



Territory of a struggle for the right to a home in Paris, geography of a mobilisation and its suppression: the case of the Réquisitions Collective

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Abstract

The Réquisitions Collective belongs to a tradition of struggle for the right to a home in Paris. Since December 2020, it has been pursuing protest campaign to raise awareness of the scale of homelessness in Paris and to push for the application of the Requisition Act, under which the state has the right to seize vacant buildings to house the homeless. Drawing upon an ethnographic survey and semi-structured interviews, we map the protest actions undertaken by the Collective to disrupt the socio-spatial order by the temporary seizure of space. The analysis of these materials gives insight into the struggle for the right to a home in Paris. We then look at the nature of the negotiations around the attempts to occupy and hold such spaces, by examining the forms of control exercised by the authorities. In particular, we explore the exercise of this control through the notion of demobilisation—i.e., of depoliticisation – in order to understand how the institutional framework of the protests helps to shape their geographies.

Key words: right to the city, housing, appropriation, demobilisation, territory

Résumé

Le collectif Réquisitions s'inscrit dans la filiation des luttes menées pour le droit au logement dans Paris. Il conduit, depuis décembre 2020, des actions afin de visibiliser l'ampleur du sans-abrisme et d'obtenir l'application de la Loi de réquisition par laquelle l'État s'octroie le droit de saisir des bâtiments vacants pour y loger les personnes à la rue. À partir d'une enquête ethnographique et d'entretiens semi-directifs, nous cartographions les actions du collectif qui perturbent l'ordre sociospatial en s'appropriant l'espace. Leur analyse permet de saisir un territoire de lutte pour le droit au logement à Paris. Puis, nous étudions comment se négocie ce territoire pour tenter de l'investir, d'y rester, en examinant les modalités de son contrôle par les pouvoirs publics, notamment au prisme de la notion de démobilisation pour saisir comment l'encadrement institutionnel des contestations participe à façonner leurs géographies.

Mots-clés : droit à la ville, logement, appropriation, démobilisation, territoire

Introduction

Against a background of tension around the issue of housing (Bouillon et al., 2019), a shortage of accommodation relative to demand,¹ and a crisis in the reception of exiles (Lendaro et al., 2019), the streets of Paris have become home to large numbers of rough sleepers. These homeless resort to temporary and often informal solutions to live in the city, solutions that are regulated in different ways (Froment-Meurice, 2016; Piva, 2021). The clearance of an exile camp in Saint-Denis on 17 November 2020 is a significant example, ending with the violent dispersal of between 500 and 1,000 people.² In response, on 23 November 2020, some of the exiles and their supporters decided to occupy Place de la République. The repression inflicted on them was widely reported in the media,³ forcing the issue into the public arena.

The formation of the Réquisitions Collective was a response to this situation. It brought together a number of existing organisations—Coordination 75 des sans-papiers (CSP75), Droit au logement (DAL; Right to Housing), Enfants d'Afghanistan et

1. According to the 2021 annual public report of the Cour des Comptes, there were 260,000 places in accommodation centres at the end of 2019. In 2022, the Abbé Pierre Foundation estimated in its annual report on housing shortages that there were a little over a million people without homes (living in shelters or on the streets).

2. Observatoire des pratiques policières du 93, *Observation note, evacuation of the Saint-Denis camp on 17 November 2020*.

3. "À Paris, migrants frappés et journalistes molestés lors de l'évacuation d'un campement éphémère", *Libération*, 23 November 2021.

d'ailleurs (EAA), Paris d'Exil (PE), Solidarité migrants Wilson (SMW), Utopia 56 (U56)– and representatives of two squatters' collectives. It was built around the campaign for the application of the Requisition Act, a law that allows the state to seize vacant buildings to provide housing for homeless people (Ministerial Order of 11 October 1945). The Collective's actions were planned by representatives of these organisations, some of them undocumented migrants, former asylum seekers, people living with poor housing conditions, squatters, or people in emergency accommodation. Their involvement in collective activism distinguishes them from most participants in housing-related protests, which usually focus on short-term solutions to homelessness or poor housing. Between December 2020 and September 2021, they ran 12 projects providing accommodation for 4,600 people, most of them considered "undesirable" by the authorities (Agier, 2010) and usually handled by forced displacement, i.e. police action to remove or evict them from their living spaces.

The collective's methods of resistance—a mix of occupations of public spaces and buildings and awareness-raising campaigns—were consistent with a long tradition of similar mobilisations in different countries. In 2005, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Médecins du monde distributed tents to homeless people in Paris to raise awareness of their situation, an action that was repeated a year later by Les Enfants de Don Quichotte (Bruneteaux, 2013). More generally, the establishment of camps in public places is a method that has been used in many such campaigns. The occupation of Tompkins Square in New York (Smith, 1989), People's Park in Berkeley (Mitchell, 1995), Gezi Park in Istanbul (Erdi, 2019) and the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and Nuit Debout movements (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012) are just a few examples. The Réquisitions Collective also draws upon a repertoire of actions inherited from the DAL movement (Péchu, 2006) and the Jeudi Noir Collective by occupying vacant buildings. This type of approach is common to movements that support the housing and urban rights of vulnerable populations, for example in Rome (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018) or Athens (Kotronaki et al., 2018). Its different forms have been explored in comparative international studies (Martínez López, 2018).

Our analyses are based on a year-long ethnographic study within the Réquisitions Collective, where we conducted participant observations at meetings and campaigning events—which provided material for a multi-situated analysis—along with semi-structured interviews with members of the organising team. We examine how the Collective's actions construct a territory of struggle for the right to a home in Paris, disrupting the socio-spatial order (Dikeç, 2002). We then look at how the occupation of this territory (Ripoll and Veschambre, 2005) is negotiated and the methods employed by the authorities to control it. In particular, we examine this control process

through the notion of demobilisation (Baby-Collin et al., 2021; Tilly and Tarrow, 2008), in order to understand how the institutional framework of the protest actions helps to shape their geographies. According to this line of reasoning, territory is first and foremost the product of the physical or symbolic appropriation—however temporary—of a space (Raffestin, 2019 [1980]) and the outcome of power relations.

Mapping a territory of struggle for housing in Paris: balancing the symbolic and the pragmatic

The different locations occupied by the Réquisitions Collective (figure 1) reveal a fragmented territory of struggle, a trade-off between the desire to take possession of symbolic locations in order to disrupt the socio-spatial geography of the city and the need to ensure the safety of participants.

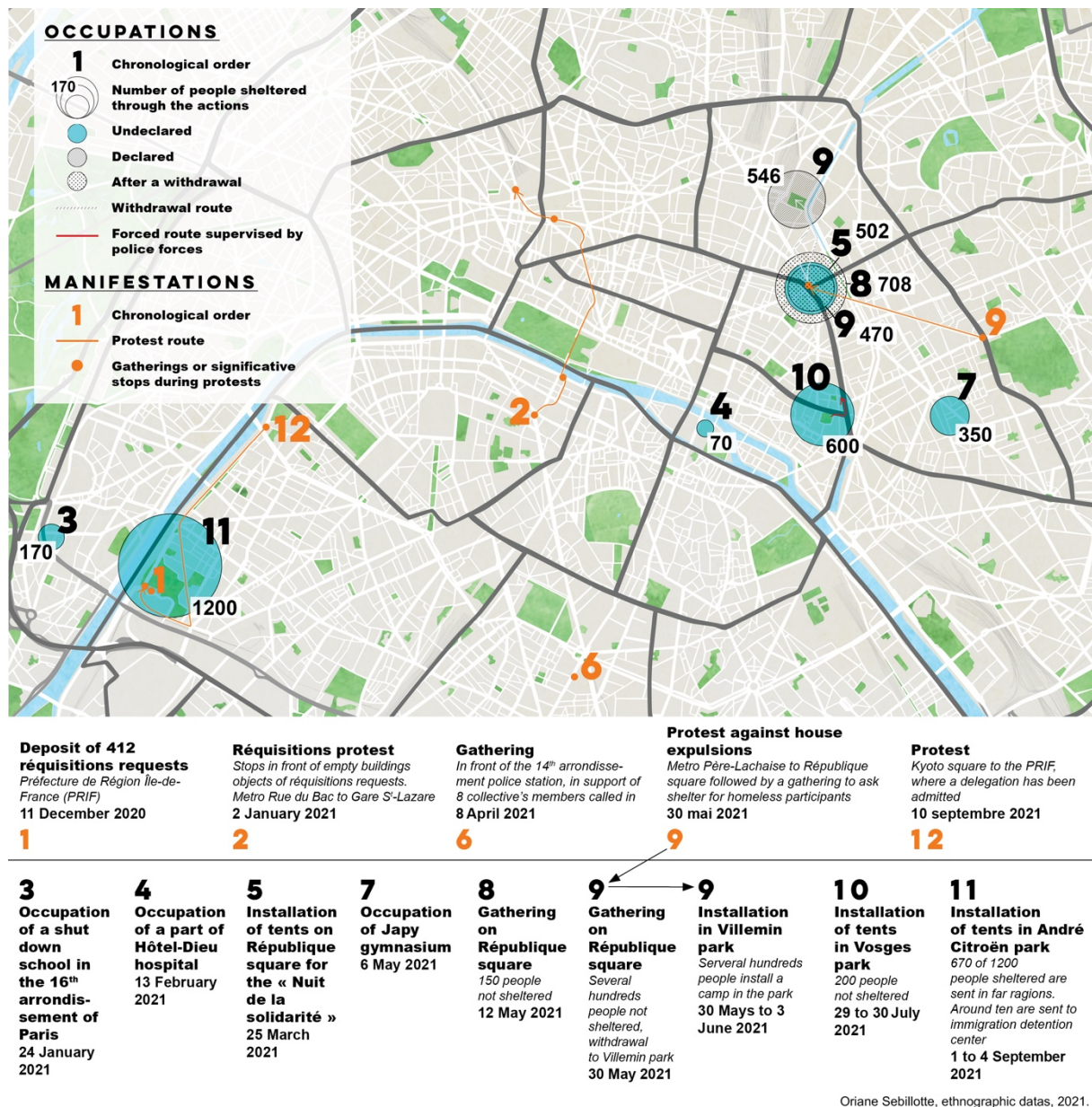


Figure 1: Actions organised by the Réquisitions Collective, 2020-2021

Produced by: Oriane Sebillotte, ethnographic data, 2021

The Collective's first, undeclared action was the occupation of a disused school in the 16th arrondissement on 24 January 2021. This followed the submission of 412 requisition applications to the Préfecture de région d'Île-de-France (PRIF) and a march through Paris linking several buildings proposed for requisition, neither of which approaches elicited any response. Subsequently, the collective carried out seven

undeclared occupations of actual or apparent public spaces or buildings,⁴ and organised three declared demonstrations. Each helped to give concrete expression to the struggle:

“Places are important. [...] Every time there’s a choice of location [our comrades] tell us: ‘ah, that’s a good choice! That’s really symbolic, you chose well.’” (B., CSP75)

The aim of these occupations was to disrupt the “hierarchy of places”, to oppose the financialisation of public buildings by temporary seizure, while adapting to the constraints of the places and the participants, as well as those imposed by local spatial regulation.

Planned territories of resistance

For the members of the Collective, Paris can be divided into four broad regions: areas where action would be desirable but difficult to undertake; areas where action is possible and politically valuable; intermediate areas that can be used as fallback spaces; and areas where action would have little political impact (figure 2). This geography corresponds to the map of wealth distribution.⁵ The desirable areas for action comprise places of political and financial power,⁶ while the areas of low impact are the capital’s working-class districts, which are also where rough sleepers tend to spend their time. As P. (SMW) points out: “The real challenge for me is in Paris: I mean, the most bourgeois districts. [...] there’s no reason why it should always be the working-class neighbourhoods that take on the burden of poverty and homelessness, encapsulating aphy of the struggle projected onto the canvas of Paris.

4. Hôtel-Dieu hospital, then in the throes of privatisation, was perceived as a public building.

5. Online interactive map, “Data Portraits Paris/Grand Paris – arrondissements, communes, territoires”, Atelier parisien d’urbanisme (APUR).

6. Agnès Stienne, 2012, “Cartographie des lieux de pouvoir à Paris”, published in *Manière de voir*, 122 (<https://www.visionscarto.net/lieux-de-pouvoir-a-paris>, accessed 20/03/2024).

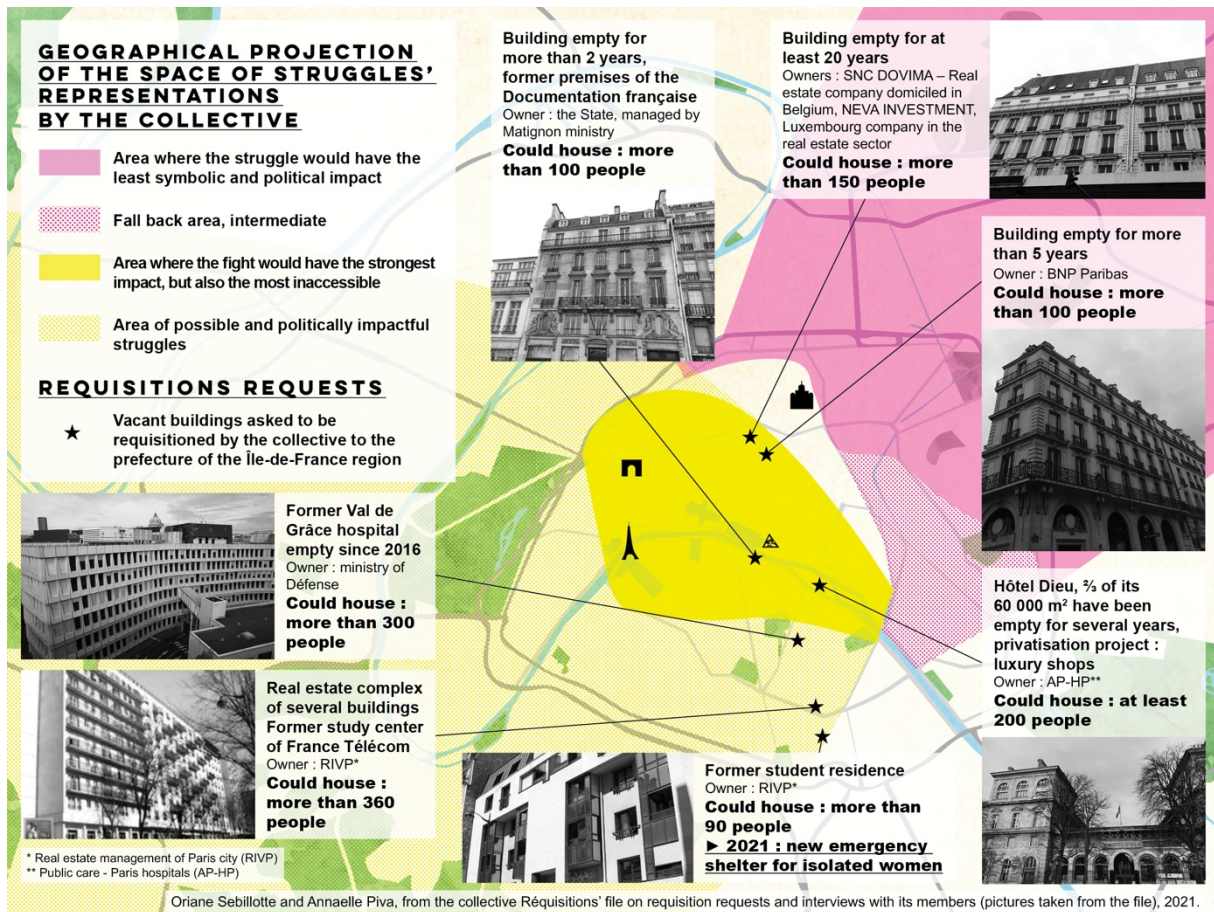


Figure 2: Projected areas of resistance, based on requisition requests submitted to the Prefecture

Produced by: Oriane Sebillote and Annaelle Piva, record of the Réquisition Collective's requisition demands, interviews with its members (photos from the file), 2021

Seeking to disrupt the "hierarchy of places"

To "make the invisible visible"⁷ to the authorities, the geography of the movement revolves around the principle of disrupting the hierarchy of places, the geographical pecking order. This order corresponds to the socio-spatial distribution of roles and functions in society, established and maintained by what Jacques Rancière describes as "police" (1995). Here, the term "police" refers to all the agents of neo-liberal urban production—i.e., economic agents, public authorities, the forces of law

7. "'Rendre visible les invisibles'" in Paris, 400 homeless people take up residence on the chic and very touristy Place des Vosges", RTBF, 29 July 2021.

and order, and all those who establish and enforce this distribution at all levels – and its direction is primarily determined by the political leaders and the systems that place them in a position of responsibility.

In this sense, the territory of the struggle for the right to a home arises from the seizure of space, however ephemerally, in conflict with the “police”. For Jacques Rancière (1995), “politics” refers to actions that disrupt the spatial order and challenge it in the name of the principle of human equality. In consequence, in order to create a territory that counteracts this, an ideal locus for action is one whose appropriation—albeit temporary—constitutes a break with the norm, generates media interest and confronts the authorities in order to alter the balance of power.

The idea is to become visible in places that are far removed from the social realities of residential, administrative or economic vulnerabilities, as M. (U56) puts it: “For me, there are two Parises: postcard Paris and the ‘real’ Paris [...] Putting the ‘real’ Paris—i.e., rough sleepers—[...] into postcard Paris.” This confrontation also has a relational dimension. It is about raising public attention and reminding the rich of the existence of the people at the heart of the protest.

Transgressing the hierarchy of places in the city also relies on media coverage: “Place des Vosges [...] the media reacted, tourists reacted, and as a result the authorities reacted” (P., SMW). The square became a tool of communication, “it’s a hyper-symbolic site, one of the poshest places in Paris, and you go and occupy it, and you take some great photos” (P., SMW). This aestheticism implicitly shows that not all places are equal and that real iconoclasts will rise to the imperative of producing images that challenge people: “As you can see in the press, it’s hard to get them on board [...] but here you’re offering them an unusual angle on things.” “Spectacularisation” thus becomes “a structural condition” of the protest events (Ripoll, 2008, p. 88) in circumstances where tents have normalised homelessness in the urban landscape (Zeneidi-Henry, 2010).

However, some of the venues were chosen primarily to meet the participants’ immediate need for accommodation, rather than for transgressive purposes. This was the case with Place de la République, which for the Collective came to be a sanctuary space following the crackdown of 23 November 2021. P. (SMW) nevertheless emphasised the difficulty of getting listened to in a space implicitly dedicated to struggle. “It’s a kind of maelstrom. [...] Ultimately, it’s not easy to make your voice heard in there.”

Some locations were chosen under duress and used as fallback spaces: “we got chased out this morning [after a protest operation], we just needed a quick place to fall back to [...] surely you’ve got something more symbolic than a fallback location!” (M., U56). These are areas that are familiar to the Collective’s member organisations, which work there with rough sleepers on a daily basis. On 30 May 2021, following the rally at Place de la République, around 500 people were dispersed by the police and withdrew to Square Villemin, sometimes nicknamed “Little Kabul” because of its frequent occupation by Afghan asylum seekers (Emmaüs Solidarité and France terre d’asile, 2011). The frequent presence of homeless camps in this area, together with its use for demonstrations, makes it a relatively non-transgressive space. M. (U56) identifies neighbourhoods that have been “abandoned by the [...] authorities” as possible fallback areas. “They won’t come looking for you there” (M., U56). They are spaces which, like Place de la République, do not disrupt the hierarchy of places by challenging the social pecking orders that pervade these neighbourhoods without challenging them (Dikeç, 2002), as F. (DAL) reminds us:

“The poor live with the poor. They don’t give a damn [...]. In fact, for some people it’s even an everyday reality... They don’t find it very surprising.” (F., DAL)

Lastly, the locations of some of the protests reflect the desire to establish a more head-to-head relationship with the authorities responsible for shelter and housing. The formation of a camp in André Citroën Park, opposite the PRIF, created a spatial proximity between housing applicants and the housing administration: “Parc Citroën is next to the PRIF. That’s the point of the challenge [...] Because in the end it’s about a balance of power.” (B., CSP75). This proximity also reflects the Collective’s desire to enter into direct dialogue with the authorities.

However, the Réquisitions Collective wished to strike a balance between the desire to challenge and the desire to protect the people taking part in their protests, particularly those with the most precarious administrative status, such as undocumented migrants. This more pragmatic element was reflected in the choice of locations, which reveals a detailed knowledge of the administration of the city’s spaces. The prefecture can only intervene in certain parts of the municipal domain if requested by the mayor, as noted by M. (U56): “It’s no accident that we chose ‘municipal’ locations as much as possible. It’s because it gave you a degree of political protection and... you play a bit on the tensions between the mayor and the prefecture.” (M., U56)

The protest actions take place in spaces or buildings that are public. The aim is to make an impact by taking advantage of the greater accessibility and visibility of these places, while at the same time counteracting the mechanisms of social filtering

and exclusion of the poorest populations that characterise them (Froment-Meurice, 2016). In addition to pursuing the objective of geographically disrupting the hierarchy of places in order to raise awareness and to try to establish a dialogue with the authorities, the territory of the housing struggle sets up a tension between the exchange value and the use value of empty buildings (Brenner et al., 2012).

Fighting for the right to live in the city: the financialisation of the built environment

Central to the Réquisitions Collective's priorities were its opposition to habitable buildings lying empty and its demand for requisition to be used as an instrument for providing access to "homes for everyone". During the march on 2 January 2021 (figure 1), the procession and speakers at the event drew attention to vacant buildings belonging to major financial groups, the state or the city of Paris, by stopping in front of them. For P. (SMW), "we point at them and say, 'this is empty and belongs to such and such an institution and why aren't there people in it?'" As well as publicising the availability of these spaces, taking possession of them is a way to rebalance unequal socio-spatial relations and to ensure that the right to a home takes precedence over the financialisation of the built environment: "[There are] people who have nowhere to live, so [we need to] annex empty dwellings, [...] annex wealth where there is a real vacuum..." (B., CSP75). This perspective explains the occupation of a wing of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital that had lain empty for years and had been sold by the Assistance publique-Hôpitaux de Paris (AP-HP) for conversion into a shopping arcade. While historically and as recalled in the speeches of the Collective, this building represented the embodiment of unconditional hospitality, its capture by property developers highlighted the commodification of the heart of the capital. B. (CSP75) explained the extent to which requisition represents a pushback against these commodification processes (Harvey, 2003), and how its application would require use value to be prioritised over exchange value:

"There's going to be talk about requisitioning in France, and that frightens people. [...] It's an inconvenient law, if it ever gets enforced. But who owns the big buildings in Paris? It's for banks [...] It's scary, it's going to raise some seriously big issues. Speculation is a problem and they [the government] don't want to get involved in issues like that." (B., CSP75)

So the authorities—both central government and the City of Paris—are also subject to market pressures. One of the buildings identified by the Collective (figure 2) was requisitioned at the request of the City of Paris to be used as a women's shelter.

On the other hand, the former Documentation française (a State publishing house) building, which the mayor wanted to requisition, was not:

“How can that happen? [...] It touches a raw nerve, where there’s money, where there’s power, where there’s a lot at stake, and people don’t like it.” (B., CSP75)

The abandonment of this second plan reveals the difference between accessible spaces (the 13th arrondissement, a former student residence with little architectural merit) and spaces that are off-limits (the former Documentation française, a beautiful building in a rich part of the city) (figure 2). It gives explicit expression to the idea of the “commodification of the world” (Aguilera, 2021, p. 8), which takes precedence over the right to a roof.

Spatial appropriation: making territory through struggle

The issue of visibility is linked to the choice of location, but also to the forms of protest and the meaning assigned to it by the participants. The location choice raises the profile of the occupation, because of the nature of the surroundings, the positioning of the participants and the way the action unfolds. The campaigns take hybrid forms, a mix of “high-impact operations” (M., U56) and practical, pragmatic demands, where the call for shelter coincides with the appropriation or occupation of a living space. This collective appropriation (Ripoll and Veschambre, 2005) becomes political by diverting the space away from the uses allocated by the state (Aguilera, 2021).

Although the operations differed, they took on a partially ritual character: logistics arrangements (masks and hand sanitiser, tables and meals...), festive activities (brass bands, games...) or protest materials (leaflets, banners...) marked the takeover of the site. Day-to-day arrangements in the space redefine its function: the base of a statue becomes a speaking platform; a place under the trees becomes a meal distribution spot; an open space becomes a playground (figure 3). This mixing of uses and materials is a way of physically and materially appropriating the space, of inhabiting it. This territorial appropriation demonstrates the participants’ capacity to organise and act for themselves in their quest to promote a different way of thinking about state-provided housing:

“People don’t need tons of rules [...]. Ultimately, we can organise ourselves [...]. After all, we know full well that the 115, the housing structures, are strict. It’s a kind of prison, isn’t it?” (F., DAL)



Figure 3: Camp set up by the collective on Place des Vosges, 29 July 2021
 Produced by: Oriane Sebillotte, ethnographic data and photos taken during the occupation,
 2021

Homeless people (asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, the poor) reclaim spaces and an insurgent citizenship (Isin, 2002, p. 273) by demanding a “de facto” right to the city (Morange and Spire, 2017). The length of time you spend at the protest site amplifies the scale of appropriation and self-management. The members of the Collective who organise the mobilisation increasingly come to rely on the participants to manage the life of the place, while at the same time having to handle the logistical challenges posed by the operation. However, occupation for purposes of protest does not generate the conditions needed to create a “subaltern public space”, i.e. a place that offers “parallel discursive arenas in which members of subordinate social groups develop and disseminate counter-discourses, enabling them to express their own interpretation of their identities, interests and needs” (Fraser, 2005, p. 126). Because of the diversity of the participants’ administrative profiles and needs, coupled with the brevity of the occupation (from a few hours to a few days), the conditions were not right for this political discourse to emerge, as it did in the politicisation of the participants in the operations staged by Les Enfants de Don Quichotte (Bruneteaux, 2013).

This kind of temporary occupation, initially intended to underpin demands for housing and for the application of the Requisition Act, very quickly shifted in its intent towards the effort to obtain accommodation in interaction with the authorities. Despite the politicisation of the Collective members-organisers, these operations became platforms for obtaining accommodation, thereby initiating the first steps in a process of demobilisation.

Regulation, standardisation, demobilisation

The trajectory of the actions organised by the Réquisitions Collective, seen through the prism of its interactions with the authorities, to some extent reveals the demobilisation of the movement. This collective depoliticisation is distinct from political engagement, which is an individual process (Tejel-Gorgas, 2013). It does not necessarily presuppose intentionality in the people concerned, but suggests a trajectory of regulation and standardisation that gradually lowers the tempo of conflictuality (Bacqué, 2005). It entails the development of close relations between activists and public representatives and practical attempts by certain players to inhibit struggle by means of repression. It is also accompanied by the emergence of a routine dimension in the response to the emergency of homelessness—i.e., the provision of shelter—which contributes to the standardisation of the protest operations and a change in the positions and practices of those involved (Baby-Collin et al., 2021; Tilly and Tarrow, 2008). Indeed, having started out as activists in the staging of a protest operation, the participants come to be assigned a role as agents or beneficiaries by the authorities, which gradually reshapes the form of the process and hence limits the scope of the demands.

Differentiating between actors: a negotiating tool and a means of control

Through its actions, the Collective posed a challenge to the state and the municipality. The former was represented in situ by the actors responsible for control (police), for accommodation (the regional and interdepartmental accommodation and housing directorate [DRIHL]), and for asylum (the France terre d'asile [FTDA] organisation), which were officially tasked with offering guidance to the protesters. The municipal council, which was perceived as a more accessible political tier, was represented by its Unité d'assistance aux sans-abri (UASA; Homeless Assistance Unit). Réquisitions interacted mainly with ground-level operatives—and more rarely with

institutional officials—at delegation meetings and through press releases and media statements.

The Collective's members were aware that it was perceived by the authorities as their preferred interlocutor. They favoured predictable interactions, marked by a certain routine that would reduce the conflictual dimension of the meetings: "for the DAL, the demands have been the same for a long time. So it's all business as usual" (F., DAL). M. (U56) explained that "[at city hall], they had tried to restrict delegation precisely because they wanted to maintain the link with specific organisations rather than to recognise the Réquisitions Collective as such". This preference seemed to be a way to circumvent shared political demands by giving precedence to pre-existing local demands and relationships.

This differentiation was perceived by the members of the Collective as a way to divide them by sidelining them in negotiations. The policing of the protest events (Della Porta and Reiter, 1998) had the effect of increasing the risks to undocumented participants. For example, B., from the CSP75, analysed the detention of ten undocumented migrants and the obligations de quitter le territoire français (OQTF; official national expulsion order) issued after the evacuation of André Citroën Park as an attempt to subvert the movement: "The state uses this insecure administrative status to ensure that we cease to be a part of this Collective [...] to try and divide us."

In turn, the Collective's members made their own distinctions between the authorities. K. (U56) explained that "you can't put the state, the government, the Île-de-France prefecture and the City of Paris on the same footing" and that it is the differences in the relations between the people on the ground and decision-makers that cloud their perception of the authorities. M. (U56) explained that FTDA as an organisation was answerable to the PRIF and was therefore restricted,

"but individually, among the street level support workers, there are people [...] who will do everything they can at their level to help the situation. But when it comes to the protest campaigns, they're not the decision-makers, they're not the ones who open up the squares [...] and they're not the ones who are going to change migration policy." (M., U56).

Again according to him, the closeness of these relations did not prevent the fight becoming politicised:

"You can be radical and rational, [...] you also have to realise what is the responsibility of the city and what is the responsibility of the state, [...] sometimes, just legally, it's the responsibility of the state." (M., U56)

The close relationship with the support workers on the street, in contrast to the adversarial relationship with the decision-makers, added nuance to the views of the activists: "Seeing how things work on their side also made me aware of their challenges and constraints. It somewhat changed the way I saw the work they do" (O., PE).

Shelters: erasing the housing issue, erasing the struggle

The relations with the people tasked with finding emergency solutions (Gardella, 2014) was critical to the outcome of the protest movements. B. (CSP75) describes the situation as follows:

"They choose the easiest thing: accommodation. [...] The protests generated a sense of emergency, and the response was to provide emergency shelter [...] I don't think they'd ever thought about housing, even though we are always talking about housing, giving everyone a roof over their heads". (B., CSP75)

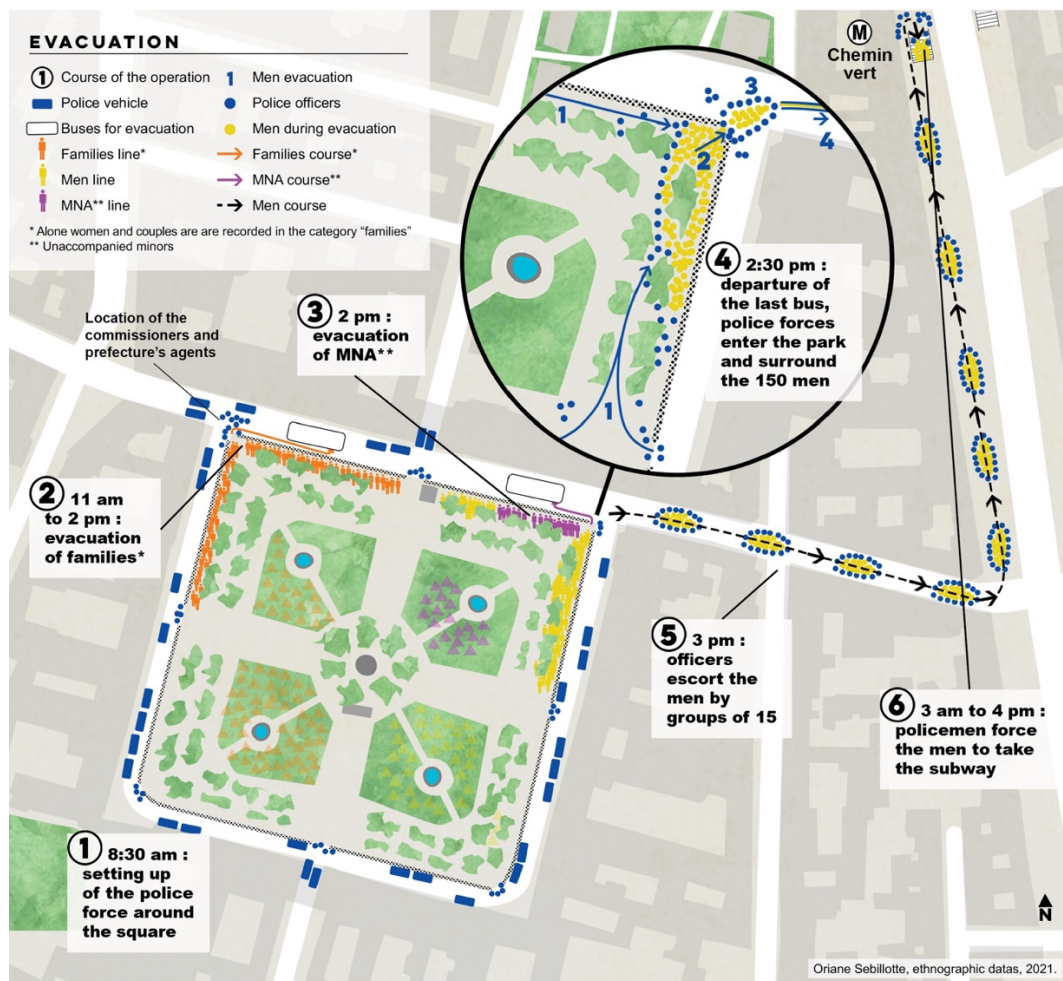


Figure 4: evacuation of the camp on Place des Vosges, 30 July 2021

Produced by: Oriane Sebillotte, ethnographic data, 2021

Within the framework of the protest actions organised by the Réquisitions Collective, providing shelter began with the rollout of a police response (blue shapes in figure 4), which would set the operational perimeter and monitor who moved in and out of it. Members of FTDA and the UASA would draw up lists and classify individuals according to their profiles (families and women, minors, men), and direct them to different accommodation solutions where their administrative situation would be investigated (figure 5). Finally, when the shelter allocation process was finished and if there were still people waiting for a solution, the forces of law and order would break up the event (see details in the close-up in figure 4) and empty the area of the collective presence that gave material substance to the demands.

Allocating temporary accommodation had the effect of depoliticising the protests. The authorities would ask the organisations in the Collective to act as an interface with the protesters. They would be tasked with drawing up lists, circulating information and helping to organise the queues. M. (U56) justifies this involvement by the skills and know-how that his organisation and the Collective were able to provide: "I think we're all more competent from an operational point of view [...] for each evacuation it takes them [the authorities] 20,000 years to get two pieces of information that we can get in two minutes." In response to demand from some of the participants, the Collective gradually began to organise its protest events with the aim of getting people into shelter, occupying sites while waiting for the system to be put in place:

"Most of our operations [...] were driven by demand from rough sleepers: 'They are the ones organising action in Paris, and it is those operations that are currently the only way to get accommodation, so we want to take part'." (M., U56)

As a result, a transition took place towards processes of assistance and humanitarian aid. Local organisations and institutions that worked with rough sleepers—particularly exiles—saw the Réquisitions Collective as a means of accessing accommodation. As O. (PE) sums things up: "We are becoming an interface that people pass through, so we are now becoming a substitute for procedures." The vast majority of people would take part in the operations in order to get shelter. So, for example, on 12 May 2021, one of the members of the Collective urged participants to remain on Place de la République in order to alter the balance of power. However, as soon as a bus arrived to begin the process of moving people to shelters, the participants rushed towards it, although not everyone was able to benefit. One man complained angrily about having waited all day for nothing when he had been promised support. Some of the people present did not understand the political dimension of the operations and saw the Collective as a service provider. More generally, the Collective's leaders pointed out how the quest for accommodation reduced the protest dimension of the operations:

"You're always going back-and-forth between being an activist with demands, ready to occupy a public space, and becoming an adjuvant to the authorities, helping them to get people onside and, in the end, to provide the shelter that the authorities are obliged to provide anyway." (P., SMW)

This blurring of roles also disrupted the way the protest participants perceived the Collective. This normalisation was counteracted to some extent by the spatial component—occupying spaces that are representative of power or in some way symbolic—which tenuously maintained the political dimension of the struggle.

In this respect, the effect of gaining access to shelter was to mask the demand for access to accommodation.

“For them [the authorities] it’s no longer the Réquisitions Collective. It’s nothing! It’s nothing more than... a ‘camping group’! [...] In my opinion, it’s a matter of intelligence, how can you not assign importance to the word ‘requisition’? Because ‘accommodation’ and ‘shelter’ have nothing to do with ‘requisition’.” (B., CSP75)

B. interprets the offer of temporary accommodation as a way to silence the demand for requisition: “we give 300, 400, 500 people a roof over their heads, it’s better than having talk about the Réquisitions Collective in the news”. However, accommodation is not housing.

“I have [a friend] who’s constantly being moved from one place to another. True, thanks to the Collective, she’s never been homeless. But if it was her home, it wouldn’t change any more. [...] Because when we say ‘home’, we mean ‘stability’.” (B., CSP75).

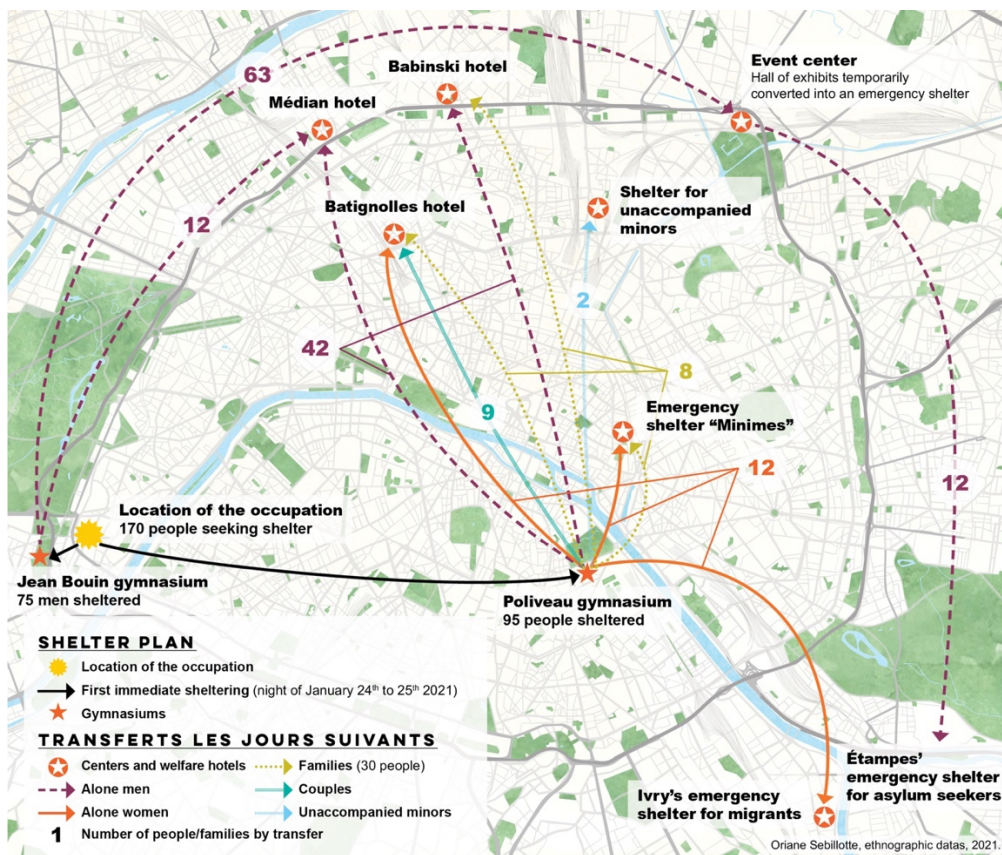


Figure 5: arrangements for providing shelter and successive accommodations after the evacuation of the school in the 16th arrondissement.
Produced by: Oriane Sebillotte, ethnographic data, 2021

This instability is reflected in the system for providing shelter, with a succession of accommodation solutions and transfers. The system presented here (figure 5), set up following the Collective's first occupation, is representative of approach employed after each protest. It differs in geographical scope from the evacuation of Parc André Citroën, which led to more than half of the participants being steered towards accommodation in the region, which was perceived as a form of repression that distanced them from their resource territories (schooling, work, relationships). Little by little, shelter came to be interpreted as a tool of socio-spatial control, a way to divert the demand for requisition towards a solution for a social emergency.

Cracking down while limiting police violence

The media coverage of the violence that followed the evacuation of Place de la République in November 2020 for a while led to a reduction in police violence against the Collective. B., of the CSP75, notes: "If they want to use force, they can give the order. [...] In my opinion, they don't really want to... It's a way of turning down the heat, a way to avoid getting more sympathisers on our side." In her view, the authorities thus avoid creating the conditions for mobilisation by limiting repression (Fillieule and Della Porta, 2006). According to the members of the Collective who were most insistent in the demand for housing, the prefecture's aim was to depoliticise the struggle by focusing on accommodation solutions. For others, more inclined to respond positively to the offer of accommodation of shelter, the prefecture's attitude was a sign of fear and of a shift in the balance of power: "they took us at least a little seriously [...] when we announced something, they would say 'okay, we'll bring back the buses or they'll be putting up tents in Place de la République again'" (M., U56). P. (SMW) noted, however, that the authorities were quick to adapt:

"Between the first operation and the tenth, the reaction changed, and the tenth [...] it's a strategy of force, of violence! Sending 600 people to the provinces is a message they're sending us." (P., SMW)

So, without resorting to violent dispersal or leaving all the participants without accommodation options, the authorities nevertheless employed repressive methods. Initially targeting the activists who were summoned to the police station following the demonstration at Hôtel-Dieu, they were then directed against participants in the protests: "they decided: 'we're going to attack people,' first by not taking everyone, and then by making it clear that 'you're not in charge, we're the ones who decide what

places we give you', [...] and, what's more, it was a way to reduce the level of conflict" (O., PE).

Relations with the authorities thus led to a loss of motivation through repression, discriminatory responses based on administrative status, and close relations with officials who were only able to propose routine and operational solutions without dealing with the fundamental demands.

Conclusion

The activities of the Réquisitions Collective marked out a territory of struggle for housing influenced by the trade-offs between the pursuit of radical outcomes and the goal of awareness-raising, the demands of the participants in the protest actions and the expectation of repression. On the one hand, the occupation of high-profile sites kept the struggle alive materially through appropriation and public impact, and thereby challenged and transgressed the hierarchy of places by revealing its inequalities *vis-à-vis* the principle of universal equality (Rancière, 1995). On the other hand, interactions with the authorities, and the priorities of the participants—to get a roof over their heads—had a demobilising impact with respect to the initial demands, while allowing the struggle to continue and the enactment of immediate solutions that reproduced the socio-spatial hierarchies. This mobilisation needs to be analysed on a collective scale, within a limited timeframe and through the spatial balance of power established between homeless or poorly housed individuals and the authorities. The trajectories of (dis)engagement of the people concerned (Fillieule, 2005) and the sometimes ambivalent role of the Collective's leaders-organisers—who may, in spite of themselves, have reproduced the social hierarchies they condemned in the manner that they implemented protests and took decisions—offer further potential ways to understand (de)mobilisation in terms of the construction of political subjectivations (Tassin, 2014). It would be worth studying other recent struggles from a comparative perspective in order to examine this phenomenon of social reproduction in migrant mobilisations and to further extend and qualify our understanding of individual engagements.

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