

◆ Chapter 4

Radical Exposures: The Photography of Eviction in Crisis-Era Spain

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Introduction

In the introduction to *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay makes a bold assertion that reframes common perceptions about photography and the photograph itself. Azoulay advocates for “an ontology of a certain form of human being-with-others in which the camera or the photograph are implicated” (18), conceiving of a critical, triadic, and interdependent approach to photography, whereby the spectator engages in an active, public, and shared watching that has the potential to redefine what it means to be a citizen (25).¹ According to Azoulay, what is needed today is “an ontological description of photography” that “suspend[s] the simple syntax of the sentence divided into subject, verb, predicate and adjective—*photographer photographs a photograph with a camera*—which has organized the discussion of photography for so long” (18, emphasis in original). Azoulay’s interest is with the notion of a “citenry of photography” (70), which illuminates our understanding of both the medium and the evolving nature of democratic belonging.

The idea that photographs record reality, or that they offer an accurate and credible depiction of the visible, was put to rest long before the arrival of the digital era. Yet the “democratization of the social media revolution” (Ritchin 48), whereby anyone with a mobile device could instantaneously document, edit, share, or comment on an immediate reality, has reinvigorated debates about the role of not only photography and its practitioners, but also that of spectators. As Fred Ritchin writes in *Bending the Frame*, “the collapsing boundaries between author and reader . . . open[s] up the expectation that the

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greater media world may now function in more of a conversational rather than simply a hierarchical, mostly top-down system” (11). Following Azoulay and Ritchin, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites’s *The Public Image: Photography and Civil Spectatorship* advocates for “a new discourse on photography as a public art for the 21st century” (4), one that “regularly connects individual experience with the expectations of citizenship” (14). Hariman and Lucaites tackle some of the most frequent criticisms of photography past and present: that it anesthetizes, de-contextualizes, or distorts reality; that its ubiquity depletes it of meaning; that it is a lesser art form; and that it can be easily manipulated. At the same time, they articulate how images compel us to interrogate “what it means to see and be seen as citizens” (78).

It is a critical time in which to consider how such a “political ontology of photography” (Azoulay, *Civil Imagination* 18) can inform and invigorate contemporary debates about citizenship, home, and belonging. In the twenty-first century, a vast body of photographic images attests to sociologist Saskia Sassen’s observation that “we are confronting a formidable problem in our global political economy: the emergence of a new logics of *expulsion*” (1, emphasis in original). Images of expulsion invite us to confront the contested nature of home and belonging in democratic society. In recent years, visual scholars have employed images of out-migration and reverse migration to do just that. However, what to date has received relatively little attention is the photography of home eviction, a social problem brought to the foreground by the global financial crisis (GFC) and Matthew Desmond’s work of nonfiction, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2017.²

In Spain, the ongoing fallout from the GFC provoked extremely high unemployment rates (particularly for youth), out-migration, abandoned construction projects, foreclosures, and the eviction of hundreds of thousands of families. As is by now well-established, prior to the crisis, Spain had one of the highest rates of home ownership in the European Union (approximately 80 percent), with a social housing stock of 2 percent and a significantly undeveloped rental sector (Kenna 16).³ As Padraic Kenna notes, “the absence of any alternatives to home ownership rendered Spanish households vulnerable, due to their reliance on mortgages” (16). While exact statistics for the number of evictions remain unavailable, we can get a sense of the breadth of the problem by concentrating our attention on the most severe period of the crisis in Spain, when there were “some 210 000 mortgage related evictions between 2010 and 2015. In the rented sector, there were some 206 000 evictions in the period” (Kenna 19).⁴ During this five-year period, a variety of factors helped draw attention to Spain as a particularly severe example of the ravages of the boom and bust of the housing bubble. A series of highly-publicized evictions

and suicides drew international outcry from human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch (2014) and Amnesty International (2015), who charged that the right to housing—guaranteed by Article 47 of the Spanish constitution—was under attack. The 2009 creation of the PAH (Platform for Mortgage Victims), a grassroots social movement, was critical, reframing the discourse on home and housing, providing support for those on the verge of eviction, and, in many cases, successfully impeding evictions from proceeding.⁵ Yet, the work of the PAH might also be seen as being in dialogue with that of Spanish photojournalists, whose frequent presence at the site of evictions in process or at their immediate aftermath helped visualize and communicate the “spaces of the expelled” (Sassen 222).

In this essay, I examine the work of four photographers whose projects in crisis-era Spain (2008–2015) depict what Sassen calls “one of the most brutal forms of expulsion . . . the eviction of people from their homes” (48). While it is crucial to signal the fashion in which these projects document and archive a specific form of “violent unhousing” (McClanahan 115) in the twenty-first century, of greater concern to me here is how the images work to reconfigure our understanding of “dwelling” together in a shared space. By dwelling, I mean not only its literal manifestation within a home but also the symbolic dwelling we inhabit as participants in a “civil contract” between photographer, photographed, and spectator. Photographs of eviction establish and critique a dialectical relationship between belonging and exclusion by appealing to the visual paradox of trespassing inhabitants, whose indebted bodies destabilize conventional notions of home as a private, secure retreat. In these photographs, inhabitants occupy a liminal space that positions them as quasi-criminals in their own homes, as “an actual or potential security threat that must be contained” (Brickell, Fernández Arrigoitia, and Vasudevan 15). Yet in so doing, the images also urge spectators to consider alternative forms of habitation that break with the capitalist model of housing as a financial asset detached from social relations.

I align my close reading of these images with several key assertions in Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites’s *The Public Image*. Most crucially, I subscribe to the authors’ understanding of photography as a “democratic mode of communication,” which “presumes common rights in a shared world and critical engagement in a public sphere” (77). In this formulation, photography brings together viewer and viewed in complex acts of spectatorship that have the potential to reframe the political imagination.⁶ Eviction photography in Spain is about the traumatic dismantling of home and housing. But it also intimates, in its representation of expulsions in process, a bodily disruption of one’s physical and social attachment to home. In these photographs, we move between home as a space expropriated by the neoliberal state and home

re-appropriated and re-signified as a vital part of the commons, where housing is a right, not a privilege.

Overview of Eviction Photography

Expulsion connotes a violent, involuntary, and physical removal from a specific location with lasting social, economic, psychological, and material consequences. Not surprisingly, the images examined here are often imbued with disciplinary or punitive overtones. While the photographs differ in their aesthetic approaches, we can identify several common thematic categories: evacuation of inhabitants and belongings, police presence, and housing rights activism on the premises. Many of the images take place within specific rooms of a house, while others depict the immediate exterior of the dwelling, such as hallways, stairwells, entrances, or sidewalks. We often see individuals and families amid an array of personal effects, whereas in other instances the inhabitant appears to be the last person standing in an empty room. The act of viewing is a frequent motif, with occupants peering through windows, peepholes, or blinds, or being observed themselves.

In this essay, I examine the work of four photojournalists whose images offer us a vital and complex portrait of crisis-era Spain. These photographers, born in the 1970s and 1980s, carry out their work not only in Spain but also in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Broadly speaking, their photographic projects center on human rights and social concerns, can be found in prestigious national and international publications, are exhibited online and in galleries, and have received numerous awards. For the purposes of overall organization, I approach their work on eviction in a loosely chronological fashion, while being mindful that the circulation of images and means of display often make it challenging to determine an exact date of origin for the work. The images examined here first appeared publicly between 2012–2015. I also have a distinct rationale for situating the close readings of these images as follows. Examined as a complete body of work on the visual portrayal of eviction in crisis-era Spain, we can trace in these images of home a process of expropriation to re-appropriation, exclusion to belonging, criminalization to legitimacy. As “the public art . . . that regularly connects individual experience with the expectations of citizenship” (Hariman and Lucaites 14), photography is uniquely situated to help spectators assume an active role as they engage in an “imaginative interpretation of the public image” (59), ultimately reconceiving home and housing as a shared encounter.

Samuel Aranda: Spanish Crisis (2012) and the “Great Capitalist Eviction”

In late September 2012, the *New York Times* published a front-page article titled “Spain Recoils as Its Hungry Forage Trash Bins for a Next Meal.” The image of a man digging through a trash bin, taken by Spanish photojournalist Samuel Aranda (b. 1979, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Spain), dominated the bottom center of the paper’s print edition. The article and accompanying series of fifteen photographs (“In Spain, Austerity and Hunger”) catapulted Spain and the so-called “Spanish crisis” into world news headlines, generating debate about the “reality” of the portrayal and who had the authority to tell the crisis narrative, particularly beyond Spain. Aranda frequently photographs in zones of conflict and is no stranger to public controversy over his images.⁷ Following the publication of the *Times* series, Aranda argued that the negative reception of the photographs in Spain was due to a public unaccustomed and unwilling to contemplate the circumstances the images made visible: “cuando a alguien se le dice lo que pasa en su casa, en su patio, duele” (Mateo) (when you tell someone what is happening in their house, in their backyard, it hurts).⁸ Some media publications in Spain, such as *El País*, seemed to come out in favor of Aranda, suggesting the images coincided with visits to New York by then-president Mariano Rajoy and King Juan Carlos, both of whom sought to improve Spain’s image abroad by actively avoiding a public acknowledgment of the crisis (“El hambre en España”).

The issues raised following the publication of Aranda’s photographs speak to photography’s capacity to transcend, through the vehicle of interpretation, the singular moment captured in the image. This “deep pluralism” assists us in recognizing an image as both “distinct and one of many; a single moment and part of multiple patterns; a specific intention and something defined by others” (Hariman and Lucaites 52). Thus, while some of Aranda’s photographs examine the eviction of individual families, others call on us to understand eviction as a widespread, indiscriminate phenomenon. As Amador Fernández-Savater succinctly puts it, evictions are the image par excellence of the crisis and of capitalism itself: “Ninguno está a salvo del gran desahucio capitalista (679) (No one is safe from the great capitalist eviction). Fernández-Savater’s ominous assessment draws to mind several points relevant for this analysis.

First, at the most basic level, Aranda’s photographs suggest that the eviction of middle-class families should be read as part of the same process that drives immigrants to the periphery. Aranda shows individuals in transit, segregated through a “savage sorting” (Sassen 4). Treated as expendable, some are about to lose their home, one lives in a site never intended for dwelling, and

another inhabits a temporary shelter after already being forced to surrender his previous place of residence. Spain is certainly accustomed to media portrayals of migrant populations in transit, yet perhaps, as Aranda suggests, it was less familiar with witnessing a vulnerable working-class population also forced to abandon their homes and enter a life of uncertainty. As the controversy surrounding the *Times* photographs revealed, Aranda's images ask Spain to gaze inward and to contemplate the nation's appearance through a particular frame beyond the control of the Spanish state.



Figure 1. Awaiting eviction

Credit: Samuel Aranda/The New York Times/Redu

The initial image in the series and its caption immediately call spectators to engage more deeply with eviction (see Figure 1).⁹ As the caption notes, “The Aliu and Lopez families looked out from their window at the arrival of the police, who were coming to evict them from their home in Viladecavalls, north of Barcelona, Spain. Alfredo Aliu and Montse Lopez had been unable to pay their mortgage for two years after their coffee shop went bankrupt.” As spectators, we are paradoxically brought into the image by the sense of exclusion it generates; none of the figures acknowledge either the photographer or the spectator. The first of the four appears somber, set somewhat apart from the others. A boy pauses in conversation on a cell phone with his head bowed, and two figures peer beyond the secure space of the room through half-closed blinds. Their attention is turned to their own spectatorship as well as to the surveillance under which they find themselves. A “dual spectatorship” takes

place here, whereby the figures appear to be posed for the photograph but also for the police. They are shut out or held back from the community, cast as illegitimate occupants of a space that outwardly still belongs to them. This is an idea further corroborated by a related image on Aranda's website, which appears to be of the same room and individuals, now shot from a distance while sitting together on a bed, surrounded by personal items. Again, the figures do not acknowledge us nor the presence of the photographer. Whether or not the police encounter these individuals as criminals, we cannot know; however, their awareness of the approaching police reshapes a formerly private space and its inhabitants, exposing them to the public eye. When and if they are evicted, their private lives and personal belongings will cease to be such and become available to anyone.

Aranda's images capture the sense of day-to-day life in a home built on comfort, security, and social relations. Yet, in the absence of adults, the young people also seem to shoulder alone the burden of inevitability just beyond the room. The window allows them to see outside and others to see within. Because we, as spectators, remain unable to view what lies beyond the window frame, we must concentrate our attention within the space of the room. The window frame has a self-reflexive quality, whereby our own spectatorship is called into question. How are we gazing upon these figures? Are they separate from us, or do we recognize this space? And, as we return to Azoulay's formulation of the triadic relationship between spectatorship, photographed, and photographer, how does the photographer inhabit the room and how does the camera (a "room" itself) create its own frame to live in a space about to be evacuated?

In Aranda's complete "Spanish Crisis" series, available on his website, the photographer includes several other images of domestic interiors and inhabitants preparing for eviction. For example, we witness Edward Hernández painting a banner in his home the eve before his eviction, which introduces a type of caption within the confines of the image reading "Stop Desahucios. Art. 47. Constitución" (Stop Evictions. Article 47. Constitution).¹⁰ A caption is also present in the following photograph, where Hernández holds his daughter outside his home. Spectators view two banners, one in the upper-left-hand corner reading, "Deutsche Bank es un banco que engaña, estafa y echa a la gente de su casa" (Deutsche Bank is a bank that cheats, swindles, and throws people out of their homes), and another reflected in the windshield of a car that reads (in reverse), "Rescatan bancos, desahucian familias" (They rescue banks [and] evict families). Finally, in the next image in the sequence, we see a group of protestors united below this same slogan, present on a banner hanging over the doorway to the building. Hernández is among the crowd.

As in the earlier photographs, we do not see the eviction taking place, yet the expulsion is clearly imminent. The image of the protestors attests to an

advancing threat, as several men are captured standing with their arms crossed or shouting. They are resisting the physical presence of police and court officials and their claim to the home, but they are also resisting the banks, protected at the expense of people. This is a “loud” image, where the noise generated from the protest is visible to spectators. If earlier, the inhabitants were cast in a quasi-criminal role, this sequence urges us to inquire who the real “criminals” are—those rescuing banks and evicting families or the families themselves? As Brown and Carrabine note elsewhere, “visual assessments of others and the world in which one is surveilled can create strategies of resistance in how one looks, is seen or resists the gaze of others” (5). These strategies of resistance are present in the subjects’ activism, Aranda’s decision to portray them as he does, and in the way we choose to engage with these images.¹¹

The domestic space where Hernández paints the banner is made explicitly political by visually calling into question the Spanish Constitution’s right to adequate housing. In this gesture, Hernández refuses his “expelled” status and stakes a claim to his surroundings. As we move beyond the entrance to the home, we are reminded of Julio Vinuesa Angulo’s observation that “la puerta de la vivienda es la entrada a un espacio público común” (19) (the door to the home is the entrance to a shared public space). Indeed, Hernández and his family are joined by other members of the community, communicating the sense that the home is not just a private matter but one of public interest. The banners reveal a community unwilling to tolerate expulsion of its members predicated on the uninterrupted flow of capital. Photographed outside the home, the protestors confront those who symbolically represent the State’s interests. They refuse their illegitimacy by inhabiting the street where they are granted visibility. In this way, the shame that accompanies an eviction can be transformed through the sense that others not only exist but resist.

As a photographer, Aranda refuses to make the authorities fully visible to viewers, aesthetically granting his subjects a space of their own to occupy. He effectively “evicts” police and judicial officials from the frame, focusing our attention instead on those who resist, while at the same time signaling the vulnerability inherent in their resistance.¹² In this fashion, Aranda also positions spectators in relation to the protestors, rather than situating the latter in opposition to the police (and thereby implicitly asking us to choose sides or engage in the dichotomy of crime and punishment). In creating a visual “map” of the Hernández eviction that literally and symbolically mobilizes the domestic space, Aranda’s photographs allow us to navigate multiple phases of the process and to envision the situation as one that transcends this particular case.

Aranda seems insistent on broadening the implications of the crisis to encompass Spain’s diverse populations. “Spanish Crisis” contains several images depicting immigrants in the context of home and housing. While

these images do not portray eviction in the strict sense of the word, they imply that the crisis doubly displaces those labeled “other” through their immigrant status. They also depict liminal dwellings and populations on the move. In the image captioned “Senegalese immigrant Musa Fal Fal (36) in the room where he lives in an abandoned factory in Barcelona,” the spectator encounters a barefoot man sitting on a bare mattress in a disheveled room. Visible behind the man are scattered belongings, including several suitcases and duffel bags. He gazes down, away from both the photographer and the spectator and toward a small object between his hands. In another image, available in both “Spanish Crisis” and the *Times* series, we encounter a shirtless man standing with his dog in front of a home in need of repair. From the caption, we learn that Manuel Lourerio is originally from Cuba and has been living in a mobile home for the last year and a half, ever since he “lost his job as a construction worker on the Spanish high-speed train and was forced to leave his apartment.” The suitcase in the first image and the mobile home in the second call attention to how insufficient and temporary shelter limits the men’s access to an entire network of social support. In the case of Manuel, the ironic implication is that the collapse of the construction industry has “unhoused” him. For Musa Fal Fal, the abandoned factory also suggests a parallel abandonment is at play here: the crisis has served to further marginalize immigrants by depriving them of jobs as well as access to adequate housing. Figuratively, he lives within the shell of an economy that has been made obsolete. Certainly, this too is a form of expulsion.¹³

Aranda’s “Spanish Crisis” series implores us to consider how we view and are viewed, as well as how we determine who belongs and who does not. Aranda accomplishes this, at least in part, through his appeal to what might be described as a series of visual and narrative foreclosures. Elements—such as a half-pulled window blind, absent adults, figures with averted gazes, police and legal representatives excised from view, an object held but not seen, or the marginalized immigrant experience—implore spectators to gaze beyond the frame and contemplate what has been excluded and why. In these images, it is the invisible or absent that draws us into an encounter with the evicted subject and, by extension, the photographer.

Olmo Calvo: Spanish Crisis, Evictions in Madrid, and Policing the Home

Like Samuel Aranda, Olmo Calvo’s images of the Spanish crisis reveal scenes of eviction, unemployment, mass protest, and extreme poverty. On his website, Calvo (b. 1982, Santander) features several projects related to the crisis,

including “15-M,” “Spanish Crisis,” and “Evictions.” Of these, “Spanish Crisis” contains the greatest number of images (122), many of which can also be found in the other online portfolios. Many of Calvo’s images in “Spanish Crisis” are shot at night, and a striking motif of his work is the intense interplay between shadow and light. Like Aranda, Calvo displays eviction from both within and outside the home. His attention is often turned toward immigrants, youth, and elderly populations, yet a striking number of his photographs depict women seated alone, covering their anguished faces as they attempt to process what is happening. It would be challenging to cover the range of experiences available to us in Calvo’s work. Therefore, my focus here will be on Calvo’s repeated images of riot police in and near the domestic site at the time of eviction.¹⁴ If in Aranda’s photographs of eviction, the police are not explicitly featured, then in Calvo’s photographs, the police (or, at times, a legal surrogate) are visually omnipresent, fulfilling the frightening dual role of one who protects or secures the home and one who seeks to carry out its dispossession. At times, this sense of indeterminacy regarding the police is particularly compelling.

Certainly, in several images, Calvo captures the sense that inhabitants are criminalized in their own homes, rather than victims of a crime, a point that is reflective of the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility for debt and the “dominant narrative developed by national and local politicians . . . that the housing crisis resulted because ‘people have lived beyond their means’” (Casellas and Sala 179). In “Spanish Crisis” and “Evictions in Madrid,” for instance, a recurring image, shot from several different angles, is that of a woman with a clipboard appearing to read an official document to an elderly woman and her family. The woman stands in profile to spectators, facing the home’s inhabitants in an authoritative and intrusive fashion. The sense, judging by the expression on the subjects’ faces, is that the family is on trial. To be sure, these images are unsettling and reflect a distinct power relation, but police on the premises complicate the scene. Are the police there to protect inhabitants from a threat, or do they represent the threat themselves? Are they performing acts of surveillance or under surveillance themselves? Perhaps the construction of an aesthetic ambivalence about the role of the police is precisely what Calvo intended.

Calvo’s photographs reject facile conclusions regarding the link between policing and the state, with the police charged by the government to enforce laws and maintain social order (Yarwood 448). I examine how the images construct the relationship between police, domestic space, and its inhabitants. However, while I am interested in addressing what social order the police look to preserve and how Calvo reflects this pursuit, I believe it is equally valuable to interrogate how, as Wall and Linneman establish, “the politics of security

and order are also a politics of aesthetics encompassing practical struggles over the authority and regulation of ways of looking and knowing” (2). A portion of my reading of these images therefore deals with Calvo’s own role as a photographer and his stated interactions with the police. I also situate these images in relation to Spain’s 2015 passage of the *Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana* (Citizen Security Law), otherwise known as the *Ley Mordaza* (Gag Law).

Calvo’s photographs do not capture anyone in the act of being physically removed from their home; however, the element of exclusion and the anticipation of threat are immediately apparent. First, the placement of the officers suggests that they are in a “standoff” with us. We are kept physically restricted from the residents who live in these photographs, separated from them by the police. Yet, like those residents, we are also potentially under surveillance: the implication is that, while the police remain faceless and unidentifiable to viewers, they are still able to observe us. Calvo features each officer in the foreground, while obscuring his features from our view. In one image, the officer wears dark glasses and stands, arms crossed, out of focus. His enormous, menacing figure occupies over half the frame, while, in the background to his right, two individuals gaze out a small, square window, banging pots and pans in earnest. Similarly, another image—this one in black and white—depicts the officer’s face nearly covered with what appears to be a scarf. Again, immediately behind the officer are several windows open to occupied rooms. In the window on the upper left, we observe a hand making the “V for Victory” sign and holding a “Stop Evictions” poster.

More than anything, it is the visibility of the police that stands out in these images, and their presence shapes how we, as spectators, engage the photograph. Our attempt to view the scaled-down figures or the hand raised beside the “Stop Evictions” sign in the background is visually paused or interrupted by the police presence that occupies the frame. The black and white photograph is also crowded, divided into a series of geometric patterns including bricks, vertical lines on open rectangular shutters, tall metal fencing, and the outline of window panes on which “Stop” signs have been hung. These multiple patterns confuse our sight and cultivate the sense that home, along with its walled-off inhabitants, lies just beyond our grasp. As Atkinson and Blandy argue, “property boundaries give often physical but surely symbolic effect to one of the essential characteristics of property ownership: the ability to exclude outsiders, which is the basis of the law of trespass” (67). Here, inhabitants can no longer shield themselves from the outside world because they have now become the trespassers.

Home is visually blocked by multiple layers of “protection,” and Calvo shows us how these layers contain the protest under the guise of “security.” Perhaps Calvo’s depiction of the police, who quietly observe *us* even though

we cannot see their eyes, also marks us as trespassers. Whereas Aranda's photographs may encourage empathy with the inhabitants or protestors, Calvo's images ask us to question our own visual "policing" of evicted persons. As a photographer, Calvo also enters a site that is marked as "off limits." But what is the role of the police in these images? What social order have they been called to maintain, and why do they seem to be holding citizens apart from one another? Perhaps an answer can be found in Medina Ferreras's reflection that, following the emergence of new social movements and forms of protest between the years of 2010–2013, we also witnessed increasingly repressive actions on behalf of the authorities, whereby any form of perceived dissidence was criminalized (225). Most significantly, Medina Ferreras suggests that state intervention into social protest is a form of trespass, whereby those with a legitimate right to appear and speak in public are marked as violent and a threat to the nation's economic, political, and social stability (226).

In an image of police entering a private domestic space, Calvo takes the theme of trespass one step further, loading the frame with content. At the center of the image, a distinct black line divides the scene in two. To the left of the line, we encounter a kitchen and the figure of Antonio Tomás, both in disarray as national police enter Tomás's home in Leganés to evict him on December 14, 2011. Antonio is narrowly framed, emerging only partially, as though by accident. At the right of the dividing line, two police officers enter from a point beyond the frame. We know this only because of a circular mirror that captures the upper half of their bodies at the precise moment that Calvo shoots the picture. As with the images discussed above, Calvo draws our attention toward the expulsion: as the police enter, crossing the threshold of Antonio's home, he appears ready to surrender and depart. He is rendered nearly ghost-like, his shadow seeming to pass through the central wall of his dwelling. In Annie McClanahan's illuminating reading of the photography of foreclosure and eviction in the United States, she notes that eviction is "not only a way to police individuals but a means to govern an entire 'subprime' population through violence and dispossession" (121). Calvo illustrates this idea in his juxtaposition of Antonio with the police. The officers are reflected in a mirror but are only partially visible. Caps pulled low over their eyes, scarves covering their mouths, they are afforded a privacy that remains unavailable to Antonio. After his home is violated in multiple ways—by the police, by the camera, and by our gaze—he is expelled. Later, a close-up of Antonio's hands firmly grasping the blade-like key to his home painfully illustrate his unhousing. Yet, Calvo's framing of the police in the wall mirror proposes there is more to the image than the violence of eviction.

Earlier, in the discussion of Aranda's work, I signaled the way that Figure 1 emphasizes the act of watching others watching. Calvo's work reveals

similar tendencies. The mirror on the wall of Antonio's home reflects simultaneously back on the photographer, on us and on the act of photography itself. The image may document an eviction in process, but it subsequently complicates the sense that the photograph is merely depicting a moment of reality or providing a single truth about the meaning of that moment. This is a disorienting photograph because it isn't entirely clear what we are witnessing and who is doing the looking. Who controls the gaze in this image? Is it Antonio? The police? The spectator? The photographer? Perhaps Calvo is suggesting that the gaze is shared, but he may also be calling on the spectator to decide or adopt a specific position about the gaze. This image, like photography more broadly, has a unique capacity to frame multiple perspectives at once and still form a coherent whole (Hariman and Lucaites 54–55). What Calvo seems to privilege in this image is what could only be called a form of resistance against how we are conditioned to look and be seen.

At the time that Calvo took these photographs in 2011, Spain had not yet passed the *Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana* (Citizen Security Law). Popularly known as the *Ley Mordaza* (Gag Law), the measure, officially adopted in 2015 under the government of Mariano Rajoy, tightened restrictions on public protest and “the ‘unauthorized use’ of images of law enforcement authorities or police” (“Spain’s Ominous Gag Law”).¹⁵ The law was sharply criticized by human rights organizations, journalism advocates, and those who read the law as standing in direct opposition to the right to assembly, free speech, and freedom of the press. In Ramón Campderrich’s scathing exposé of the law’s implications, he wrote that the law is not about providing security to exercise one’s rights but rather generating insecurity (qtd. in Medina Ferreras 234), a mechanism for diverting attention from the real insecurity faced because of the crisis. It sees forms of protest not as legitimate vehicles for democratic participation but a risk to citizen safety and, by extension, the safety of the Spanish state (234). In addition to controlling information on a domestic front, the gag law allows Spain to police visual content and messaging abroad.

Although the law was not yet in force in 2011, Calvo’s images appear to blur the identities of the agents depicted. An awareness of the *Ley Mordaza* thus adds another layer of meaning to these images, as do Calvo’s reflections on his profession. If “every photograph records what is so that one might see it as relative to what came before and what came after” (Hariman and Lucaites 101), then the images involving police officials underscore the increasing criminalization of home and its inhabitants, as well as the emerging threat to photojournalists documenting evictions. In a 2013 interview, Calvo expresses concern that restrictions on what photographers are permitted to cover (and how) could lead to greater censorship. He notes instances where photographers have had their film confiscated to control the

information released (“Entrevista a Olmo Calvo”). As Wall and Linnemann observe elsewhere, “the state rejects unauthorized ways of seeing and knowing on the grounds that staring should be reciprocal—the police deserve no scrutiny which has not been sanctioned by police, the powers underlying the police stare are legitimate and just, suspicion only goes one way” (8). This is precisely the type of power dynamic present in Calvo’s images of police. The *Ley Mordaza* establishes a double standard regarding surveillance: as in the model of the panopticon, the police can see everything but should themselves remain invisible. As engaged spectators, we can re-contextualize Calvo’s photographs of police and eviction in light of the law passed after the release of Calvo’s photographs. This process of re-contextualization allows us to contemplate seeing and being seen through a fresh lens that reveals the reason for the security forces at the time these images were taken. Calvo’s images presciently frame security forces obstructing citizens from access—access to their homes and to one another. They safeguard the home (or *homeland*) from its own “subprime” inhabitants, signaling “the instrumentalization of state violence as the means for the maintenance of private property relationships” (McClanahan 121). In the images examined thus far, housing is not a common good or a shared enterprise but one that is about individual ownership predicated on a debt economy. Calvo plays with the notion of trespass and surveillance, allowing us to reconsider how we view and are in turn viewed.

Andrés Kudacki (Evictions, 2012) and Joan Alvado (The Lab, 2013): Home and the Reappropriation of Space

The photographs of Samuel Aranda and Olmo Calvo wrestle with the turmoil of eviction by granting spectators intimate access to individuals and families on the verge of becoming unhoused. Aranda widens the frame for understanding eviction by placing into visual dialogue diverse populations expelled from home. Calvo in particular is interested in revealing the state’s role in executing evictions and the criminalization of those who have been evicted. Andrés Kudacki and Joan Alvado treat the same subject matter, yet their work probes deeper into the question of space itself and how we conceive of belonging. Kudacki purposefully employs a new angle from which to observe the immediate aftermath of eviction, and Alvado’s series *The Lab* features a self-designed space that rejects the stigma of eviction in favor of a collaborative, creative site of experience and experiment.

Andrés Kudacki (b. 1974, Buenos Aires), dubbed in *El País* as “el retratista de los desahucios” (the eviction photographer), works for the Associated

Press. His work on evictions in Spain was carried out over the course of several years, culminating in a widely publicized series in *Time Magazine* and *El País* in 2015. If Aranda's work on the Spanish crisis for the *Times* granted Spain an external visibility it had not previously enjoyed, Kudacki's eviction series was vital *within* Spain for helping to transform, along with the PAH, the crisis narrative from that of the victim to the political agent.¹⁶



Figure 2. After the eviction
Credit: Andrés Kudacki/AP

Like Aranda and Calvo, Kudacki also depicts evictions in process and with a police presence. Yet, at least one of Kudacki's photos, taken in 2013, offers a new perspective on the photography of eviction by displaying the evicted subjects and their belongings from above so that spectators can appreciate what appears to be the entire room of a house reconfigured on the street (see Figure 2). In the accompanying narrative for the photograph ("El retratista..."), Kudacki explains that the family had been evicted the day before and was just waking up after spending the night outside in the cold.¹⁷ Kudacki captured 68-year-old Efrén González pulling a blanket over his granddaughter, what the photographer called an act of "la protección dentro de la desprotección en la que estaban inmersos" (protection within the lack of protection in which they found themselves). As we have already observed, many photographs of eviction display people in motion, uprooted, and caught between different locations, real or imagined. Although this particular image is about

the experience of one family immediately after eviction, it offers us an initial point of departure for talking about housing beyond the act of dispossession.

When Kudacki captures the layout of the home from above, he implies that there was something we would have been unable to see or fully appreciate from down below: “Vi que podía hacer una fotografía cenital desde el segundo piso, desde donde se veía la casa armada pero a la intemperie. En la calle, pero al lado de la casa. . . . Fue una imagen bastante icónica, porque representaba mucho y nunca se había hecho. También fui consciente de que funcionaría” (Hidalgo) (I saw that I was able to take a photograph from up on the second floor, where you could see the house set up but out in the open. On the street, but next to the house. . . . it was a pretty iconic image, because it represented a lot and had never been done. I was also aware that it would work). This bird’s-eye view of the home laid bare visually introduces, in both its subject matter and aesthetic features, the sense that housing is a collective concern and not an individual one. This family is not making a political statement—they occupy this exposed space out of necessity. Yet, the image challenges us to think imaginatively about how we might construct and use a space that lies beyond the conventional home. Can we, as spectators, figuratively follow Kudacki to peer inside at how we live? Can we divest the home of its connections with ownership, property relations, debt, and individual responsibility and invest instead in social encounters generated by belief in the home as a common good?



Figure 3. PAH activists protest in Barcelona outside PP headquarters
Credit: Courtesy of Joan Alvado

Joan Alvaro's series *The Lab* offers one way of understanding the concept of home in a collective fashion. "Lab" simultaneously speaks to experiments in housing, the traditional photographic lab where images are processed and developed, and the *labor*—what we might call "sweat equity"—of home-building. Alvaro (b. 1979, Altea, Spain) is interested in depicting how people conceive of themselves as political subjects and to what extent the social use of the property facilitates that process. In this way, his series depicts a crisis narrative undergoing a key transformation "from *the socialization of guilt* to the *socialization of activism for housing rights*" (Casella and Sala 181, emphasis in original). The series emphasizes active work and engagement with one's environment, with space being continuous but internally divided. *The Lab* follows a family post-eviction from March–May 2013, as they collectively occupy a property named *Ínsula Utopía* (Utopian Island) in Nou Barris, a district in Barcelona. In contrast with the more somber work of Aranda or Calvo, Alvaro's twenty images convey possibility, renewal, and solidarity among community members (see Figure 3).¹⁸ In the written narrative that accompanies the series on Alvaro's website, he offers a brief context for the problem of evictions, the emergence of PAH collectives in Catalonia, and the collective occupation of empty, bank-owned buildings by those in need of shelter. As the housing activists see it, they are taking part in "an unprecedented social experiment: the buildings are laboratories of self-management for housing." In a similar vein, Alvaro's photographs of this experiment play a parallel role—they allow spectators to encounter what self-management looks like and, by extension, contemplate photography's role in envisioning collective life and what (or who) constitutes "the public." When homeless families and activists began living in *Ínsula Utopía* in March 2013, they did so in the belief that the empty housing units were owned by Caixa Penedès, at one time one of the largest banks in Catalonia. Occupying is a symbolic act, implying "una crítica hacia la propiedad privada" (Coordinadora 22) (a criticism of private property). Not surprisingly, the corresponding definition in the RAE criminally marks occupying as "taking" an empty property without the owner's consent (22). Those who occupy during the crisis often experience the social stigma of losing their homes, only to feel a similar sense of shame about their new living circumstances (Coordinadora 240). In this case, the decision to occupy a bank-owned building was clearly intentional, given the common understanding that big banks had been bailed out repeatedly, while individuals continued to be evicted and, sometimes, indebted for life for a property that no longer belonged to them.¹⁹ In addition to the banks, it is important to recall that one of the PAH's common slogans was, "¡Ni gente sin casa ni casas sin gente!" (Neither people without a home, nor homes without people!). The slogan called out Spain's decades-long construction boom, driven by real-estate

speculation, for leaving millions of housing units empty and paradoxically expelling inhabitants from their homes. The rationale for occupying empty housing varies, but it is often motivated by job loss, eviction, and other factors. It also may arise from a desire for the sense of communal belonging surrendered upon eviction.

The Lab, read as an experimental site, reveals how the concept of assembly might foster belonging. In the words of Judith Butler, “public assembly embodies the insight that this is a social condition both shared and unjust, and that assembly enacts a provisional and plural form of coexistence” (*Notes* 15). Alvado’s photographs, assembled together, reveal PAH activists gathered in common areas of an occupied building, undergoing a support workshop on the conditions of their housing contract or demonstrating in the streets and continually re-appropriating the space around them. They are active and involved in physically and meaningfully putting together their living environment. Not surprisingly, several of Alvado’s images also extend the notion of assembly to the physical transformation or re-assembly of domestic space.



Figure 4. PAH activists change the lock on an apartment in Sabadell
Credit: Courtesy of Joan Alvado

For instance, changing a lock on a door reconfigures the entrance to the home and readies the space for dwelling (see Figure 4). The act symbolically “expels” the bank who owned the property, while revising the common practice of locking out a home’s former inhabitants after they are evicted. Continuing with the notion of assembly, Alvado also encourages spectators

to engage in a visual assembly of their own by examining the layout of various rooms in the building and putting them together, both to contemplate the routine activities going on there—cooking, talking on the phone, eating a meal, watching TV—as well as to understand how occupation shapes common space. In the lock assembly image or in the “split-screen” photograph of a woman cooking and a man talking on the phone, Alvado features the role of participation and collaboration in establishing a life in common (see Figure 5). The home is seen as a continually evolving space that belongs to all, where everyone is responsible for one another’s well-being. Finally, Alvado also engages in a type of assembly, if we consider that every photographer’s work is about the careful selection, framing, and public display of images.



Figure 5. Establishing a life in common
Credit: Courtesy of Joan Alvado

Whether we envision “assembly” as being about public protest, the judicious selection of images, or how we put our homes together in concert with others, *The Lab* hints at a transitional moment in the articulation of home and housing in Spain. In fact, just two months after beginning their occupation of the property, residents made a collective decision to evacuate the premises during a public assembly. The building was not actually owned by Caixa Penedès but rather by a small developer made up of residents in the broader community. While this particular “experiment” in housing was brief, it was not unique. Many other forms of alternative housing have sprung up in the years since the crisis ended. Through the recurring theme of assembly in its multiple guises, Alvado’s series reminds us how “non-citizens—those

stripped of their citizenship (their spaces and places in neoliberal society)—are opening up their own spaces in a process of struggle in which they develop as subjects: spaces created, designed and controlled by these very sectors themselves” (Zibechi 18). *The Lab* depicts scenes of everyday life at *Ínsula Utopía*, decriminalizing the concept of occupation and compelling us to contemplate home as more than a financial asset (or liability).²⁰ The series also implies that photography itself constitutes its own lab or productive site of civic engagement (Azoulay, *Civil Imagination* 70) for understanding how we live together.

Conclusion

By all accounts, the Spanish crisis reached its end in 2015. Since that time, the number of homeowner evictions has dropped, yet evictions on rental properties have risen substantially, even motivating the release of a new report from Amnesty International in 2017, “La crisis de la vivienda no ha terminado” (The housing crisis hasn’t ended). On February 11, 2019, in what might have been one of the most high-profile eviction cases since the start of the crisis, four inhabitants of Argumosa 11 in the Lavapiés neighborhood of Madrid were evicted after multiple prior attempts to do so had failed. Reportedly, the eviction notices arrived with little advanced warning and riot police, who had cordoned off the area surrounding the building the night before, succeeded in preventing activists from gaining entrance to the building (Franco). Despite an evolution in the way these cases are now handled, evictions are still occurring, driven by a myriad of factors, including unemployment, increasing urban rents, and gentrification.

Not surprisingly, eviction is a theme in a number of recent Spanish cultural texts on the crisis. The comic *Aquí vivió. Historia de un desahucio* (Here Lived: Story of an Eviction, 2016) and films such as *5 metros cuadrados* (Five Square Meters, 2011); *Os fenómenos* (The Freaks, 2014), *Techo y comida* (Food and Shelter, 2015), and *Cerca de tu casa* (At Your Doorstep, 2016) form a noteworthy subgenre of crisis-era texts that interrogate the normalization of precarious dwellings and depict the emergence of collective forms of resistance in the face of eviction. These fictional representations establish an intertextual relationship with many of the eviction photographs discussed in this essay.

At the heart of all these texts, we find a fundamental questioning of what it means to inhabit and to do so together. As Fernández-Savater reflects, the fight against eviction “no apunta tanto a otros mundos posibles y utópicos, como a poder *habitar* el único que hay” (680, emphasis in original) (doesn’t

signal other possible utopian worlds as much as being able to *inhabit* the only one there is). Spanish photography of crisis-era eviction problematizes the capitalist expropriation of home and exposes its policing, while also positing other forms of dwelling through occupation, assembly, and commoning, defined as a “new way for everyday citizens to make decisions and take action to shape the future of their communities without being locked into the profit-driven mechanics of the market” (Ristau). While the photographs offer a realist portrayal of housing issues in Spain, they can also generate insight about photography’s role in considering “home” and democratic belonging. Ultimately, Alvado’s phrase “laboratories of housing” extends beyond the concrete site of occupation and attends to photography itself.

If the photographic medium begins with “reality,” the photographer understands this reality to be only a starting point. That reality is framed, edited, and transformed when photographs succeed in inviting spectators to become visual agents or creators through analysis, interpretation, and engagement. The photographs of eviction featured in this essay summon spectators into domestic spaces in transition and demand that we see the displaced and interrogate their expulsion. The images of Samuel Aranda, Olmo Calvo, Andrés Kudacki, and Joan Alvado expose and critique the erosion of the fundamental human right to shelter and security at the hands of the state, while also signaling photography’s role in re-shaping our understanding of home, housing, and belonging. If a scientific laboratory allows us to experiment with and analyze ideas, photography’s lab welcomes spectators as co-architects and visionaries committed to the labor of a project on experimental dwelling for the twenty-first century. While the worst of the Spanish economic crisis may have subsided, the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the urgency to confront the way we live together. Now more than ever, we need photography’s visual language to help us navigate a life in common beyond the frame.

Notes

1. Azoulay prefers the term “spectator” over “viewer,” recognizing that the former is “not typically employed with reference to still photography” (*Civil Contract* 168). For the author, being a spectator signals an active, participatory viewership. Throughout this article, following Azoulay, I will employ “spectator” as well.
2. For two works that examine twenty-first-century foreclosure photography in the United States, see Hariman and Lucaites (116–18) and McClanahan (99–142).
3. See Kenna (18) and Nasarre-Aznar and García-Teruel for a more specific breakdown on the rental market (293–94).

4. Estimates on eviction statistics vary widely, but generally range between 400,000–500,000 total evictions. For more, see Sunderland (16).
5. While recognizing the vital presence of the PAH and its appearance in eviction photography, this essay does not focus specifically on the social movement and the particulars of its labor in crisis-era Spain. For more on the role of the PAH in reshaping the narrative on housing rights in crisis-era Spain, see Casellas and Sala.
6. Azoulay defines the “political imagination” as “a form of imagination that transcends the single individual alone and exists *between* individuals and is shared by them” (*Civil Imagination* 5).
7. As a case in point, several months before the publication of the *New York Times* series, his 2011 image of a Yemeni mother cradling her injured son had earned him the World Press Photo of the Year prize, as well as criticism over the image’s allusion to Christian iconography and, specifically, the *Pietà*.
8. All translations are mine.
9. Image courtesy of the *New York Times* and Redux Pictures. Figure 1 is the first photograph in Aranda’s online portfolio for the *Times*, “In Spain, Austerity and Hunger,” published 25 September 2012. While Aranda’s website offers no captions for the photographs in “Spanish Crisis,” we can view a partial title of the jpeg file, which also indicates the teens are waiting to be evicted.
10. It is important to note that Article 47 of the Spanish Constitution does, in principle, guarantee the right to housing. However, as Nasarre-Aznar and García-Teruel note, “the right to housing is not a fundamental right” but rather a “programmatic principle: that is, it cannot be used by itself as a legal ground to ask a judge for a dwelling or as a ground to ask for protection from the Constitutional Court” (306).
11. Hariman and Lucaites write that one of the elements of realist photography is “the presumption of a high level of critical and collective spectatorship” (77). In other words, there is an assumption that viewers form “an ethical and political relationship with those in the photograph” (77). This is similar to Azoulay’s understanding of photography as “one of the distinctive practices by means of which individuals can establish a distance between themselves and power in order to observe its actions and to do so not as its subjects” (*Civil Contract* 105).
12. In *Vulnerability and Resistance*, Judith Butler defines vulnerability as “a deliberate exposure to power . . . part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (22).
13. As Slavoj Žižek has noted, “in . . . global capitalism, it is ‘things’ (commodities) which freely circulate, while the circulation of ‘persons’ is more and more controlled” (102). In Žižek’s view, “the segregation of the people *is* the reality of economic globalisation” (102, emphasis in original). In this way, eviction is not only the physical removal of inhabitants from a site once viewed as “home,” it is also about the brutal disposal of anyone who stands in the way of capitalism’s constant demands.
14. Captions for the photographs in the series “Evictions in Madrid” are unavailable on Calvo’s website but can be found in the online newspaper *Diagonal* (“Olmo Calvo”).

For an interesting assessment of the presence of riot police in twenty-first-century photography, see Hariman and Lucaites (194–97).

15. This serious infraction consists, in part, of “el uso no autorizado de imágenes o datos personales o profesionales de autoridades o miembros de las Fuerzas y Cuerpos de Seguridad que pueda poner en peligro la seguridad personal o familiar de los agentes” (qtd. in Medina Ferreras 234) (the unauthorized use of images or of the personal or professional information of authorities or members of the Security Force that might put the agents’ personal or family safety at risk).
16. As a case in point, Kudacki’s moving photographs documenting the eviction of Carmen Martínez Ayuso, an 85-year-old woman forced to leave her home after five decades, motivated indignant community members to launch an online campaign in her defense. The campaign culminated when El Rayo Vallecano, a soccer team from Madrid’s working-class neighborhood of Vallecas, offered to pay her rent for life (González).
17. Image by Andrés Kudacki for the AP, published in “El retratista de los desahucios,” *El País*. In a follow-up story in *Cambio 16*, we learn that the family spent fifteen days in this patio area, surrounded by their belongings and just feet away from what had been their home. For more, see Sofía Pérez Mendoza, “La vida después de un desahucio.”
18. Figures 3-5 are courtesy of Joan Alvaro.
19. One of the chief demands of the PAH and human rights organizations about improving Spanish housing rights has been the elimination of the “dación en pago retroactiva” (retroactive dation in payment), or cancellation of debt upon surrender of the property.
20. As Nassare-Aznar and García-Teruel note, “squatting is a criminal offence under Spanish law. However, there is a trend in doctrine and the judiciary to resolve squatting issues through the use of civil law rules instead of criminal rules” (314).

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