the most desirable and advantageous form of participation and struggle for social justice among “Roma” should develop in the institutionalized framework of ethno-policies addressed to this minority. However, this scenario is not free of contradictions. Despite the cooperative and mutualistic values of the assembly, and the good intentions of some of its members, hidden hegemonies and power relations persist. The loyalty-provision dimension characterizing more institutionalized forms of solidarity leaves space to other forms of differentiations and pedagogical interventions, while a new social citizenship is constructed, with its own boundaries, structures and norms.