

Introduction: the autonomous life?

Every Saturday night for thirty years, the renowned Vrankrijk, a squatters' social center, has hosted a dance party which attracts a mix of squatters, punks, artists, radical left activists, hippies, university students, and tourists seeking to taste the underground scene in Amsterdam. Located on a beautiful street in the inner city, the building is enormous, standing four-stories tall, its facade covered by colorful murals in stark contrast to the eighteenth-century dollhouse architectural landscape of the neighborhood. Tour guides often stand in front of the Vrankrijk, explaining the importance of the squatters movement in the 1980s and how the building represents its achievements in maintaining affordable housing and encouraging cultural innovation in the city. The mainstream media and the municipal politicians call it a squatters' bulwark.

For squatters, the building has an entirely divergent set of meanings. Having been legalized nearly twenty years earlier, the building is no longer a squat or in any way at the political core of the movement, but a reliable place to party and consume cheap drinks. As is the norm for radical left European social centers, a rotating collective, mainly comprised of baby punks, enthusiastically manages the bar. As volunteers, they organize the bar shifts, the cleaning, the bouncers, the finances, and the themes of the Saturday dance nights – ranging from benefits for Polish queer organizations, Latin American solidarity info-evenings, to 1980s pop parties. Former squatters, referred to sarcastically as pensioners by activists, reside in living groups upstairs.

In September 2008, tremendous violence dismantled the tradition of the Saturday night dance party at the Vrankrijk. Around 8 p.m., two veteran squatters, Yoghurt and Joseph, both involved in the movement for over fifteen years, arrived drunk and high from a prodigious cocktail of drugs, with a hefty dog. The bouncer, a twenty-two-year-old punk who knew these men, refused them entrance with the dog. Ignoring his request, they barged in anyway. The bouncer and other bar workers, including a staff member nicknamed “Macho,” ordered the men to leave. Finally, threatening them with a bat, the two men exited the bar. They then returned shortly afterwards and



Figure 0.1 The Vrankrijk legalized squat, 2006

the situation escalated, to the point where the bar staff locked the door to keep the men out while they pummeled the door and demanded entrance. Multiple versions of what happened next exist, but with the mix of alcohol, drugs, a barking dog, a bat, wooden sticks, and the involvement of someone nicknamed “Macho,” the possibility of conflict resolution seemed slim at best. The situation ended with Yoghurt falling backwards (or being pushed), cracking his head, and permanently injuring his inner ear.

Discussions of the “Vrankrijk incident” in the squatters’ scene were pervasive in the months following the event. What exactly happened? Was it a

crime or self-defense? Who were the victims and who were the perpetrators? If a crime had been committed, how should the perpetrators be punished? Months passed without decisions but in numerous conversations, people complained and proclaimed furiously.

“Someone needs to take responsibility,” I heard Chris, a Belgian squatter say loudly with conviction late at night at a squatted bar. “This is unacceptable behavior,” declared Marie, over breakfast in the squat where I resided at the time. Meanwhile, for months, the collective who managed the Vrankrijk had been meeting nightly, wrangling over appropriate solutions for hours. Although regretting the violence and the permanent injury, most supported the staff, believing that Yoghurt had provoked the incident which spiraled out of control. They found it unfair to expel those involved from the squatters’ community when they had merely done their best in an impossible situation.

Eventually, a citywide squatters’ meeting was called to settle the issue. The majority in attendance – who had passionate opinions about the matter in bars and at breakfast tables – remained silent, while a handful of the attendees, mainly squatter bosses, argued about what to do. Was it fair to ban the perpetrators from the movement? Should they collect money towards the costs of Yoghurt’s rehabilitation? Would Yoghurt report the perpetrators to the police? The meeting failed to produce a plan of action. A month later, the police resolved the movement’s dilemma when they arrested and imprisoned the so-called perpetrators and the mayor announced that the city had removed the Vrankrijk’s liquor license and had closed the space to the public.

This conclusion embarrassed the squatters movement, which prides itself as an anarchist, “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY), emancipated alternative to the capitalist, authoritarian, hierarchical Mainstream.¹ The incident demonstrated that in terms of internal conflict, the squatters movement could not “Do-It-Themselves.” Instead, after months of waiting, the squatters’ articulated enemy, the state – in the form of the mayor and the police – rectified the issue on their behalf. To add injury to insult, the mayor, acting in his role as the benevolent father figure of the city, grounded his naughty, punk, squatter children, taking away their liquor license and chiding them for their inability to manage their “playground,” valued at millions in the 2008 real estate market.

The incident encapsulates many of the contradictory internal dynamics of the movement which form the basis of examination in this book. Like many social movements the squatters movement has two faces: “the front stage,” which interacts with the Mainstream, consisting of the state, politicians, the media, and an imagined “public”; and the other, more complicated and perplexing “backstage,” which directs itself towards the internal community, or “the scene.”

Presented with a clear enemy, a determinate external Other such as the state, squatters can easily unite to work together using a well-rehearsed repertoire of tactics to reach their goals. But an internal problem, such as the incident at the Vrankrijk, involving members of this community who make

their own claims for inclusion, support and justice, upsets an underlying logic. It proves impossible for squatters to perform “backstage” as the articulate, assertive “front stage” activist who unwaveringly proclaims and acts on one’s ideals. The example points to a persistent contradiction between the two faces of squatting, and an unresolved problem in the heart of the squatters movement for the past forty years.

This book is an ethnographic study of the internal dynamics of a subcultural community that defines itself as a social movement. While the majority of scholarly studies on this movement focus on its official face, on its front stage, I am concerned with a series of ideological and practical paradoxes at work within the micro-social dynamics of the backstage, an area that has so far been neglected in social movement studies.

The central question, which I explore from a variety of angles, is how hierarchy and authority function in a social movement subculture that disavows such concepts. The squatters movement, which defines itself primarily as anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian, is profoundly structured by the unresolved and perpetual contradiction between both public disavowal and simultaneous maintenance of hierarchy and authority within the movement.

This study analyzes how this contradiction is then reproduced in different micro-social interactions, examining the methods by which people negotiate minute details of their daily lives as squatter activists in the face of a funhouse mirror of ideological expectations reflecting values from within the squatter community, that, in turn, often refract mainstream, middle-class norms.

In the examination of this question, I repeatedly revisit questions of performance and habitus. I use the term performance for self-conscious behavior exhibited by activists with a range of audiences in mind, which include a number of characteristics. First, I argue, they should display a specific socialization into a movement subculture through the practice of squatting and by learning skills that gain prestige in this community, which I term squatter capital. Moreover, I demarcate that an essential element of this socialization is to render invisible the long and arduous process of skill acquisition, thus demonstrating a process of mastery and rejection. Finally, I contend that activists should present a hostility and rudeness that is in itself a rejection of imagined middle-class insincere politeness.

While performance reflects a self-conscious display of internal movement socialization, I use habitus to refer to the types of unselfconscious quotidian behaviors and style preferences that reflect an activist’s upbringing, and thus, his/her class, culture, and education. While performance is movement specific and theoretically accessible to all within the community to reproduce, habitus reflects class, culture and education and hence hierarchy and differential status, which I assert, are taboo to acknowledge transparently in a subculture that claims emancipation from differential status hierarchies.

Although these socializations exist independently of each other, I focus on the relationship between habitus and performance. For example, I illustrate when habitus contributes to the seamless performance of the ideal

squatter self in the case of authority figures and their ability to mobilize their often educated, upper-middle-class habitus to effortlessly perform conviction. Or, on the other hand, I highlight when habitus undermines the convincing performance of the autonomous, defiant activist, such as in the case of people addicted to alcohol or drugs, who lack capacity to manage both movement and mainstream tasks, or simply originate from working-class backgrounds.

Both performance and habitus require recognition, and therefore, an audience. In addition to analyzing both successful and failed performances and the various types of habitus possessed by people in this community, I also consider how others recognize these performances mainly at the level of discourse. Moreover, I argue that when people in this community both gossip and classify each other negatively this reflects a squatter's status and capital in the movement in unexpected ways. Since members of this subculture are fiercely individualistic and view themselves as unclassifiable non-conformists, I contend that the best way to understand norms and values is through the negative classification of others that dominate subcultural discourse. In analyzing these interactions and methods of organization, I place as much value on the meaning of the silences and on the unstated assumptions as on the articulations.

Squatters are constantly negotiating elements of performance and habitus before a range of audiences. Some audience members, such as the state and the media, are temporary, tuning in for only selected, dramatic episodes. Some, such as one's housemates and the gaze of others who participate in the squatter "scene," are ever-present. Squatters juggle multiple ideals, many of which are premised on mastery and rejection and which are never explicitly defined. This lifestyle is especially labyrinthine, I assert lastly, when one examines the paradox surrounding the ideal of the "autonomous self." This study demonstrates that it connotes someone who is independent, non-conformist, emotionally self-contained, entitled, and anti-capitalist.

Reflecting on all of these factors and considering that this community of people – of different skills, habitus, and backgrounds – live and work intensively together on the legal margins of a tiny, wealthy, northern European, highly bureaucratized, multicultural city dominated by religious and ethnic tensions, the autonomous life is more often complex and fraught than liberatory and utopic.

Historical context of the squatters movement in Amsterdam

In this section, I will first review the main sources from which I have constructed this narrative, then present a critical historiography, followed by an overview of the main points of this history. I conclude by discussing the

impact of this history on the current movement and summarizing structural changes in the political landscape during my fieldwork.

Description of sources

The three most comprehensive histories on the squatters movement in Amsterdam are *De stad in eigen hand* (The city in our own hands) (1992) by Virginie Mamadouh, *Cracking Under Pressure* (2009) by Lynn Owens, and *Een voet tussen de deur* (A foot between the door) (2000) by Eric Duivenvoorden. The academic monographs by Mamadouh and Owens are both based on their archival research for their doctoral dissertations and situate themselves in social movement studies. Duivenvoorden presents a narrative to a popular audience without an explicit argument. He was also instrumental in the making of a well-known and influential full-length documentary, *De stad was van ons* (The city was ours) (Seelan 1996), which relates a history of the squatters movement in Amsterdam.

These three books and the film have a Russian doll effect on the historical record. Mamadouh's book was published first, and Duivenvoorden then bases his work partially on her research in which he duplicates what she argues are the main points of historical development. Duivenvoorden works on the documentary by conducting the main interviews and providing the historical expertise that form the bedrock of the film. Duivenvoorden's film and book then provide the data for Lynn Owen's monograph.

Mamadouh's monograph, *De stad in eigen hand* (1992), is a foundational text. Mamadouh contends that the influence and impact of urban social movements is difficult to measure in terms of class conflict. Instead, these movements were directed towards enacting a vision of the city that challenged the types of municipal policies and the social norms of urban lifestyles at the time. Mamadouh investigates how urban social movements interpreted the city ideologically, their attempts to modify the built environment, and how their methods and tactics compared with each other.

In *Cracking Under Pressure* (2009), Lynn Owens studies the decline of the Amsterdam squatters movement as a specific contribution to social movement studies, which has been dominated by resource mobilization and political process approaches that focus on how social movements originate. Rather than a broad sociological analysis, Owens analyzes the emotions in narratives of squatters in reaction to high profile events that he argues are crucial to the development and the eventual decline of the movement. (These events are identical to those that Mamadouh and Duivenvoorden highlight.) Owens presents a multi-layered narrative in which he emphasizes the individual voices and diversity of opinions of squatters to these events.

Duivenvoorden's text, *Een voet tussen de deur* (2000) recounts a popular history – the result of meticulous archival research, intended for an audience

of members of the educated Dutch left who possess considerable knowledge of major figures in Amsterdam politics since the 1960s. Focusing on 1964 to 1999, Duivenvoorden traces how the movement began, how it grew, and its relationship to the Amsterdam municipal political machinery. He describes the movement's activities, methods, its internal subcultural institutions, the social profiles of the participants, and a number of mediagenic riots that he contends, impacted the movement's development.

These three texts as well as the entire documentary collection on the squatters movement of the Staatsarchief (approximately 250 hours' worth of video) provide the data for the historical narrative that I present. The documentary footage display a range of images: from hours of footage of riots, interviews of squatters by mainstream news programs, videotapes of satirical performances by squatters, to hour-long documentaries by non-Dutch filmmakers. In addition, many of the videos repeat footage. Without describing each video in detail, the cumulative effect of these documentaries provides a sense of the subculture's presence as a protest movement and a countercultural lifestyle in the 1970s and 1980s.

Historiography

Presenting the history of a squatters movement proves challenging because the act of squatting is often clandestine. Thus, most squatters go to great lengths to ensure that no written trace of their activities exist, leaving no record available from which to construct a historical narrative. With this in mind, the history of the Dutch squatters movement is primarily a chronology of certain types of people who squat through public occupations and who identify as being members of a social movement. Such a classification excludes people who squat outside the movement, for which only one article exists (Diepen and Bruijn-Muller 1977), and people within the movement who squat but do not engage in the movement as activists. Duivenvoorden transparently discusses his exclusionary focus (2000: 52):

Young people occupy a house and sooner or later have to deal with an eviction threat from the government and/or the owner. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the squatters leave silently. In the following story, the only squatting actions that are described are the ones that contribute to a better understanding of the history of the squatters movement. And there are plenty of these stories. (my translation)

Describing "actions that contribute to a better understanding of the history" means concentrating on a minority of politically well-organized activists articulating themselves in a manner that Duivenvoorden and others recognize as a legitimate form of squatter activism. Duivenvoorden writes that

between 1964–99, approximately 45,000 to 70,000 people in Amsterdam had some involvement with the squatters movement, the overwhelming majority of whom were not activists and whose participation derived from a diversity of motivations. Consider, for example, that in this movement, there were macrobiotic squats, vegan squats, feminist squats which prohibited the presence of men, as well as squatters who only sought free housing and lacked interest in politics. For squatters embedded in such households, the actions and conflicts that Duivenvoorden highlights as instrumental were most likely far removed from their social worlds.

By focusing on self-identified political activists and on mediagenic actions, the historical record gives excessive attention to branches of the movement that produced written text while failing to consider whether such texts resonated in the informal, verbal, non-written discourse and debates of the movement. The most textually verbose groups are those most often quoted, leading to a distorted view of movement discourse and giving excessive importance to texts with disputed relevance or may have been only one voice among a cacophony.

By focusing on actions, riots, and evictions to tell the story of the movement, these texts create an impression of artificial linear progression and only narrate its front stage. In this book, I argue that the movement's internal and external faces are circular and repetitious rather than linear and progressive. Rather than viewing violent actions as events that transform history, an overly simplistic teleological narrative, I assert that riots, evictions, and actions are not as instrumental for so-called larger movement goals. Instead, these events serve to compile squatter capital on the movement's back stage as well as advance towards a vision of self-realization of the ideal autonomous activist.

Furthermore, the historical record emphasizes discussions in reaction to actions, but none consider the intricacy behind organizing these actions, which masks these actions with a doubtful coherency. To illustrate, a number of squatter documentaries repeatedly present one action in which squatters in 1978 took over a city council meeting. In this clip, a group of young, white squatters in their early twenties storm the meeting. One young man, tall, blond, wearing glasses, grabs the microphone from the chairperson, stands on a table, and makes a speech. A few documentaries feature this clip because it portrays various facets of the front stage of the squatters movement: spontaneous direct action, anti-parliamentarism, lack of respect for authority figures, articulate public speaking, and bravery.

This clip, repeatedly featured in the documentary collection, gives cause for reflection on how an action intended to give the impression of spontaneity must have, in actuality, been planned with incredible attention to detail in order to succeed. What was the brainstorming session that eventually led to this action being chosen as the one to pursue? How many meetings did

the group hold to plan it? Who wrote the speech? Why did the group decide to pick this young man in particular to give the speech? How did they manage to videotape it? Did they invite the press? What were the hundreds of small details that they had to address to produce this action? These questions illustrate the contradiction between the necessity to intricately plan with the desire to leave an impression of spontaneity. This results in the intricate construction of the front stage and the discursive invisibility of the backstage apparatus required to create that performance.

Furthermore, these texts tend to uncritically represent how authority functions in this movement as well as reify the voices of male leaders. Mamadouh and Duivenvoorden strengthen the authority of leaders by only referring to well-known, articulate men by name while subsuming the rest under the label of the group.² Such a practice renders invisible the participation of unnamed members who crucially enabled the production of actions. These unnamed members include people who may have been non-articulate, did not publicize their activities, or were women. Both authors fail to recognize that this method of historical narration, in which they privilege the voices of authority figures and represent actions as a consequence of their leadership, undermines their arguments that these movements were anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian.

Finally, if one views the history of post-war Amsterdam through the lens of the squatters movement, the texts present a misleading and nostalgic white urbanity by neglecting the arrival and impact of non-white immigrants in the city. During the period that these books and the documentary highlight, from the late 1960s to 2000, the population of Amsterdam radically transitioned from mainly white Dutch to over half "foreign" (this percentage includes certain classifications of non-white people born in the Netherlands). In 1980, the official population of "ethnic minorities" was 11 percent of the city, by 1986 it was 16 percent, 27 percent by 1992, and 32 percent by 1995 (Tesser 1995: 56). By the time I conducted my fieldwork, the populations of the major Dutch cities had 50 percent or more non-white residents who were classified as foreign.³

With the exception of Mamadouh briefly mentioning tensions between Surinamese squatters and white Dutch people in the Transvaal neighborhood, the texts wholly ignore the consequences of the radically changing face of the city's population. In terms of squatting, by only focusing on a particular profile of white squatter activists, again the historical texts present a misleading and distorted view. There are rumors and assumptions in the squatters movement that Surinamese immigrants squatted entire housing blocks in the Bijlmer in the 1970s, which have remained squatted until the present day. During my fieldwork, the majority of eviction notices published in the newspaper were for apartments in the Bijlmer that were squatted outside the movement. Yet, only one academic article from 1977 (Diepen and Bruijn-Muller) mentions this phenomenon. Otherwise,

all academic research on squatting in Amsterdam has failed to analyze it in-depth – including my own.

In terms of contextualizing squatters in the city and their relationship with their neighbors, the lack of discussion of immigration presents a problematic Eurocentrism and limited critical inquiry. The texts habitually present non-squatter neighbors as authentic, white, working-class residents who resist their displacement by urban renewal projects. However, looking at the figures for the population of the city further complicates these assumptions regarding the locations of these “solidaric” neighbors. By selectively focusing on certain sections of the city and particular types of people and lifestyle practices in exclusion of others in the immediate context, these texts construct a fantasy of urban whiteness, a mythology which impacts gravely on the movement.

With this perspective, it’s possible to construct an alternate reading of the squatters archives, but such a project is outside the limits of an ethnography of a movement between 2005–08 based on interviews and participant observation. This historical background intends to demonstrate a lineage for the activities that comprise the internal movement culture as well as display the repetition and circularity of this movement over the past forty years. In addition, this background serves to contextualize the interactions between squatters and the front stage of the media, the state, and the press and demonstrate the institutionalization of the squatters movement in urban life. Last, I avoid repeating problematic aspects of the sources used to construct this narrative, such as by extensively describing violent riots and profiling male leaders.

Historical background

In post-war Amsterdam, squatting space was a fairly common practice. Families living in cramped social housing⁴ apartments often took over clandestinely an extra floor in their building for more space. With the inability of the housing corporations to keep track of the empty properties, these extra spaces eventually became the possession of the “squatters.” The phenomenon of young people taking over empty spaces without legal entitlement was first featured by the media in 1964 when a group of young married couples squatted in houses scheduled for demolition which had languished empty for years.⁵ These couples wanted to reside independently from their parents but could not obtain social housing. In response to this action and the extensive press coverage, the state and the housing corporations offered the couples social housing.

During this same year, a university student newspaper featured an announcement that sought people to live in buildings in which a group of students had squatted. Although these buildings were evicted within a few

months, there were reports of internal conflicts between the “legitimate residents,” who had organized the squatting of the buildings, and “illegitimate residents,” who moved in afterwards. With the exception of these two public squatting actions, squatting was hidden from the public eye until 1969, after which it has developed into a visible part of Amsterdam life through public actions with ample coverage by the media and through their spatial presence in which squatted spaces are dotted throughout the city.

The legacy of the Provos is instrumental to understand the tactical approach of the squatters movement. The Provos were an anarchist, situationist, countercultural group active between 1965 and 1967. They sought to challenge authoritarian and hierarchical social relations between citizens and the state. This attitude brought them attention in a culture, which at the time, highly valued conformity and the uncritical obedience of authority. They also attacked consumerism and car traffic in the city. The group was associated with one figure in particular, Robert Jasper Grootveld, a performance artist, who regularly staged weekly “happenings” which combined non-violence with absurdist humor to provoke the police, often ending with his arrest.

While the Provos comprised a small group, they developed a tremendous following and successfully impacted social norms. They created a space to reconsider the relationships between the citizen and the political machinery of the city. They also put forward an array of what they termed “white plans” to improve quality of life. The most famous, the “white bike” plan, proposed to ban car traffic from the city and replace it with 20,000 white bicycles unlocked for people to use freely. Other examples of “white plans,” included the white housing plan, suggesting that the city council ban speculation and legitimate squatting as a means to solve the housing shortage, and the white wives plan to create reproductive health clinics which offered advice and contraception for young women. The Provos gained enough popularity to win a seat on the city council in 1966. By 1967, the members of the group declared the Provos dead and moved on to other projects.

In 1969, squatting re-emerged with three groups that publicly squatted houses to protest the housing shortage in situationist media spectacles, *Woningburo de Kraker*, *Woningburo de Koevoet*, and *de Commune* (The Squatter Housing Agency, The Crowbar Housing Agency, and The Commune). The participants of these groups had either been members of or were heavily influenced by the Provos. While the Provos attacked a range of social institutions, these groups protested housing shortage and, in particular, the lack of social housing for young people. In the tradition of the white plans, they painted the doors of empty houses white and declared them speculated properties. The groups engineered media spectacles around their squatting actions that lasted a few days before they were evicted. During evictions and threats by owners, the squatting groups invited the media to witness and record the violence committed by the police and the threatening

behavior of the hired thugs. Furthermore, they organized a national squatting day in 1969.

Despite the media attention on their actions and their concrete target – a lack of housing for youth – the general public misinterpreted their messages. Housing seekers who visited the groups often believed that they were real estate bureaus whose purpose was to find them affordable housing. The housing seekers did not understand the “DIY” and anti-authoritarian messages that were essential to the squatting actions that the three groups organized. Moreover, due to the almost immediate evictions of the squatted houses and the police violence during evictions, the squatting actions failed to provide a sustainable housing solution.

Squatting groups that took over spaces for the sake of housing rather than to send an anti-authoritarian, situationist message were initiated by alternative youth support organizations that, ironically, received funds from the state. Recognizing that housing presented a central problem for young people, alternative youth support organizations lobbied policymakers and politicians to solve the problem by creating independent youth housing. Since lobbying had limited impact, the organizations then became involved in squatting and transformed it from a symbolic tool to a viable means to both protest and provide housing. In Amsterdam, they began a voluntary organization called the *Kraakpandendienst* (Squatted Houses Services Agency) to support the squatting of houses and the squats themselves. This organization emphasized “DIY” principals from its inception. Outside of Amsterdam, alternative youth service groups initiated squatting and the organization of the squatter groups while in Amsterdam both independent squatter groups and youth service organizations existed simultaneously. The independent groups used more radical rhetoric and promoted the use of violence more severely than the squatter groups associated with the alternative youth service organizations.

In terms of party politics, former Provos launched the *Kabouter* movement (the Gnomes). The *Kabouters* were anti-authoritarian, environmentalist anarchists, who opposed pollution, housing shortage, and car traffic in the inner city. They manifested these ideals by creating an alternative state in 1970, the *Oranje Vrijstaat*, which comprised of symbolic acts that served to parody the idea of states, particularly capitalist, social democratic ones. The *Oranje Vrijstaat*'s housing policy was to squat houses, enabling the *Kabouters* to possess a notable presence throughout the number of squatted *Kabouter* offices spread around the city.

A few months after the *Kabouters* launched the *Oranje Vrijstaat*, they significantly won five of the forty-five seats in the city council elections. The *Kabouters*' presence in the Amsterdam city council meant that the squatters movement had allies to influence municipal policy decisions.

Meanwhile, by 1970, the three situationist squatting groups – *Woningburo de Koevoet*, *de Kraker*, and *de Commune*, merged into one, called *Actie '70*

(Action 1970). Actie '70 and the *Kabouters* organized a national squatting day in 1970 to take over houses countrywide. In contrast to Amsterdam, the municipalities in the rest of the Netherlands responded to the squatters' protests by creating affordable housing for young people. Between the police repression, the short amount of time a squat existed before its eviction, and the concessions by the other municipalities to the squatters' demands, squatting as a practice was waning.

Surprisingly, a higher appeals court decision reversed this decline in 1971. At the time, squatters relied on a statute from 1914 that declared that someone could occupy or use a space without having legal entitlement to it. The practice of this statute translated into the requirement to display a table, bed, and chair to the police at the squatting action, if one wanted to establish residency in a property. In 1971, the Court of Higher Appeals ruled that squatting was not only not punishable as a criminal act, but that squatters retained the rights to domestic peace in their residences. This decision meant that squatters possessed the same rights as renters and homeowners to refuse entry to anyone, including the police and property owners. Hence, only a court order, often obtained after a lengthy procedure, could evict squatters.

With these elements in mind, the squatting of houses through public take over had significant support: legally, through the change in case law; organizationally, buttressed by the state-funded youth organizations; and politically, by being embedded with the *Kabouter* party in the city council. They just needed houses to squat. These houses became available as a result of the large-scale remaking of the urban spatial landscape planned during this period by the city government, beginning with the *Nieuwmarkt*buurt.

Nieuwmarktbuurt

In the late 1960s, the city council decided to build a four-lane highway to run through the inner city of Amsterdam, and a metro. Both were intended to connect the city center with a planned middle-class community in the far southeast edge of the city called the *Bijlmer*. To construct the highway and metro, the city planned to destroy the *Nieuwmarkt*buurt, an eighteenth-century former Jewish neighborhood which had languished dilapidated since World War II, when the majority of the property owners had been deported and killed in concentration camps.

The process of drastically remaking the urban landscape involved the – at times – forced relocation of the working-class locals to other parts of the city while a small number of residents protested the demolition and refused to leave. Furthermore, once the *Nieuwmarkt*buurt was emptied, the bulldozing stalled for years due to political disagreements regarding the financing of the project. Meanwhile, the local council had given two recently vacated buildings in this neighborhood to former *Provos* who had created a non-profit

organization, De Straat (The Street) for cultural innovations, such as art projects and the experimental implementation of the “white children” plan, a Provo idea to create child care facilities collectively run by a revolving group of parents. The local council’s endowment of the two buildings to De Straat proved highly controversial to the remaining residents. They demanded that De Straat’s projects should derive from collaboration with the neighborhood residents rather than vaguely on their behalf.

The disagreement between the working-class neighborhood residents and De Straat reflected tensions that arose in the alliances of neighborhood action groups and squatters; squatters were often ideologically romantic while neighborhood activists were more pragmatic. For example, squatters often sought to retain old housing at all costs and opposed the building of new social housing; while neighborhood groups advocated for the construction of more social housing in addition to the maintenance of older buildings when possible.

In the Nieuwmarkt, De Straat responded by connecting the neighborhood action group with people interested in squatting the emptied buildings to protest and delay the demolition. Meanwhile the neighborhood action group, encouraged by the neighborhood support center, lobbied politicians and mobilized support throughout the city. The neighbors and the squatters effectively worked together in the neighborhood action group and even formed a committee that reviewed potential squatters as a way to exclude non-political tourists who were only interested in free housing (Duivenvoorden 2000; Mamadouh 1992).

The Nieuwmarkt campaign eventually succeeded. The city council cancelled the highway plans and built a fraction of the planned metro beneath the inner city. Thus, the campaign prevented a radical transformation of the eighteenth-century center with its narrow streets and canals to a functionalist cityscape that privileged automobile access. Such urban planning was antithetical to a built environment that bred neighborhood cohesion and *gezelligheid*, a Dutch term that vaguely translates as warm coziness, with connotations of nostalgia and intimacy.

In terms of the squatters movement, the Nieuwmarkt campaign enabled the squatters to transition from disparate groups that existed simultaneously to a network of interdependent squatters groups. The independent squatter groups and the *kraaksprekuren* (KSUs, the squatting information hour), mainly neighborhood based, formed the nodes of the network. The *kraaksprekuren* held significant authority since the members of the KSUs decided who they supported in the squatting and maintenance of a house. The alarm list – a phone tree that squatters use to mobilize to defend against hired thugs and police officers – was instituted during this period, as well as the citywide and nationwide squatters consultation meetings. In cultural terms, the Nieuwmarkt campaign witnessed the transformation of squatting from an often symbolic protest tool, to a lifestyle that

combined activism and experimental forms of New Left communal living. Owens comments on the significance of the Nieuwmarkt campaign:

Squatting had become more than a way to simply put a roof over your head. It was a means of creating a better world, or at least a more livable city. Squatters began placing more emphasis not on the political message of squatting, but rather of the opportunities it gave to live an autonomous life, for self-development. (Owens 2004: 49)

In 1975, the city evicted the squatters from the houses that were scheduled to be demolished for the metro during which huge riots ensued between the squatters and the police.

The mythical 1980s

By the second half of the 1970s, a split unfolded in the squatters movement regarding attitudes towards the use of violence. A non-violence consensus had prevailed until a particularly brutal use of force by the police during the eviction of a squatted house on the Jacob Lennepstraat in 1978. As Erik Williams, a young squatter, who went to the eviction to film it, describes:

Squatters from throughout the entire city were standing in front of the building ... I stood there with my Super-8 camera then there came in buses of ME (riot police). Well, I had never seen such a thing, and I saw them coming towards me, and they ran towards the people and they immediately began to beat them up, and I was stunned. But I believe that everyone was really stunned, because the entire group that was standing there had also personally never experienced that before, and they stood there yelling "no violence, no violence" and the ME, yeah they began to hit them and the people were beaten away and I filmed everything from the start on in a sort of stupor. (Seelan 1996 as quoted in Owens 2004: 72)

With the shift in tactics in which squatters used violence without apprehension against the police and the hired thugs, conflicts arose between squatters who worked closely with alternative youth organizations and the squatters who considered themselves more political, who called themselves the Political Wing of the Squatters Movement (PvK) associated with the neighborhood, the Staatsliedenbuurt. The PvKers advocated for open and direct violent confrontation with the state instead of a defensive posture against police and the hired thugs.

The Grootte Keyser, a squatted mansion on the Keizergracht, and the immense defense of this house against eviction symbolized the squatters

movement's embrace of violence and the cultivation of a defiant attitude towards the so-called Mainstream. For most of its existence, the squatters who inhabited the Groote Keyser primarily aimed to in party rather than engage in political action. They often rented rooms to tourists and the key to the house was rumored to float around Dam Square available to anyone who sought a crash pad. When the eviction notice for the house arrived, most of the residents moved out, but ten refused to leave and instead barricaded the house to protect themselves against the eviction attempts of the bailiff and the police.

The PvKers from the Staatsliedenbuurt decided to take over the defense. They moved in, replacing the barricades of bed spirals with steel, and engineered a media spectacle around the house. They broadcast a pirate radio station from within the house (called the *Vrije Keyser* – the Free Emperor), and produced a number of documentary films that displayed the endless rows of paint bombs and Molotov cocktails that the squatters had prepared for the eviction. Countless documentaries and news clips from this period showcase tall, thin, masked, young men engaged in various activities, from debating suited news reporters to walking on the roof of the house to guard it from potential evictors. The squatters were ready to fight.

As Owens describes, “The Keyser became an armed camp, ready and waiting for the looming eviction” (2004: 74). According to Mamadouh, half of the squatters movement was willing to give up their lives for the cause of the Groote Keyser (1992: 144). Given this readiness and the emotional uproar around the building, Mayor Pollack refused to evict, claiming that it posed to be too dangerous for the public order. Instead, the city bought the building to create independent housing for young people.

The violent confrontation that the PvKers sought came unexpectedly during the attempted eviction of another squatted villa, the Vondelstraat. The three-day riot around the Vondelstraat has since defined images of squatters and Amsterdam in the 1980s. The squatters set up burning barricades and removed stones from the street to throw at the police. In reaction, the riot police attacked the house with a force of 1,200 police officers, helicopters, several tanks, and water cannons. As Owens narrates:

Tanks rolled through the streets of Amsterdam early on the morning of Monday 3 March, 1980 ... Their goal: to break through the barricades built by a large group of squatters who had occupied the building over the weekend, after beating back the police. The streets were blocked off with paving stones and garbage. Inside the walls, squatters celebrated their strength and victory. The *Vondelvrijstaat* [Vondel Free State] was a place of joy and excitement. Never before had squatters taken the offensive, and it seemed to be working. (Owens 2004: 49)

During the eviction of the Vondelstraat, over 10,000 people demonstrated against the city's heavy repression of the squatters, in particular the deployment of tanks against the city's own population.

After the Vondelstraat, the next defining and mediagenic riot took place during the coronation of Queen Beatrix on April 30, 1980. For months, the squatters had campaigned against the coronation with the motto, *Geen woning, geen kroning* (No housing, no coronation, a phrase that rhymes in Dutch) positing the use of state resources to celebrate the excesses of the coronation against the lack of funds directed to solve the housing shortage in the Netherlands.

To protest, squatters organized a nationwide squatting day during the coronation, opening hundreds of empty houses around the Netherlands. However, a group that called itself the Autonomen declared war on the Queen with a riot that lasted all day. For months afterwards, movement participants debated the riot: whether it was fruitful, who took responsibility for it, and its impact on the squatters' public image. Owens illustrates the different sides of the debate:

Piet believed that it was the best day ever for the movement – an exciting, powerful protest against the ruling class, which managed to include not only squatters, but also many disaffected citizens, who used this opportunity to make their displeasure known. The majority, however, felt differently. They considered the day a black eye for the movement. Wietsma had only one word to describe the events: “Terrible.” Most squatters believed that the protest neither represented any of the real interests of the movement, nor did it even accomplish anything for the values it did support. It was nothing more than meaningless destruction. (Owens, 2004: 78)

The coronation of Beatrix is widely considered both the height and the beginning of decline for the squatters movement. As Owens notes (2009), decline is subjective and can last for years, especially since the squatters movement continued for another thirty years after its so-called point of decline.

While at the level of public and scholarly discourse, this point may have signified the beginning of decline, culturally, this was a time of renaissance for the squatters' subculture. The squatters succeeded in realizing the absurdist, parodying goals of the Oranje Vrijstaat to create a state within a state. If one participated in the movement, one could live entirely in it without interacting with the Mainstream: one could grocery shop, weld, attend the cinema, find a plumber, and read newspapers, all from within the squatters' subculture.

Squatters boasted their own media. There were fifteen newspapers for and by squatters, including one that only related gossip, one intended for foreign squatters, and one for squatter children. The Squatters Newspaper (*De Kraakkrant*) had a circulation of 2,000. Squatters ran a major pirate radio station, a pirate television station, and regularly hacked into the city cable system to transmit. They formed printing press collectives to publish newspapers, pamphlets, books, posters, and other printed media.

The squatters' subculture featured cafes, restaurants, bars, infoshops, give away shops, bakeries, bookstores, bicycle repair shops, grocery stores, cinemas, welding workshops, dance clubs, performance spaces, medical clinics, rehearsal rooms, and a multiplicity of art initiatives and gallery spaces. An enormous infrastructure existed solely intended for and created by predominantly young people who lived on low incomes that derived from state benefits or university scholarships. Everything that could not be produced from within the movement with a combination of voluntary labor and cheap and readily available products, was stolen from the Mainstream, such as building materials used in squatted houses to renovate and barricade.

The squatters movement comprised of people involved in a wide assortment of radical left political issues such as anti-nuclear energy, anti-apartheid, anti-militarism, and anti-fascism. Many worked on solidarity campaigns with Nicaragua and El Salvador and organized attacks on the US Embassy to protest US foreign policy and the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The women's movement manifested in the squatters' subculture through a number of squats that banned the presence of men, to the point that during alarms, they permitted men to stand in front of the house but did not allow them to enter the squat to defend it from eviction.

A differentiation existed between activists who mainly identified as squatters versus activists who resided in squats but primarily invested their time and energy into other radical left issues. Mobilizing these activists for actions related to squatting was challenging since they were busy with other commitments and also because to be active in the squatters movement meant primarily participating in resistance during evictions. Furthermore, in the left activist community, squatters had the reputation for being violent, confrontational and extremely rude.

Violence on the front and back stages of the movement

The internal disagreement regarding the use of violence came to a head in 1982, with the riot during the eviction of the Lucky Luijk. The Lucky Luijk was a villa in which hired thugs had evicted the squatters in 1981. Despite the squatters' legal right to domestic peace, the police refused to help the squatters retake the house. The squatters then organized a massive action to violently evict the hired thugs and re-squat the space. With the media and political attention obtained from the squatters' campaigning, the city decided to purchase the house and convert it into social housing.

The city's decision proved controversial within the movement. A number of squatters felt content to leave the house because of its eventual conversion to social housing rather than remaining an unused object of speculation.

However, the PvKers from the Staatsliedenbuurt refused the offer, demanding that the city give social housing contracts to the house's squatter inhabitants since their efforts led to the house becoming social housing in the first place. Owens describes the feelings of Piet, who was involved in the negotiations around the Lucky Luijk:

Piet felt torn during the negotiations process over the Luijk. He believed that, even if the building was not going to end up in the hands of the squatters, it could still be put to use, because it would help working people, "families with kids, bus drivers, taxi drivers, it doesn't matter." On the other hand, he saw some value in confrontation and keeping the building. Both sides tried to seek his support. The hardliners "made me out to be a traitor, because I'll talk to the council, but on the other and, they were trying to appeal to me." (Seelan 1996 quoted in Owens, 2004: 130)

Despite the internal debate, the PvKers' stance was the answer to the city council's decision, who responded by evicting the squatters. Again, an enormous riot ensued during the eviction, during which the squatters set an empty city tram, Tram 10, on fire. The media coverage, and in particular, the image of the blazing tram, led to the squatters' losing public support in Amsterdam. Owens comments on how this image led to the loss of public support, "Whatever the actual cause of the fire, the image became forever associated with out-of-control, violent squatters willing to sacrifice the public safety for their own private gains" (2004: 123).

The internal debate that followed from the riot calcified existing tensions in the squatters movement. The PvKers, who were associated with the Staatsliedenbuurt neighborhood, had for years advocated for more radical and violent confrontations with the state. This group also organized the most successful squatting actions and choreographed violence during evictions. Such tactics often led to material concessions from the state in the form of legalized squatted houses and social housing. The views and actions of the PvKers and *kraakbonzen* (squatter bosses) contrasted sharply with non-violent squatters and those who squatted for the cultural opportunities enabled by the practice and the movement. They often critiqued the PvKers as authoritarian and for undermining the consensus-based decision making of the citywide squatters' consultation meeting. "The bosses, the men of the movement, hid a great deal of information just for themselves." (Seelan 1996 as quoted in Owens, 2004: 129)

Meanwhile, the PvKers considered squatters who failed to attend squatting actions and evictions as parasites. This was particularly aimed at artists who only wanted free space but lacked interest in the political activity that enabled the spaces to exist.

Despite the sizable resentment of the *kraakbonzen*, those who opposed the PvKers lacked their strategic acuity and skills. For example, deciding

to eschew the authority of the PvKers who dominated the *kraakspreekuur*, one group squatted a building on the Prins Hendrikskade. When a vast police force arrived to evict the house, broadcast live on radio and TV, no squatters responded to the Prins Hendrikskade squatters' alarm. With the media spectacle, the PvKers became involved. They succeeded in organizing a riot by mobilizing hundreds of squatters to fight the police, a deed that the anti-authoritarian squatters who resided in the house had failed to accomplish.

The burning of Tram 10 and the condemnation of the Lucky Lwijk riot as a failure shifted the movement's consensus regarding the use of violence to favor pragmatic negotiation with the state instead of confrontation. The PvKers retreated to the Staatsliedenbuurt neighborhood and fortified it into a bulwark of the squatters movement, which featured five hundred squatted spaces. A member of parliament who visited the neighborhood in 1984, proclaimed:

The Staatsliedenbuurt is actually no longer a part of the kingdom of the Netherlands. Authority has ceased to exist there; the laws of the squatters reign. Because of safety concerns, the police no longer patrol. What I experienced there was, in fact, an American situation. There are places in New York where the police are afraid to get out of their cars. They are afraid someone will be armed, and people on both sides will be killed. (Duivenvoorden quoted in Owens 2004: 182)

The police did not enter the neighborhood and the PvKers had developed strong relationships with the renters. Furthermore, the PvKers held strict standards for acceptable behavior of the squatters in this neighborhood, to the extent in which they evicted those who they considered problematic.

Isolated from the rest of the squatters' subculture, the PvKers in the Staatsliedenbuurt became more militant and extended their gaze beyond empty houses, hired thugs, and police officers, onto other squatters. During a number of violent evictions, a few arrested squatters had identified other squatters. Informing on other activists is taboo since its customary for activists in custody to remain silent for three days until their release (an expectation that continues today). To condemn this behavior, the PvKers formed a research organization to find the "traitors" – those arrested who identified other participants – then published posters with the names, photos, and addresses of these individuals. The PvKers' methods became even more draconian. They chased "suspected traitors" through the streets of Amsterdam with cars and searchlights. They beat up and threatened to torture another squatter with electric shock. In the film, *The City Was Ours*, Theo van der Gijssen dismissed the violence of this act, "He was well treated and those electrodes are irrelevant. It only counts if you use them" (Seelan

1996).⁶ The PvKers' tactics proved intolerable for a number of squatters. They decided to eject one of the main PvKers from the movement, Theo van der Giessen, by going to his house and beating him to the point in which he was hospitalized. After this attack, the rest of the PvKers retreated, leading to the squatters group in the Staatsliedenbuurt falling apart.

The historical treatments of the squatters movement conclude with the defeat of the PvKers and dissolving of the movement as a result of intense internal conflict. However, a number of consequential changes occurred that impacted the decline in participants in the movement. First off, two laws changed the legal landscape for squatters. In 1987, the first law, The Empty Property Law allows owners to take squatters to court anonymously, whereas previously, the owner had to know the name of one inhabitant in order to sue and evict. This meant that as long as the owner did not possess the legal name of any of the inhabitants, the residents of a squat could potentially remain in a house indefinitely. Second, in 1993, article 429 went into effect, declaring that only houses that are factually empty for a year could be squatted, further reducing the number of spaces available. As a result, squatters had to prove with some form of documentation to the police at squatting actions that the space had been empty for at least a year, a practice that was not necessary prior to this law.

In addition, the availability and quality of potentially squattable spaces had reduced considerably. In the 1970s and 1980s, most squatted buildings were massive warehouses located in the city center. These houses had been legalized into social housing and simply were no longer available to squat. Much of the abandoned properties that dominated the urban landscape were renovated and rented or sold. Anti-squatting was introduced in 1990, an arrangement in which an agency contracts people to "guard" a space, which is essentially a temporary rental agreement without Dutch tenancy rights (described more in detail in Chapter 1). The anti-squat system took care of the housing needs of young, single people, often students, the constituents who the squatters movement had previously attracted en masse.

Moreover, the social system that supported a squatter's lifestyle radically changed. The squatters in the 1970s and 1980s lived in a social welfare regime where the only preconditions to receive an unemployment allowance were to be sixteen years old and older and the ability to articulate one's incapacity to work. The preconditions became stricter, determining that one had to be twenty-three or older to qualify for public assistance and that the state could force someone to take a job in lieu of unemployment benefits. Also the system of university scholarships had transformed, limiting the number of years one could study and receive a living allowance. Last, during the 1970s and 1980s, one could fulfill study credits through activism, while in the 1990s, being an activist was seen as a diversion rather than a part of one's education.

Socio-political context during fieldwork 2006–10

The overwhelming majority of contemporary squatters are unaware of this brief history. A continuum of knowledge exists, from a vague awareness that “the squatters movement was big in the 1980s,” to a wider group of people who have seen the film, *De stad was van ons*, out of curiosity and interest, to a handful of Dutch activists who have written about the history of the squatters movement for university courses, a Bachelor, or a Master’s thesis, in which they read Duivenvoorden and possibly Mamadouh, both only available in Dutch.

Despite the general lack of knowledge about the history of the squatters movement, the idea of squatters “being big in the 1980s” casts a shadow on the much smaller, but still persistent squatters movement in the 2000s. Surprisingly, this sentiment within the movement of being a shadow of its former greatness is a constant in the movement’s discourse. In the documentaries which featured interviews with squatters, they often expressed a heavy nostalgia concerning a mythical heyday. In the 1970s, they referred to the late ’60s; in the late 1970s, the early ’70s. In 1981, they extolled 1980 as the moment of authentic activism, and in the mid-80s, the early 1980s was



Figure 0.2 Graffiti against the squatting ban circa 2006: “Fight for your housing rights. Stop the squatting ban”

the high point. By the 1990s, this sentiment became “the ’80s,” a mythmaking discourse which continues up to the present.

Although this nostalgia seemed timeless, during the period in which I conducted my fieldwork, this sentimentalization about the movement was repeated in political debates about squatting and became embedded with dominant xenophobic discourse. In reaction to mediagenic violent evictions or in discussing the issue of squatting, the main media message as well as the reaction of white, middle-class, and left-leaning Amsterdammers can be summarized as, “Squatting was widespread in the 1980s when it was idealistic. Now it’s done mainly by foreigners who do it for free housing rather than out of ideals.” I have encountered this sentiment an innumerable amount of times, such as whenever I have told people the topic of my research, on television news, and in the newspaper.

Consequently, the Amsterdam public has a conflicted view on squatting. On one level, they generally support it due to the housing shortage and the exploitative market conditions. On the other hand, this support is damaged by nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments that resent foreigners for exploiting a Dutch protest tactic. These feelings resonate with larger antipathy towards non-white immigrants, particularly working-class Turkish and Moroccans, in the Dutch public sphere. Last, the reasoning that the squatters movement has been taken over by foreigners was one of the main justifications for the passing of the national law that forbid squatting and criminalized squatters in 2010 (see conclusion).

In addition to a conflicted relationship with the “public,” a number of structural factors impacted the squatters movement in the second half of the 2000s. As already mentioned, anti-squat hugely undermined the squatters movement since the types of people who had squatted en masse in the past – white, middle-class students – instead house themselves as anti-squatters.

Moreover, the system of social housing has been in the process of being slowly dismantled. That is, the federal government decided to convert Amsterdam from a city of majority renters to majority owners by emptying social housing blocks of their renters, relocating the tenants, renovating the buildings, and then selling each unit one by one. During the emptying and relocating process, buildings often were squatted. However, the conversion to condominiums meant that social housing corporations were unwilling to give rental contracts to squatters. They could also more aggressively and quickly evict squatters in this political climate since judges were less likely to rule in favor of squatters than in the past. Consequently, while in the 1980s and 1990s, with sufficient preparation, squatters could expect to live in a building from five to ten years, during the period of fieldwork for this study, squatters could be evicted anytime within the first two weeks to a maximum of two years if they were lucky. Most squatters only spent a few months in a space.

Social movement literature review

There are no academic studies of internal dynamics of hierarchy and authority within social movement communities that engages with social movement theory. The neglect of internal dynamics and social movement performances and habitus, exists both in classical social movement literature and its recent culturally oriented scholarship, including those that result from ethnographic research and participant observation. In this section, I will first provide an overview of classical social movements literature and discuss its subsequent “cultural” turn. I then review recent studies of social movements, in particular, the alter-globalization and social centers movements and how these texts have summarily ignored internal dynamics in their analysis. Last, I situate this book within social movement studies.

Overview of the field of social movements

My approach to this study has been influenced by urban anthropology in both methods and theory (Caldeira 2000; Goddard 1996; Hansen 2001; Holmes 2000; Mitchell 2002; Pardo 1996) and the literature on global cities (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Harvey 1991; Hayden 1997; Ong 1999; Sassen 2001; Zukin 1996) rather than the field of social movements. Working in the anthropological tradition, my intellectual interests were straightforward. By living and working in this community, I was investigating the people who participated in this movement, where they were from, what they did every day, how they narrated their lives, and their ideological motivations.

In contrast, social movement literature is dominated by a series of recurrent theoretical questions, which are fairly removed from actual dynamics within social movements themselves. Analyzing culture in social movement communities with an anthropological perspective is highly difficult since social movement scholars investigate social movements as organizations rather than in seeking to understand the motivations of people who comprise these movements. Since the abstract concept of culture is itself difficult to engage with in this field, situating a study of micro-social internal dynamics and questions of hierarchy, authority, performance, and habitus poses a considerable challenge.

Neil Smelser, in *Theory of Collective Behavior* (1962) considers social movements as an example of collective behavior. He categorizes social movements as norm-oriented and value-oriented. Norm-oriented movements primarily seek social reform while value-oriented movements are “a collective attempt to restore, protect, modify, or create values in the name of a generalized belief” (Smelser 1962: 313). The critique of Smelser and the collective behaviorist approach to social movements is its implication that individuals participate in social movements only in reaction to crisis

and social marginalization (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 6, 12; Diani and Eyerman 1992: 5; Melucci 1989: 18).

The resource mobilization approach (Freeman 1979; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Zald and McCarthy 1987) is a response to the collective behaviorist approach, with its emphasis on rational and strategic choices of social movements to achieve their goals in relation to larger social and political structures (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Resource mobilization theorists suggest that social movements develop when structural conditions are conducive to their growth and that they decline when the political climate changes to their detriment (Whittier 1995). Whereas the collective behaviorist school emphasizes that feelings of unease, conflicts of interests, and oppositional ideologies are fundamental for collective action, resource mobilization scholars claim that such tensions are always present, and hence, cannot be the only conditions to explain the reasons that underlie when and why people collectively act for social change.

As a result, resource mobilization scholars concentrate on analyzing the social and political context on a meso and macro level that undergird the emergence of a social movement and how it succeeds. They attempt to understand the broader conditions in which discontent translates into collective action. It is an approach that heavily depends on tracing the interactions and impacts of the relationships between social movements, formal organizational structures, and the state. It relies on empirically observable events recorded in written texts such as newspaper reports and public records (Melucci 1989: 44).

Political process theories (Gamson 1990; McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1988; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1978) concentrate on the relationship between institutional political actors and protest. They examine the “political opportunity structures” defined as the external environment in which a social movement exists. Examples of political opportunity structures include whether the local political system is open to social movement concerns and grass-roots initiatives in general, electoral instability, whether influential allies are available, and if the elite tolerate protest. A movement’s ability to negotiate resources and the political playing field leads to the successful achievement of its goals.

In resource mobilization, the main subject of analysis is “the social movement organization” rather than participants. In political process theories, individuals exist but as “social movement actors.” “A social movement actor” is a rational person who carefully calculates costs and benefits of collective action, such as the presence of resources which support the movement and strategic interactions which develop the movement. In this area of literature, there is no description of the types of people who participate in social movements. There is no analysis of who they are, the different perspectives that they bring to the movement communities in which they become embedded, the variety of motivations that drive people to engage in collective action,

and the dynamics that arise from the interactions due to the multiplicity of locations of individuals who comprise these communities.

In the 1980s, European sociologists and political scientists performed a “coup” on the American dominated social movement literature and its emphasis on the resource mobilization approach, called the New Social Movements Approach (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). Instead of concentrating on rational and strategic tactics of social movements on a meso and macro level, European social scientists, as characterized by the work of Alberto Melucci, emphasized instead the values and meanings of collective action. They draw attention to how the symbolic values of actions that challenged the dominant political order created new forms of collective identity. The spotlighting of new forms of identity and space as being one of the many diffuse and non-material goals of collective action contrasts sharply with the analysis of the rational interest and strategic interactions on the part of the singular movement. In his critique of resource mobilization approaches, Melucci states:

Participants in collective action are not simply motivated by “economic” goals – calculating costs and benefits of their action – or by exchanging goods in a political market. They also seek goods which are not measurable and cannot be calculated. Contemporary social movements ... have shifted towards a non-political terrain: the need for self-realization in everyday life. In this respect social movements have a conflictual and antagonistic, but not a political orientation, because they challenge the logic of complex systems on cultural grounds. (Melucci 1989: 23)

Melucci argues that contemporary movements do not express themselves in instrumental action, operating instead as signs in which their actions serve as symbolic challenges to dominant codes. He further explains that social movements serve to renew cultural outlooks of dominant institutions and select new elites for the mainstream (Melucci 1989: 12).

With this European “coup,” culture was put on the table of social movement literature and was seriously considered by a number of American social movement scholars, including those who had specialized in resource mobilization and political process analysis (see edited volumes: Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Larana 1994; Meyer *et al.* 2002). Where the Europeans considered collective identity and the symbolic meanings attached to collective action by creating spaces away from a state that encroached on every possible intimate space, American scholars who analyzed the culture of social movements did so by focusing on the process of “framing,” (Snow and Benford 1986, 2000), the creation of expressive culture from within social movements and movement’s channeling of cultural traditions from the past for emotional resonance in the present (Eyerman and Jamison 1998), the impact of informal movement communities on movement

longevity (Rupp and Taylor 1999; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Whittier 1995, 1997), decision-making processes (Polletta 2002), as well as collective identity (Whittier 1995). Therefore, culture in social movement studies is often constructed as rational and instrumental and never a question of habitus, which is subconscious and habitual. In addition, there are no examinations of the possible disruptive clashes that occur from the intensive interaction of diverse backgrounds.

To research framing is to understand how social movements present themselves discursively to communicate to potential participants and motivate them to engage in collective action. According to Benford and Snow (2000), who founded frame analysis in social movement studies, "Collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization." Eyerman and Jamison critique the excessive focus on framing in social movement studies, charging that they are methods for studying social movements as texts and discourses for social scientists and not an active component of social movement activity (1998: 19). Furthermore, they argue that the emphasis on frames belittles social movement actors' perspectives and the meanings that they bring to their actions by investigating primarily how these discourses successfully bring about social change.

In *Music and Social Movements*, Eyerman and Jamison argue that social movements often have a greater impact culturally than politically because the reflection on habitual mores and the reconstitution of culture that occur during times of social change eventually seep into the culture of everyday life after the political uproar has simmered down (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998: 6, 11). Versus the dominant mode of analyzing social movements in instrumental terms, Eyerman and Jamison argue for the crucial role of culture within social movements to address its neglect in the literature and further connect cultural studies with social movement studies.

Nancy Whittier, in her book *Feminist Generations* (1995), used interviews and participant observation in a Midwestern radical women's community to consider questions of diversity of the collective identities of radical feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. The radical women's movement in the United States serves as an interesting counterexample from which to compare the squatters movement in Amsterdam since they share ardent anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian ideals. Furthermore, the "personal is political" ideology of American feminism – one that intends to de-construct gender norms on the level of practice and annihilate the boundaries between the private and public spheres – lends itself to the policing of habitus as a marker of conviction in new social movements where collective identity reigns.

Whittier argues that participants in the women's movement had varying experiences based on the social and political context of the group with whom they were associated – what she terms micro-cohorts. She explores, first, how radical feminists identified themselves in relation to liberal

feminists and then, how each generation of radical feminists developed distinct identities based on the specificity of the social and political context of their activist participation. Engaging with social movement literature, she contends that social movement communities are political and serve movement goals by sustaining movements during periods where the state and dominant cultures are hostile. Whittier defines the alternative women's culture primarily as institutions for expressive culture – music, art, bookstores, record companies, music festivals, and publishing houses.

Throughout the text, Whittier refers to a number of dynamics within the movement that fit into broader anthropological notions of culture but fails to examine them in more profound ways. She refers to women being “trashed out” of collectives, but refrains from explaining the term. What does it mean to be trashed? Who trashes and who is trashed out and what types of power relations exist between them? She mentions the conflicts between women identified as “bar lesbians” versus “political lesbians,” but again, does not discuss the tensions more in-depth – one that at first glance seems to reflect class differences. She alludes to the symbolism embedded in the decision on whether or not to shave one's legs, but again fails to explore the meanings that underlie such negotiations.

Taylor and Rupp utilize the tools of social movement literature to analyze how and why the women's movement continued during times of abeyance to contribute to debates within women and gender studies (1993). Taylor and Rupp, scholars of the American Women's movement in the twentieth century, use analytical frameworks from social movements literature to reconsider debates in women and gender studies about “women's culture” and “cultural feminism” as the antithesis of radical feminism in the second wave of the American Women's movement. Cultural feminism was posited as a countercultural retreat which ultimately betrayed radical feminist goals to eliminate capitalism and patriarchy.

Rupp and Taylor shift their focus away from the debates around the ideologies of these feminisms prominent in women and gender studies, and instead concentrate on the actual participants in the communities of the American Women's movement. They contend the practices of lesbian separatism, which highly valued investing in an alternative “women's culture” actually enabled radical feminist culture which, in turn, promoted feminist activism.

Like Whittier, a number of scholars obliquely mention the subcultures of social movements yet abstain from a more intensive analysis, especially around questions of habitus which require participant observation to collect data. Eyerman and Jamison refer to a:

Habitus of protest and rebellion as embodied in the ritualized practice of individuals and groups. Such practices help to personify the movement among individual activists and serve to shape preferences and tastes in much the same way that the conspicuous consumption of classical music

or champagne reflects reproductive strategies of certain segments of the middle class. (Eyerman and Jamison 1998: 28)

Nick Crossley calls for a further examination of a “radical habitus” in social movement studies. Crossley states that class-based skills exist and that social movement participants often feel pressured to conform to a particular type of dress code and lifestyle, dynamics that are ignored in the resource mobilization paradigm (Crossley 2003). In *Freedom is an Endless Meeting* (2002), Polletta focuses on how participatory democracy in decision making further promoted leftist social movements goals. In her examinations of a number of American social movements, she remarks on the habitus of activist culture. In the New Left, for example, despite the discourse against hierarchy, a masculinist mode of being dominated in what she describes as a “competitive intellectual bluster” (Polletta 2002: 157) of the New Left’s man of steel and his tough, sexual posturing.

With a focused investigation of these monographs, one can compile different taste choices and performances which accumulate to Crossley’s “radical habitus.” For men, this radical habitus comprises a range of different styles: wearing beards in the New Left of the 1970s (Crossley 2003), to being soft spoken in the meetings of the Direct Action Network described by Polletta; a style which is in itself a reaction to the machismo of the American New Left of the 1960s and 1970s. For women, radical habitus extended to the policing of conviction in the American Women’s movement. Such policing included noting whether or not a woman shaved her legs or, in the case of the “bar” versus “political lesbians,” how a consumption practice then becomes a code word for a whole set of assumptions regarding a woman’s class and political affiliations. The hesitancy by which these performances and habitus are explored reveals the limits of this scholarship. Such boundaries exist either because scholars lack the data to further analyze these lines of inquiry or and are committed to represent them uncritically despite having knowledge that contradicts their movements’ front stage self-representations.

A range of academic literature on the women’s movement (Freeman 1972; Gordon 2002; Polletta 2002; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Whittier 1995) describes the internal tensions and conflicts that result from the anti-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian organizing model that privileged friendship groups. Polletta and Freeman charge that the friendship group model is inherently problematic because it creates bonds based on trust that simultaneously exclude. Whittier explains such tensions through her concept of “micro-cohorts,” stating that the level of experience and seniority of activist women leads to differential power dynamics. Only Gordon examines internal power dynamics as partially arising from class, noting in particular which activists were considered qualified to act as media spokespersons. However, when Gordon discusses the impact of activists’ class backgrounds on internal dynamics, she relates it as a personal account,

not academically. The scholarship on the women's movement examining tensions around hierarchy all conclude that they arise from dynamics of seniority and friendship groups, and in doing so fail to examine how more pervasive structural differences between participants are the source of differential status hierarchies.

The alternative globalization and social centers movements

The alternative globalization and social centers movements have been the subject of recent ethnographically informed scholarship that engages with social movement studies. Maeckelbergh (2009) and Juris (2008) focus on decision-making processes, interactions, and networks; Scholl (2010) examines tactical interactions between protesters and authorities in summits in Europe; and Avery Natale (2010) considers how participants in black blocs conceptualize themselves as "queer."

These scholars have chosen to highlight decision-making processes, interactions, networks, and symbolic aesthetics rather than portraits and analysis of social movement communities and the people who comprise them. They neglect to answer basic questions such as:

- who are these people?
- where are they from?
- what motivates them?
- what are their personal circumstances?
- who depends on them?
- what are their backgrounds: class, race, ethnicity, etc.?
- why do they have the time, energy, and resources to travel all over the world, going back and forth between meetings and riots?

The nature of the alternative globalization movement lends itself to a focus on processes rather than communities as the movement only becomes visible during protests of intergovernmental summits that last approximately two weeks a year. This means that communities are not defined by sharing physical space but are more diffused, interacting mostly digitally until the time of the protests themselves. As a result, there is a focus on processes and aesthetics rather than the people who make up activist communities, leading to an absence of discussion on internal movement dynamics.

Moreover, the absence of critical inquiry into the structural locations of activists mars the literature with a perspective of white myopia. For example, by focusing on protesters' dress and their symbolic messages, the studies present a homogenized, ahistorical vision of "the activists" and

“black bloc” that fails to elucidate or challenge stereotypes of the compositions of the protesters.

The literature neglects to address the presumption that the protesters are entitled citizens of liberal democracies who are demonstrating their rights to protest and that the types of violence against them is fairly limited. The literature fails to question the supposition of who comprises the protesters, and how the state’s response varies accordingly, for example, states with a history of violent repression of protests or where the state is a liberal, Western European democracy, but the protesters are less privileged citizens, such as members of minority groups. The literature assumes the structural locations of these activists – which is highly educated, middle-class, privileged, white, and often European or American but never explicitly speaks to these conjectures and how the authorities’ response to protesters differs vastly if they were not assumed to be privileged whites (take, for example, the civil unrest in Paris suburbs created by working-class Muslim immigrant youth in 2005, to which the French state reacted by brutally policing the residents of these neighborhoods).

The literature promotes a mythic erasure of protesters’ identifications through their wearing a particular black bloc uniform. But they fail to recognize that it’s impossible to erase privilege, especially when confronted by the state’s apparatus of violence. Hence, rather than solely framing anarchists’ participations in black blocs as representing a liberatory future, it would be helpful for the literature to consider how this participation is a demonstration of white privilege and as a result, reinforces hegemony rather than liberation.

Research on the European social centers movement (Guzman-Concha 2008; Martínez 2007; Membretti 2007; Mudo 2004; 2005) similarly neglects internal movement dynamics. Similar to the writing on the women’s movement, the literature classifies tensions that arise from hierarchy and power relations that often contradict the ideal of direct, participatory, egalitarian democracy, as the result of seniority (Piazza 2007). By lumping all status tensions as a consequence of seniority, more prominent factors such as skills and habitus arising from class, gender, and race are ignored.

In general, with some ethnographically informed exceptions (Crane 2012; Portwood-Stacer 2010: 13; Rouhani 2012), recent social movement scholarship has suspended critical perspectives towards social movement communities and consequently rendered internal movement dynamics invisible.

Ethnographies of social movements

Interesting analysis on social movement culture has emerged in studies stemming from traditional ethnographic methods, in which researchers

systematically study and observe the groups they write about. Since anthropological approaches do not view movement cultures instrumentally but examine them on their own terms and seek to map the hierarchical dynamics of the social “field” as Bourdieu recommends, they often shed a light on internal dynamics that social movement literature does not. Interestingly, none of these ethnographies situate themselves within the theoretical field of social movements or the assumptions of emancipation being the natural telos of movements that informs this literature.

Thomas Blom Hansen’s ethnography of the Shiv Sena (2001), a Hindu fascist movement in Bombay, India, for example, examines how the dissolve of traditionally class-based affinities leads to the emergence of disturbing fascist identities founded on the construction of previously non-existent language-based ethnicities, wreaking havoc on a multi-lingual and multicultural urban landscape. A discourse interpolating fragile Hindu masculinities and a vilified Muslim “Other” bolsters the group’s membership and discursive authority in Bombay. The room and legitimacy for the articulation of popular resentment and discontent in all its facets, Hansen contextualizes, is created by democratic politics.

Sociologist Michael Schwalbe’s (1996) ethnography of the American men’s movement focuses entirely on the identity and masculinity concerns of the participants. According to Schwalbe’s research, informed by years of participant observation in the 1990s, participants of the men’s movement consist of highly educated, upper-middle-class men in their late forties and early fifties, who have mainly succeeded professionally in feminized social service professions (education, social work, counseling, non-profits). Using Victor Turner’s ideas about *communitas*, Schwalbe argues that the men participate in the men’s movement to reaffirm a fragile sense of masculinity and create a spontaneous *communitas* based on their mutual anxiety. In particular, Schwalbe contends that the participants actively avoid discussing politics and collective action because it may impede the sense of *communitas*. Thus, the unspoken goals of this movement are to serve the unmet identity needs of this particular profile of manhood rather than to change culture or society in any profound way.

David Graeber (2009), published a sprawling ethnography of his experiences as an “observing-participant” in the alternative globalization movement, specifically detailing the period leading to the protests of the World Trade Organization in Quebec City. Graeber argues that the practice of non-hierarchical decision making defines its political participation. The ideology of the antiglobalization movement is embedded in what he refers to as the practice of new forms of democracy via a different structure of decision making. In contrast to the other monographs on the alternative globalization movement that I highlighted earlier, Graeber actually discusses, albeit in a general way, what structural traits (class, educational level, race, gender, ethnicity) comprise the activists.

In his discussion of activist culture, Graeber distinguishes between two types of revolts which underlie people's motivations to participate in left-ist collective action: the revolt against alienation versus the revolt against oppression. In the American context, these motivations separate into lines of race and class. Thus, highly educated people, mainly – though not exclusively – white, are compelled by the antiglobalization movement's promise of a social world that combats the alienation that they find in the "Mainstream." By claiming a hippie or a punk identity, such people participate in a mass movement of bohemianism that, paradoxically, creates the very space to live as an oppositional, critical, anti-mainstream/mass thinker.

According to Graeber, activists who participate in collective action as a revolt against oppression, however, are often people of color and/or immigrants who do so through hierarchical organizations that combat specific discriminations. Thus, the difficulties that these groups have working together derive from wildly divergent underlying motivations. Furthermore, Graeber contends that the racial and class privileges inherent in the lifestyle choices, clothing styles, and consumption practices of self-identified hippies and punks who constitute the antiglobalization movement often offend activists who revolt against racialized and class oppression, since they would never be permitted to engage in practices such as "dumpster diving" or fighting in a black bloc without far more severe and violent reactions from the state. While Graeber still tends to romanticize activists and promote the movement in the style of the alterglobalization ethnographies that I described earlier, Graeber's explicit analysis of race and class dynamics reflects his focus on American-based groups in the alterglobalization movement in which such issues are more openly discussed than in Europe.

Social movement studies and this book

This study contributes to the work of a number of more culturally oriented social movement scholars by matching their theories with ethnographic situations within a social movement community, thus fleshing out abstract ideas.

Using Francesco Alberoni's theory of non-reciprocal love between authority figures and participants in social movements (1984), the present study demonstrates how in this particular movement community, non-reciprocal love has to be expressed via a negation of that love, that is, through hostility manifested in horrendous gossip, as well as aggression towards the lovers of authority figures (Chapter 2). Nancy Whittier (1995) argues that the collective identities of social movement participants vary according to both the micro-cohort and the political generation of which an activist belongs. I further explore this dynamic, arguing that activists who are culturally central eventually leave the movement, partially due to the presence of culturally marginal people who are unable to function outside the movement's

subculture (Chapter 4). As a result, for activists, micro-cohorts impact not only one's identity, but also the concrete length of time that one spends in the movement.

I engage most often with Alberto Melucci (1989; 1996), whose writing, though often abstract, most helpfully elucidates many of the contradictory dynamics that I witnessed. Melucci argues that in new social movements, participants primarily seek ephemeral symbolic gains instead of material conquests. Such an approach illuminates how the squatters movement can discursively claim that its main struggle is for housing but how at the practice level, participants are more interested in pursuing a radical left bohemian, communal existence than to fight for affordable housing.

Taking Melucci's classification of the types of social positions of participants in social movements, using ethnographic examples, I elaborate on the concepts of culturally marginal and culturally central and demonstrate how these terms constitute each other and what types of tensions occur when culturally marginal and culturally central people work together and seek recognition and authority (Chapter 2). Furthermore, to comprehend how authority works in this anti-authoritarian community, one must understand how a person's centrality or marginality in the mainstream contributes to their stature and ability to function within a movement subculture.

Melucci's writing on the participation of youth in social movements clarifies the role of social movement involvement in the biographies of culturally central, middle-class activists. He describes participation as a fake rite of passage for "youth", assuming that youth are privileged, highly educated, white, European, and entitled to the welfare state. Hence, on the one hand, social movement communities serve to enact liminality before entering into more adult lifestyles that require more responsibility. But on the other, social movement communities function as a space to act out an eternal youth, at worst, developing into retreats from the mainstream. Melucci's theories on youth participation in social movement communities helpfully illuminate the assumptions and contradictions around the *bildungsroman* of the left activist self that I saw in the squatters movement. However, the main bulk of my observations and reflections are borne directly out of my intense ethnographic and personal encounter with the world of the squatters in Amsterdam.

Methodology

Data collection

Prior to my fieldwork, I spent two summers in 2003 and 2004 (three months each) conducting pre-dissertation fieldwork in Amsterdam. I conducted informational interviews with members of *kraakspreekuren* (squatting

information hours) throughout Amsterdam, attended squatting actions, and generally hung out in the public social spaces of the squatters' subculture. In 2003, I attended a citywide squatters' meeting of approximately a hundred people. Upon introducing myself as a researcher, one of the attendees publicly interrogated me about my values and my choice of residence, ending his speech by saying: "I went to university where I studied sociology and I learned a method called participant observation (he enunciated the last two words slowly). This means that if you want to study squatting the real way then YOU SHOULD BE SQUATTING" (caps indicate yelling). Despite this experience, I continued pre-dissertation research the following summer.

I began my official fieldwork in the fall of 2005. Through the fall and winter, I conducted interviews with informants who I found through snowball sampling. I visited kraakspreekuren and squatted social centers, where I introduced myself and asked for interviews. Through these contacts, I arranged additional interviews. People who I had interviewed often then invited me to other squatter social events, where I met more squatters to interview. In the spring of 2006, I began a period of participant observation. I worked nights in the kitchen of a squatted social center as the second cook of one of two *vokus* (short for *volkskeuken*, people's kitchen). The collective of the social center then asked me to serve as the main cook for the second night. Cooking in the voku completely changed my fieldwork because I transitioned from a position of interviewing squatters to becoming a member of the collective of a squatted social space. Also, it proved an effective means for meeting people since people who attend vokus often feel grateful to the cook for the long hours and effort of cooking and seek to socially connect with the cook. On my cooking nights, I hung out with squatters for hours afterwards.

These experiences originally formed the basis for my ethnography. However, at the point where I began to write my dissertation, I found myself without a place to live and without enough money to rent a flat in Amsterdam. Since I already possessed the contacts, I moved into the living group of a squatted house in the heart of a squatters' community in a neighborhood in Amsterdam. I had sincerely believed at that point that my fieldwork had terminated; looking back, I realize that it had just begun. I eventually lived as a squatter for over two years.

I resided in the first house for about a year and a half and plunged myself socially and politically into this community. I continued cooking in the kitchen of the squatted social space as the voku coordinator. With the help of my fellow squatters, I installed a heater in my room and did physical repairs to my house. I actively participated as a member of the social space's collective. I took part in every squatting action in the neighborhood. Every weekend, I attended parties throughout the squatters' scene in the city. When my house became threatened with eviction, I worked with my housemates and other squatters in the neighborhood on a campaign to defend it from



Figure 0.3 The author cooking in a squatted restaurant, 2006

eviction by developing strategy, organizing actions, lobbying politicians, and writing press materials. The campaign successfully prevented the house from being evicted for over a year.

After being evicted from this first house a year later, I moved into another squatted house for two months and then onto a block of squatted houses where I had my own apartment. I felt happy living in this block of houses because I had the comfort and privacy of my own apartment but could easily visit the living groups in the block when I wished. I had avoided the violence of squatter life up until that point, but the seemingly utopic living arrangement was disturbed one night when I was woken at 4 a.m. to the sound of people screaming and police sirens. Police had responded to a noise complaint due to a party and the situation escalated. To the surprise of most of the veteran squatters involved, the police evicted the block of houses, arrested all fifty of the inhabitants, and impounded all possessions, without an eviction order. This event proved shocking in its brutality, particularly because the police behaved outside the institutionalized set of rules and behavior that police and squatters expect from each other.

The fear of seeing the police surround the house and arbitrarily beat random pedestrians on the street, managing the hysterical reactions of the people around me inside the house during the siege, the brutality of the

eviction, the claustrophobia of sitting in jail, and then, after being released, not knowing if or when I could obtain my possessions from the police were traumatizing features of this experience. Although I wanted to stop squatting, I still could not afford to rent.

After this eviction, I moved into my fourth squatted house. Still recovering from the police eviction, I interpreted the unstated codes of the living group who had invited me (see Chapter 3 on living groups). In exchange for the colossal room and high status in the living group, the group expected me to develop the campaign for the house's defense. I fulfilled the expected role to the best of my ability and managed a coalition of squatters, renters, undocumented immigrants residing in the building, and the renter's union in the neighborhood. Although this campaign was also fairly successful and brought me further squatter capital (see Chapter 1), I realized after a few months that the cost of squatting had outweighed the benefits and moved to rental accommodation to finish my dissertation.

These experiences provided the data for this ethnography. My fieldwork experience was fairly intense, dramatic, and traumatic. However, methodologically, I learned the value of participant observation. If I had not lived in this community as a squatter instead relying only on the interviews, I would have had a much more limited and idealized view of this community. By becoming a squatter, I could understand clearly the gap between how my informants talked about their lives in interviews versus how they practiced their lives.

My researcher positionality

In order to further explore my position in relation to this community, it's best to understand it as a relationship that changed during the three-and-a-half years that I lived and worked in a squatters' community. Furthermore, the fairly intimate relationship that I had with members of my neighborhood community differed substantially from how I interacted with squatters in Amsterdam from outside this neighborhood.

From August 2005 to November 2006, I introduced myself to every squatter I met as a researcher and was known primarily as a researcher who was working at a squatters' social center. In November 2006, I moved into a squatted living group. All of my fellow squatters in my neighborhood community knew me as a researcher but upon moving into this community, my relationship changed with them. My squatter housemates and I interacted with each other as people living together, cooperating on chores, and sharing private space. The term "sharing private space" refers to the intimacies resulting from living with people as well as the types of close bonds one forms when residing in a semi-legal housing situation where one is under constant threat of eviction. I overheard the arguments between my housemates and

their lovers. My housemates also knew minute details about my personal habits such as what I ate for breakfast, how many times a month I took long baths, and my various experiences negotiating Dutch residence permits and scholarly affiliations. I participated in discussions about the mundane tasks of daily life, from washing the dishes to scolding each other about forgetting to lock the door.

My other fellow squatters in this community knew me as one of the members of this community who worked at the social center and participated in its mutual aid and its social life. The squats were located anywhere from half a block away to a fifteen-minute walk from each other. The social life was comprised of eating together at the voku twice a week and then hanging out for hours afterwards, drinking and talking. Members of this community commonly ate at each other's houses. Most of the squatters in this community had flexible schedules since they either lacked paid employment (including myself during the initial year and a half that I was a squatter), were students, or worked part-time. This meant that people spent hours hanging out, drinking, using soft drugs, until three or four in the morning during the week, either in the social center, or in each other's houses. During the weekend, there were parties in squats throughout the city. On Friday and Saturday nights, a whole group from this neighborhood often went out together to party and bar-hop. On Sundays, active members of this community met again to squat houses. I lived this lifestyle for approximately one year.

In May 2007, my participation in this community changed when I became involved in the campaign to defend the squat where I resided for which I eventually earned "scene points" (see Chapter 1). My squatter capital from the campaign of this first house and my work in the social center led me to be invited to live in my third and fourth squatted houses. During the last year that I resided as a squatter, from January through December 2008, almost no one in this community identified me purely as a researcher. My squatter friends all knew that I was writing my dissertation on the squatters movement but none asked me about its content. People who joined the subculture after I had assumed that I was a fellow squatter without knowing more detailed information about me. In the squatters' subculture, people generally do not ask personal details about each other's lives, such as their education and their professions. Of the few who asked me more detailed questions after knowing me superficially for years (questions such as, So, what do you do? Do you have a job? Are you studying? Are you thinking of going to university?), almost none asked details about the content of my writing.

I suspect that the reason why most squatters had almost no interest in my research or my writing was due to the fair amount of researchers who regularly present themselves in the squatters movement. Thus, most squatters, especially those who work at kraakspreekuren or in social centers,

are accustomed to interacting with researchers, ranging from undergraduate students writing a paper to tenured academics. Moreover, a number of squatters write about the squatters movement academically at an undergraduate and a postgraduate level. As a result, my role as a researcher did not particularly distinguish me. I believe that my reliably working in the social center as a cook, and then, my conforming to the role of a “good squatter” set me apart from other researchers who often limited their contact with the squatters movement to analysis of websites, indymedia articles, books, and at most, one visit to a kraakspreekuur or by attending a squatters’ demonstration.

I find it difficult to assess how much status I had in the community for “non-movement” parts of my life that earned me prestige in Amsterdam outside the squatters’ subculture, specifically, doing a PhD, being a student at Yale, and being American. Despite the discursive rejection of academic status, university education and in particular, working on a PhD, holds value in the squatters’ subculture. Once again, I was not unique since other squatters in this community also have PhDs or were in the process of writing their dissertations. My position as a Yale student may have brought some prestige when I initially began fieldwork.⁷ As I developed relationships with fellow squatters, I believe that this prestige subsided. Being an American in a radical left activist community did not earn me estimation especially in the context of the Iraq war and the widespread international hatred of George W. Bush. Ultimately, my American citizenship and my position as a Yale PhD student had a subconscious rather than a transparent impact on my relationships with members of this community because these privileges demonstrated to them and to myself that I always possessed opportunities to leave this subculture at will (see Chapter 4 about entrapping marginality).

Outside of the squatted neighborhood where I lived and worked, Amsterdam squatters mainly related to me as the girlfriend of a *kraakbonz* (squatter boss). The number of times that squatters approached me merely to ask questions or make comments about this kraakbonz is too numerous to recount although I discuss the phenomenon of gossip, sexuality, and authority more in-depth in Chapter 2. The combination of my being a non-white, non-punk, American and in a romantic relationship with an authority figure led me to have a reputation on the level of the Amsterdam squatters movement. However, I do not classify this reputation as “capital” because it is not composed of a background of skills and achievements, but from the sexist perspective of being attached to a male authority figure.

My clarification on my own position in this community can only be partial and subjective since it’s impossible to objectively analyze oneself and one’s impact on others. I believe that I earned the respect of my fellow squatters according to the internal values of this movement, but that I was also

subject to the same scrutiny, distrust, and violence that underlie how this community operates. Due to the legal liminality of squatting, I was structurally at risk and suffered as a consequence. However, methodologically, these vulnerabilities were apparent to my fellow squatters who decided to share their lives with me, both formally via interviews and informally through the practice of community living.

My personal circumstance is important for understanding my position in relation to this community. The squatters offered me a large room – a physical space – and an emotional space in their community. I was factually interdependent with the squatters. I needed them beyond the data that they provided through the interviews and the observations. They helped me in the minute details of squatter life, such as with installing heaters and toilets. I dedicated myself to the campaign to defend my first house not to have the novel experience of working on a squatters campaign but because I simply did not want to be evicted from a beautiful house. After this house was evicted, I spent a year living nomadically as a squatter, moving from house to house, which I found overly stressful due to lack of stability

I clearly mark quotes from interviews. All other quotes originate from casual conversations and were recorded in my field notes. I changed the names and identifying details of informants to the best of my ability.

Participant observation versus militant ethnographer and observing-participant

My researcher positionality differs from the ethnographers of the alternative globalization movement who classify themselves as “observing participants” (Graeber 2009, Scholl 2010) or “militant/engaged ethnographers” (Juris 2008, Maeckelbergh 2009). This self-characterization creates an intentional distance from the ideal of objectivity in more positivist social sciences, which dominates social movement studies, and emphasizes that their commitment to their activist identities is equal to or greater than to their academic production.

I consider my work in the anthropological tradition of ethnographic fieldwork comprised of systematic, long-term, participant observation and my intended audience wider than only activists. In contrast to many movement researchers, I did not begin as an activist and then decide to write a dissertation about a movement to which I was emotionally and politically committed to; rather, I began as a researcher and then became an activist in the squatters movement. Although my positionality in this movement is complicated, my writing does not seek to promote the squatters movement in Amsterdam but to analyze it by systematically measuring the practices of the participants by the movement’s dominant internal discourses and ideologies.

As mentioned above, a number of movement researchers feel their academic production serves as an extension of their activism. I do not share this approach. The role of researcher and of activist demand varying skills and modes of operation that at times may or may not overlap. To successfully produce academically, one is required to be diligent, to have the capacity to spend hours at a time reading texts and taking notes, to possess a good memory, feel comfortable with a certain amount of isolation, have copious amount of self-motivation, and a commitment to maintaining a peaceful and stable life that enables the conditions for writing and analysis. To be a capable activist in a radical left community that defines itself by committing direct action against the state, one should be fearless during acts of violence, detail-oriented, reliable, communicative, enjoy working intensely and collaboratively with others, and accept a certain amount of instability and chaos in one's life.

Although it's possible to possess all of these skills, in the year and half that I lived in a squat while writing my dissertation, I found it challenging to combine writing with the nitty-gritty of an activist's life. This separation failed because the pressing tasks of my squatter's life, from managing the details of an eviction court case to strategizing on how to react to the threats of the thugs sent to harass me and my squatter housemates (we cut off their water supply and they responded by throwing plastic bags of their feces into our backyard), often overwhelmed me and prevented me from having the peace of mind to analyze and write. It comes as no surprise that I wrote the majority of my dissertation after I stopped squatting.

Since these two roles require divergent sets of skills, I do not see my writing as an activist act. As a squatter, what "counted" for myself and the other members of my community were the daily tasks that enabled the continuation of a squatted community in the face of constant threat. If I had failed in the thousands of tiny details that constituted a squatter's life, such as making sure that the door was closed to thugs, police, and owners, my writing would ring hollow and meaningless even if it were full of praise.

I understand that social movement scholars often refrain from critically analyzing internal social movement dynamics due to a reluctance to put pressure on activists who are already contending with vast challenges, from repression to organizing against increasingly neoliberal regimes. My critique does not condemn this movement without empathy for its struggles and aims. Rather, the critique I offer is a tool arising from years of meticulous participant observation research from someone who sympathizes with this movement.

My hope is that activists can use this critique of internal dynamics to rethink how to overcome such persistent contradictions and problems. I have presented my work to numerous audiences of squatters and received a range of reactions. Some have supported the analysis positively – finding it refreshing – while others have been offended, not by its content but rather

fearing that a critique from a movement “insider” could damage the movement’s strategic goals. Ultimately, I hope this critique promotes transparency rather than denial in order to avoid reproducing the very dynamics that autonomous activists find oppressive in the “Mainstream.”

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1: squatter capital

This chapter introduces a number of classifications and theoretical concepts. It presents a matrix of the types of skills and the style of the identity-making performances necessary to enable one to inhabit the ideal of the authentic squatter. Squatter capital, that is, specific skills and the differential prestige that one gains by excelling in such skills, describes the unspoken value system of the internal social world of the squatters movement. Furthermore, to achieve a sense of authenticity, one must demonstrate that one has mastered and rejected tastes and values, both mainstream and those associated with the radical left; as well as performing an inculcated middle-class value orientation to render invisible and natural a long, arduous and self-conscious processes of socialization and skill acquisition.

Chapter 2: the habitus of emotional sovereignty

This chapter explores how authority functions in this community. Specifically, the types of habitus and skills possessed by those who hold authority in the movement. I examine the consequences of participants’ backgrounds on the activities of the movement and the invisible logic of why and how more culturally central people, who have a number of resources needed by a movement, accumulate capital and become authority figures.

Chapter 3: “showing commitment” and emotional management

This chapter presents a cartography of internal power dynamics within the intimate space of squatted houses. Squatted houses comprise the fundamental basis of the structure of the squatters movement in Amsterdam. Communal living groups within squatted households both reflect and refract larger movement dynamics of hierarchy and authority. They reflect larger movement standards in the sense that one’s squatter capital contributes

to one's status position within a squatted household. They refract in that within a household, the highest values are to maintain a lively and peaceful group dynamic, silently maintain the unspoken hierarchies within a group without challenging them, and to avoid tension and conflict.

Chapter 4: liminal adolescence or entrapping marginality?

In this chapter, I consider why social movement subcultures often serve as a form of youth culture. This leads to a number of activists constructing their involvements in social movements as a liminal, youthful stage in their lives before they transition to so-called adult lifestyles which require long-term commitment and responsibility, such as by dedicating themselves to a career and/or a family. Moreover, someone who has already transitioned into an adult lifestyle can then enter a movement subculture and revert to a youth culture's way of living defined by changeability, temporariness, and lack of responsibility.

Conclusion: the economy of unromantic solidarity

I conclude by reflecting on how this movement reproduces two social profiles of centrality and marginality and its economy of unromantic solidarity.

Notes

- 1 I capitalize Mainstream in order to convey that this is an ideological classification of the world of "normal people" against whom squatters are identifying themselves.
- 2 Owens analyzes each step of decline in-depth, with quotes from interviews of twenty-eight different squatters, many of whom are women.
- 3 The shift in the composition of the urban population results from a number of factors. In the 1970s, the Netherlands had a guest worker policy leading to a substantial migration of laborers from Turkey and Morocco. The Dutch state intended this policy to be temporary and never expected these workers to settle in the Netherlands. Regardless, the workers remained and reunited with their families, who immigrated to the Netherlands and began their own families. Furthermore, Suriname, a former Dutch colony, achieved independence in 1975. Consequently, a huge influx of Surinamese immigrated to the Netherlands between 1975–80 (after which, Surinamers could no longer claim Dutch citizenship).
- 4 Social housing refers to low-cost rental housing, the vast majority of which was originally built by a variety of associations (Communist, Protestants, Catholic,

- Socialist, etc.) for their members. From the post-war period through the 1980s, one became a member of a particular housing association and waited for several years to receive an apartment. Eventually, in the 1990s, the distribution system radically reformed so that all social housing was available through one database. By the time of my fieldwork, the average waiting time in Amsterdam was fifteen years.
- 5 During this period, single people under the age of twenty-seven lacked the right to access social housing. The housing policy privileged people with more years on the social housing waiting list. This system automatically discriminated against young people and expected them to live with their parents, even if they had started their own families. Duivenvoorden recounts a story of a young man who was on the verge of committing suicide because he lived in a tiny one room apartment with his wife. His two children were placed in state child care because the state had deemed his housing unfit for the children to share the space with the parents. Helpless and frustrated, the young man literally was on the verge of killing himself before the housing authorities allocated him adequate housing for his family to live together.
 - 6 I once met a member of the PvK at a squat party in 2006. I asked him about the torture and the electric shock threat from the film. He responded nearly identically as Theo van der Giessen, “Well, it’s not torture if you say you are going to use electric shock on someone. Its only torture if you actually use the electric shock.”
 - 7 During two separate conversations with squatters working on their PhDs, when I informed them that I was studying at Yale, both responded, “What are you doing here with us?”