

Can Vies: The Reason of Force in the Barcelona Police¹

When the force of reason is subjugated by the reason of force, no one can evoke laws and rights. In such a situation, the laws are arbitrary and their application does not derive from a State of rights, but a State of abuse in which the violence monopolized by the government is placed in the service of privileged interests. In such a case, resistance to abuse is legitimate; even better, the right to resist and defend oneself is the only veritable right. Consequently, from the point of view of liberty, dignity and reason, which are the veritable sources of rights, the protests against the demolition of the occupied and self-managed space of Can Vies,² which is located in the Sants-Montjuïc neighborhood, were perfectly justified. Its demolition hasn't served as a pretext for intolerable violence by the itinerant minorities who "take advantage of grievances," as the authorities (and the police's UGT union) claim: it has simply been a proof of institutional, gratuitous and savage barbarity, as usual.

The city called Barcelona is no longer a roomy colony organized by a community of inhabitants, as it was when it was founded; it is no longer an industrial town full of workers employed by the manufacturers, as it was previously; the Barcelonese agglomeration is only an open and peaceful space for consumers, at the heart of which all human movement must be regulated and supervised in order to guarantee its transparency and functioning. Barcelona is not ruled by its inhabitants but by a caste that is political and financial, vertical and authoritarian, parasitical and usurping, and this caste has made urban management its privileged way of life. What matters to these leaders is the "Barcelona brand," that is to say, that which gives it a smooth and calm image, like that of a

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² A squatted and self-managed social center, Can Vies was founded in 1997. Ostensibly owned by Barcelona's transportation authority, the building was evicted and demolition of it began on 26 May 2014. These were actions that touched off three consecutive nights of protest and rioting, not only in Barcelona, but in other cities as well.

commercial center or theme park, favorable to business, to shopping, to commercialized leisure and tourism. It is obvious that the spectacle of a consumable Barcelona needs a space without contradictions or ambiguities, one completely subjugated and available to the buyer.

This new urban model cannot allow the existence of truly public places, without mediations or barriers, and still less can it allow the existence of horizontally managed sites: on the contrary, everything must function in a hierarchical, monitored framework in which technologies, regulations, the real estate market and urbanism work in the service of rapacious leaders. The exercise of [any] authority in these conditions is fundamentally a police operation. In this phase, politics becomes confused with repression; management, surveillance and order are one and the same thing, which means that governmental authority is exercised through the Ministry for Public Order, especially. Politics is no longer the affair of politicians, but the implacable security forces. All political and social problems that this aberrant town-model constantly cause will never be recognized as such since the population has no right to complain about this best of all possible worlds. The only response from the dominant power that has confiscated popular decision-making is violence.

In the affair of Can Vies, it is clear that the municipal authorities never intended to propose alternatives that departed from the official, bureaucratic circuit and that any meeting was condemned [in advance] to manipulations and lies because, by proposing the existence of a space placed under unacceptable administrative supervision, they only sought to suppress this [formerly] free space. The disproportionate police force used for the eviction shows this. They hadn't foreseen the help of other collectives or the support of the neighborhoods in the town center. They also didn't expect the solidarity of other neighborhoods, as was the case on that fine morning. This was why the forces of law and order were initially surprised. Where was the ultra-sound cannon, and why didn't the cops make immediate use of their "sticky foam" bullets? This is what the representative of the police's SMT-CCOO³ union wondered, because the repression was the work of the salaried mercenaries regulated by an agreements that authorized foam projectiles, and the trade unions want a thorough repression without any risk to their members. Everyone can see the results. The quasi-military occupation of the neighborhood, indiscriminate police violence, arrests and injuries. . . .

All the media efforts by Mayor Trias, Minister for Public Order Espadaler, and District Councilor Jordi Martí have been designed, first and foremost, to defend the violent actions of the police, "guardians of the right to property" and "executors of a clear decree from the Supreme Court." In fact, they haven't given

³ CCOO stands for "Comisiones Obreras."

too many explanations: “I don’t know what would happen if the police had to justify themselves” (Espadaler); “the forces of order were right. When the Mossos⁴ go into action, there is a reason for it” (Trias). Furthermore, their efforts aimed at presenting the protests as the work of infiltrated violent groups and at dividing the protesters into peaceful and “anti-system” radicals in order to “find the formulae of consensus” with the former and to bludgeon and imprison the latter. In short, this was an old political tactic that is useful when force hasn’t produced the counted-upon result. These demagogues are disgusting, but then again they always are. We don’t accuse the authorities of lacking subtleness. The only thing they need is a lack of scruples!

Thus we are not faced with an unusual and isolated event that took place in a perfectly democratic framework in which everyone has a voice and the possibility to be heard. In reality, the iniquity of the authorities and the brutality of the police forces will be more and more usual if the population doesn’t resign itself to doing what they are ordered to do. Because if the population is never right, it is not sovereign because it has no force or, rather, it does not have the monopoly on force that the law of domination grants to power. The total domination of Capital demands a type of urban space that is managed like a business and pacified like a prison. In such a space, there is no place for assemblies or the forms of life that exist at the margins of the market economy. In this space, the framework cannot be any more authoritarian, and politics cannot be distinguished from social control. In a world oriented towards totalitarianism, political management is repression.

Can Vies was a stumbling block for Barcelonese power. It seems that it wasn’t removed without difficulty. Resistance to the demolition was exemplary in more than one way, which proves that there are people who haven’t adapted themselves to the slave behavior that has been demanded of them. This is a reason to rejoice. And because stumbling blocks will not be lacking (today there are many occupied places), we count on many others in the near future!

The struggle continues. *Visca Can Vies!*

⁴ The *Mossos d'Esquadra* (“squad lads”) are the police force in Catalan.