

## Book review

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Mary Manjikian, *Securitisation of Property Squatting in Europe*, Routledge: London, 2013; 246 pp.: 978 0 415 62577 7, £85.00 (hbk)

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Mary Manjikian's comparative journey into European histories, trends, legal and political trajectories of the act of 'squatting' (taking control of someone else's property without their permission), is a striking cross-discipline project and a must-read contribution to the area, and indeed urban studies overall. Despite its comparable levels of acceptance and co-optation in varying parts of the world, squatting within an urban and moreso a Western context (as opposed the wide-ranging literature on slum-dwellings and land-based movements such as the MST, Landless Workers' Movement, in Brazil), is arguably under-researched and lacks in serious academic discussion. This is due to a number of reasons that Manjikian appreciates, the themes of which she weaves through the text. Over the years, because of media and mainstream political influence, squatting has become much maligned and misunderstood, categorised as deviant, savage and, as she gives evidence of in great detail, moving through rapid stages of criminalisation and draconian legal reactions within the countries mentioned. Manjikian gives examples of the UK, Netherlands, Denmark and France as her case-studies, states that traditionally allow for varying

levels of legal or at least 'lawful' squatting, being merely a civil offence and having some degree of protection from the courts against forcible repossession whether in common or civil law. Up until 1 September 2012, when Section 144 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act came into force, the act of squatting in England and Wales had been protected by Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, and prior to that the Forcible Entry Acts, as well as the Limitations Acts that govern time limits on appropriation and re-appropriation of land. Since Section 144 came into force, it is now an offence of criminal trespass to squat a residential building, and there are signs that the current coalition government wishes to extend this to all buildings during their term in office.

How have these laws and policies come about? Manjikian argues the regulation of squatting as that which is determined through media and political rhetoric, accelerated by discourses of security and exclusion, asking: "How is it that in the urban areas of many Western European nations, domestic policy issues having to do with housing, illegal immigrants and squatters have thus come to be viewed through the lens of securitization?" (p. 7). As a result, she contends, the squatter is constructed as a threat to the state, and that these understandings structure state responses to the squatter (p. 11). Squatting is seen as an 'extraordinary practice' (p. 8) in an era of crisis politics whereby issues that were

traditionally seen as nuisance are transformed to those which threaten 'our very way of life'. Ultimately, a localised and specific action can become something that is governed by an international language of security, protection, defence and undoubtedly race.

To place squatting within a securitisation spectrum has been overtly suggested within texts until now. The literature so far on squatting is mixed, and with this work Manjikian's approach to the area is a one-off in its subtlety and its wish not to objectify squatting and, more importantly, the squatters themselves (although some of the commentary on the Christiana squatted community in Copenhagen sometimes seems fairly negative). Fox-Mahoney and Cobb have written similarly rigorous and yet sensitively placed texts on squatting and its legal remit of adverse possession in England and Wales, with contrasting theoretically driven accounts and explanations of the practice, always bringing it back to the blackletter of law (Cobb, 2012; Cobb and Fox, 2007; Fox and Cobb, 2008). There is a burgeoning social movement literature that often seeks more to categorise squatting into various typologies and methodologies, which misses the entire nature of squatting in that there is not one squat that is the same as another. Nevertheless their work is important as they indicate a preponderance of squatting in all modes of society that at least operate along the matrix of individual property rights. As is carefully dealt with in a genealogy of occupation-protest and re-appropriation of land in the UK, Manjikian shows how squatting itself is arguably one of the oldest, most tolerated ways of dealing with land shortages (p. 31), if not *the* oldest form of land management and organisation. Of course, frontier politics and staking your claim had an altered self-legitimising rhetoric during colonial times, nevertheless there was always a prior claim to land which

essentially means Empire strategies are entirely based on a formulation of squatting. It would be difficult to find a society that was not affected by these divisions of ownership today and therefore the need to re-appropriate and claim land as a result. Manjikian's argument is refreshing in that she deals with this by arguing that squatting, as a result of securitisation speech-acts, is not just a phenomenon at local, city level, but that it is a practice that has consequences at regional, national and even international interfaces. Manjikian is therefore the first to use an international relations framework through which to analyse squatting, a social and economic response to housing that is normally theorised and analogised as a domestic problem. The 'problem' of squatting that derives from the home, to the city, to the nation, is where links between property, identity, culture and attachment to a place, fit nicely into a securitisation framework whereby Manjikian argues communities have always produced and will thus amiably re-produce practices of surveillance, '... breaking the inside-outside distinction as security becomes in a sense, everyone's job everywhere' (p. 14). In a fascinating summary of the home, the city and zoning (pp. 80–85), Manjikian manages to illustrate very methodically the processes of exclusion that start at, literally, ground level, and stretch into conflating forms of international political absolutism.

Another achievement in her work is linking anti-squatter rhetoric to race, with a focus on the legal and political treatment of the Roma in France, the double jeopardy of being both a squatter and 'A8 National' in the UK, as well as highlighting the same constructions of 'otherness' and exclusion that race creates as that of the negative discourse of the squatter. Indeed, this creation of the other is a central operation of securitisation, with its most familiar example as the 'terrorist'. This demonisation of the squatter

as 'Other' has been talked of by other writers (Dadusc and Dee, 2013; Finchett-Maddock, 2011). With *Securitisation of Property Squatting in Europe*, this phenomenology of the outside-inside, the impure, unwanted and the miscreant is further mythologised through a compelling use of 'liminality' (which is a familiar description when considering the relationship of law with resistance in critical legal studies): 'The squatter can be viewed as a type of liminal individual who resides in the interstices of society where he is often uncounted and un surveilled, sharing an identity here with other types of uncounted and ill-defined individuals, such as terrorists'. Manjikian identifies a common concern between those who are left outside as a result of post-modern crisis politics with those excluded by political totalising across eras, in her convincing and emotional call for 'critical squatter studies' (p. 52).

As someone working in law and legal studies, with a close proximity and (over) exposure to biopolitical discussions emanating from Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt, to me the analysis appeared limited to some extent with regards to a rigorous application of the 'state of exception', and indeed Schmitt's friend/enemy dichotomy and how this was related to securitisation and squatting. The great depth of philosophical work done on this since 9/11 was perhaps underrepresented in Manjikian's analysis, in fact I am not sure that the word biopolitics was used at all. To promulgate a regime of normalisation at the conclusion was also a little ambiguous, as techniques of normalisation are arguably simultaneously those of securitisation. It was also unclear as to the methodology used, and it would have been more helpful to present the findings as those driven by a discourse analysis approach specifically. Sometimes the vast comparative nature of Manjikian's research impacted on its precision, considering the

UK's legal and political changes, the use of case law and the imprecision of human rights arguments in relation to Article 8 throughout the book. Nevertheless, this was a successfully ambitious and important interdisciplinary interrogation with impact in international political theory as well as squatting studies, and thus such law-related stipulations would only be noted by lawyers.

Manjikian ends her monograph with a call for a sensible discussion on squatting that is not marred by political agendas whether local, regional, international or indeed all three: 'It is my contention that the establishment of such a space for rationally discussing the issue of property squatting is possible' (p. 326). She also asks that the media pursue an ethical coverage of the squatting issue. As an academic working on squatting, I cannot echo her concerns more, and undeniably her work will act as a timely platform upon which some of these very divisive but fundamental debates on the practice of squatting can be launched.

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