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To cite this article: Miguel A. Martinez (2019) Bitter wins or a long-distance race? Social and political outcomes of the Spanish housing movement, *Housing Studies*, 34:10, 1588-1611, DOI: [10.1080/02673037.2018.1447094](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1447094)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1447094>



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Published online: 14 Mar 2018.



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Bitter wins or a long-distance race? Social and political outcomes of the Spanish housing movement

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether housing movements can produce significant outcomes. In particular, I examine the case of the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), the main organization in the Spanish housing movement between 2009 and 2017. First, I discuss how their demands were framed according to specific contexts of legitimation. Second, I distinguish the nature and scope of the outcomes produced by this movement. My analysis uniquely combines a critical assessment of the PAH's achievements with its unintended consequences and the significant social, political and economic contexts that help to explain its major outcomes. The global financial crisis, the convergence of the PAH with other anti-neoliberal movements and shifts among the dominant political parties determine the opportunities and constraints of the PAH's development. Within this environment, the housing movement strategically operates by framing the culprits of the economic crisis in a new manner and by appealing to a broad social base beyond the impoverished mortgage holders. I also include the capacity of the movement's organization to last, expand and increase its legitimacy as a relevant socio-political outcome. This is explained here through the articulation of the PAH's agency (organizational form and protest repertoire) within the aforementioned contexts.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 27 February 2017
Accepted 26 February 2018

KEYWORDS

Housing movement;
movement's outcomes;
political contexts; Spain

Introduction

The analysis of outcomes produced by housing movements has not enjoyed much attention by scholars. Residents' resistance to the transformation of public housing estates and inner-city areas, for example (Baeten *et al.*, 2017; Goetz, 2016; Zhang, 2017), is very limited by time span, the amount of concerned urban spaces and the breadth of their contestation when compared to broader housing movements (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Pickvance, 1994; Polanska, 2015). The literature on social movements has primarily focused on three major types of their effects: activist careers, cultural changes and political environment (Bosi, Giugni & Uba, 2016, p. 4). The political environment in which social movements operate comprises both institutional arrangements and disputed interpretations of the movements'

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goals and achievements (Burstein *et al.*, 1995; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Meyer, 2004), although the incorporation of economic cycles and their political implications has been less frequently attempted (Di Feliciano, 2017). This suggests that assessing the outcomes of movements is quite dependent on the specific framing contexts of the demands and their achievement (Bosi, Giugni & Uba, 2016, p. 11). In addition, there are not many empirical analyses of the intended and unintended consequences of movements (Tilly, 1999). I deal with these theoretical challenges and gaps in the literature by examining the case of the Spanish housing movement formed by the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) and other associated groups, which has expanded to more than two hundred cities since its inception in the metropolitan area of Barcelona in 2009. This study contributes to shedding light on the social and political impacts of the PAH according to its significant environment, which has not been sufficiently evaluated by the available publications on this case (Abellán, 2015; Alvarez *et al.*, 2015; Casellas & Salas, 2017; Di Feliciano, 2017; Flesher, 2015; García, 2015; García-Calderón & Janoschka, 2016; García-Lamarca, 2016; Gonick, 2015; Martínez & García, 2015; Ortega, 2017; Romanos, 2013; Sebastiani, Fernández & García, 2016).

Although there were previous mobilizations for housing in Spain in recent decades (Aguilar & Fernández, 2010; Martínez, 2017; Villasante *et al.*, 1989), the PAH gave birth to the largest and most durable housing movement to date. By December 2017, 253 local PAH groups were active, with the highest concentration still found in Catalonia, where the core group started (78 groups).¹ Initially, the organization's main concerns were evictions of people unable to pay off mortgage loans. Thus, the PAH was formed to protect individuals and families from foreclosure. Considering the high rates of unemployment that followed the 2008 global financial crisis, the PAH quickly attracted thousands of people threatened with eviction (Colau & Alemany, 2012; Delclós, 2013; Ortega, 2017). This organization developed a self-help approach aimed at preventing repossession as well as mitigating the hardships experienced by impoverished mortgage holders. However, most of the members who joined the PAH in the last two years were tenants unable to meet rent increases.² The PAH's actions gained widespread media coverage and fuelled public debates on topics such as the legal regulations of mortgage loans, the shortcomings of housing policies and the bailout of collapsed banks. This housing movement is considered an outstanding reference for other urban movements worldwide.³

Research aims and theoretical framework

Two main questions guided this study: (1) What has the PAH achieved? and (2) How did they achieve it? According to its most prominent members, quoted in various newspaper headlines, 'the PAH has already won ... More than 1,000 evictions were halted – more than 1,000 people were housed by the *Obra Social* of the PAH, and thousands of nonrecourse debts, cancelled debts, and social rentals were provided'. (Colau & Alemany, 2014) My aim is to question this statement by providing an accurate understanding of the PAH's achievements and failures, and the contexts that made them possible.

The success and failure of social movements are a very controversial matter. They depend on the viewpoints taken by activists, by their friends and by their foes (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Meyer, 2004). Beyond insiders' evaluations, there are also the impacts of movements that cannot easily be attributed to the actions of activists but to a number of coexisting

circumstances and the actions of other groups. This is why Tilly (1999) distinguished both intended and unintended (and direct and indirect) consequences of movements. Literature on the PAH has not drawn on that distinction, so I contribute here by interpreting, in particular, its most remarkable unintended consequences.

According to Gamsom (1990) the clear goals of a movement organization facilitate their achievement. This could be applied to the PAH in comparison to broader social movements such as the 15M. Therefore, I examine the five major claims expressed by the PAH and critically assess their achievement by contrasting the views of housing activists with other contextual features. However, between goals and results there is the mediation of the means adopted by activists (protest actions) as well as the political environment and meaningful frames where interpretations are produced (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bosi, Giugni & Uba, 2016; Giugni, 1998; McLeod, 2007). This suggests the need to disentangle the non-linearity between goals and results. In particular, I propose to look at the social, political and economic contexts which are closely related to the impacts intentionally and unintentionally produced by the PAH (Di Feliciano, 2017; Martínez & García, 2015; Sebastiani, Fernández & García, 2016). Accordingly, I first analyse the framing contexts of the PAH's claims. Second, I introduce the electoral campaigns and the cohesion among political parties, along with the global financial crisis and neoliberal policies, as opportunities and limitations in the advancement of the PAH's claims (Della Porta *et al.*, 2016; Jessop, 2007; Mayer, 2016; Mayer & Boudreau, 2012; Piven & Cloward, 2005; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007).

Furthermore, I argue that the PAH has been very successful in a number of aspects, although it has failed to achieve the most substantial legal changes it fought for. This invites attention as to the impacts produced at the level of institutional politics (Burstein *et al.*, 1995) but also, in my view, to consider the long lasting self-reproduction of this housing movement and its increasing social and political legitimation as positive outcomes, not as mere organizational means. As I explain below, the PAH was able to legitimate its protest methods by combining disruptive direct actions with conventional petitions, legal initiatives and negotiations with politicians and banks. But more importantly, the influence and reach of these protests were favoured by the protest cycle broadly, ignited by the 15M movement and the instability among the major political parties (Flesher, 2015; Martínez & García, 2015; Romanos, 2013; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007).

The following sections first present my methodological approach. Second, I briefly interpret the PAH's demands in relation to its specific organizational form, its main protest actions and the relevant contexts that framed them. Third, I identify the PAH's outcomes and discuss their relationship with their claim-making activity as well as other influential features from the economic and political contexts.

Methods

This study began in 2011 and lasted until 2017. Most of the empirical information was collected and analysed before mid-2017. The first stage (2011–2013) focused on the squatting actions that housing activists developed in the city of Madrid. My research team conducted 19 semi-structured personal interviews and 2 focus groups with activists involved in squatted buildings, housing groups and PAH actions, although most were not PAH members at that time (some would eventually join the PAH network years later). This first group of interviewees was comprised of seven men and twenty women, aged between 19 and 45 years

old. In that period, I was also an active and regular participant in a squatted social centre that also housed an average of ten people. In addition, I attended PAH actions (mainly 'stop evictions' and demonstrations as well as bank office and residential building occupations on occasion) as an external supporter without participating in any organizational task. These events were used to hold informal conversations with other activists and to observe interactions between them and other social groups such as the police.

In a second phase, from 2014 to 2017, I focused more extensively on PAH activists by conducting 28 in-depth personal interviews. They were distributed across the metropolitan areas of Barcelona (16 interviews), Madrid (10 interviews), Cádiz (1 interview) and A Coruña (1 interview). My team also interviewed eight supporters from the local squatting and urban movement scenes of these and two other cities (Vigo and Málaga), two representatives of the municipal governments of Madrid and Barcelona who were former PAH activists and two municipal managers of Barcelona who occasionally cooperated with the PAH. Twenty-two men and 18 women, aged between 24 and 77 years-old, formed this second sample. The questions addressed in the interviews did include inquiries into the activists' squatting experience, if any, but the issue of the movement's consequences and interactions with the authorities were more often dealt with. In this second phase the author of this article did not reside in Spain and only attended actions or events called by the housing movement if they took place during the fieldwork periods – approximately two months per year.

Both interviewee samples were chosen according to purposeful criteria following the main research topics of each period, snowball and informal contacts through my social networks of activists, and a female gender quota of not less than 50 per cent out of the total, whenever possible, in order to verify previous assessments of the key role of women in this movement (Di Feliciano, 2016; Gonick, 2015).⁴ Interviewees were also selected based on their involvement in housing struggles over prolonged periods rather than sporadic activism or support. Although other actors' views about success and failure of the housing movement could be relevant to this research, the activists' perspective was privileged in these two phases in order to identify the frames of the movement's demands and the significant dimensions to consider when assessing them. In addition, interviewees do not know or do not remember all the political changes related to the housing crisis, especially if they occurred before they joined the movement. A way to overcome these biases was to examine another sample of 360 news items from different commercial and independent media directly related to housing struggles between 2009 and 2017 (most were concentrated in 2012–2015).⁵ The selection of news did not intend to examine the representation of the PAH's achievements in the media but to identify the topics of the evaluation and the key contexts associated with it. Topics not directly related to impacts (such as figures about evictions, protest actions, repression, op-eds, etc.) were neatly distinguished from those about impacts and their circumstances (according to the involved state level, electoral campaigns, policies, social awareness and legitimacy, etc.).

Since neither the interviews nor the media coverage were sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the housing movement's outcomes, I followed the threads suggested in my primary sources and collected related legislation and policies as published in the BOE (Spanish Official Journal), official documents (for example, figures on evictions according to the Bank of Spain and the General Council of the Judicial Power), reports by different sources (Amnesty International, European Commission, etc.), opinion polls as well as

textbooks, press notes and data gathered by the PAH itself about every protest campaign in various Spanish cities. In sum, I collected 33 documents of these kinds.

As a consequence, this methodological approach does not uniquely rely on my first-hand qualitative material (interviews and observations) but also on a triangulation with secondary sources, and a critical interpretation of discourses, observed practices, factual data and relevant socio-political contexts, following similar attempts on the same subject (Flesher, 2015; García, 2015). I applied a deductive coding procedure based on my two research questions and categories borrowed from the literature on movement outcomes discussed above (Bosi, Giugni & Uba, 2016; Burstein et al., 1995; Giugni, 1998; Tilly, 1999). The units of analysis are either paragraphs, distinct sections in the interviewees' responses or full texts-documents where the research topics and associated contexts are referred to. My interpretations stem from the insights of the critical discourse analysis approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) which, in this particular study, implies that the social and political implications of the Spanish housing movement are evaluated according to the performative capacity of discourses, the rhetorical strategies of the different social groups represented in the discourses and by their authors, against a backdrop of factual data and observed practices and policies (Cobley & Randviir, 2009; McLeod, 2007; Ruiz, 2009).

Contexts that frame the movement's demands, organization and practices

A few weeks before the general elections of December 2015, the PAH made minor reforms to its political agenda to delineate five specific 'urgent requirements'. The intention was to demand all political parties 'guarantee the right to housing and to stop evictions and poverty due to unaffordable home supplies'.⁶ The first and main demand (#1) was to make 'nonrecourse debt' or 'payment by account' for principal homes legally mandatory. At the time, this was a voluntary option for creditors. A legal mandate would entail that once a house has gone through a process of foreclosure, the corresponding debt is fully cancelled. In Spain, most people unable to pay off a mortgage loan not only lose their homes but also remain in debt to their creditors.

The PAH's second demand (#2) was for affordable rental prices. This is a broader claim that points toward legal changes such as more protection for tenants and rent control. Third, the PAH demanded an urgent moratorium on home evictions (#3), which urged the central government directly to alleviate the increasing homelessness rate (Sales, 2015) and 'civic death' of household debt caused by home evictions. Furthermore, #3 was aimed at promoting the relocation of evicted people in public housing in the same urban area in addition to providing them subsidies for rent payments.

The fourth demand (#4) established basic principles for new housing policies. In particular, the PAH aspired to increase the quantity of affordable houses, denoting a demand for either the construction or purchase of more public housing. Finally, in recent years, since December 2015, the PAH incorporated a so-called 'energetic poverty' concern, which factors the unaffordability of basic home supplies (e.g. gas, water and electricity) into the burden of unpaid mortgages. Thus, the PAH demanded the implementation of a 'basic rent' or subsidy that can cover the cost of these utilities (#5). The organization criticized the neoliberal rationality behind the privatization of such home supplies that favours companies who enjoy privileged and almost monopolistic market conditions, as well as the inclusion of former politicians as company CEOs.

Table 1 accounts for the PAH's agenda but also for its crucial implications and framing contexts – rarely underlined by other researchers – in order to later evaluate their achievement. In the remaining part of this section I argue that, above all, the PAH framed and expanded its demands in order to appeal to a broader public consisting of potential members and sympathisers who are being hit increasingly more severely by the economic crisis. In particular, the following three sociological remarks must be considered.

(1) 'People affected by mortgages' refers to homeowners who became financially broken because of unemployment and dubious banking practices.⁷ However, PAH members and supporters have evolved into a broader social collective spurred by soaring rental prices, meagre earnings and unavailable public housing; members and supporters include migrants, working and middle-class people hit by austerity policies, activists from other movements and sympathetic politicians. Accordingly, the aforementioned goals comprise two specific demands that sparked the initial mobilization of impoverished homeowners (#1 and #3), two general demands addressing housing access among a vulnerable population (#2 and #4) and one demand aimed at alleviating the impoverishment of those still housed (#5).

(2) While the scope of demands #1, #2, #3 and #5 was limited, #4 questioned the provision of social housing as a whole in a context of neoliberal austerity policies that neglected housing-related rights and subsidies (Della Porta *et al.*, 2016; Mayer, 2016). For those directly involved, specific and tactical goals engender a higher capacity for durable mobilization. More ambitious or strategic goals are less likely to fuel the movement's long-term activity. Their accomplishment is also difficult to measure; however, the strategic goals helped to frame the tactical goals in a meaningful manner for activists, supporters and opponents, thereby cementing the PAH at the core of a substantial housing movement rather than representing a modest campaign to rehouse homeowners in financial difficulty.

(3) The demands convey an interpretation of the 2008 economic recession that is in sharp contrast to that offered by mainstream media and the ruling class. The PAH emphasized the financialization of property assets, the construction bubble and the corrupt practices of major political parties as the main driving forces behind the devastating wave of foreclosures and housing repossessions.⁸ The crisis period in question has since 2008 highlighted the grievances of a social base that did not previously exist (Di Feliciano, 2016). Those potentially affected by the PAH's demands include not only bankrupt homeowners but also large parts of the population and their offspring subjected to precarious jobs, austerity policies and rampant real estate speculation.

This strategy is well represented by one interviewee's response:

Our principal goal – a very general one that, eventually, we never accomplished – is to conquer the right to housing. But, before that, there are short-term goals ... Let's make proposals, let's make it visible, let's make noise and include the issue of foreclosures in the media agenda, the scam of mortgages, the social housing shortage. This was the short-term goal ... One of our great victories, and the least visible, was to transform the collective imaginary [about those issues] ... And what the PAH promoters found out was that their main enemy was not the banks, but people[s imaginary]. (I051, PAH activist; Barcelona, January 2017)

Demands #1, #2 and #3 explicitly guided the PAH for the first 2 years following its inception. The organization gained widespread media attention because of the aforementioned framing conditions, innovative protest campaigns and the outbreak of the 15M movement. An earlier housing movement (V de Vivienda), mainly active during the peak years of the economic boom (2006 to 2008), shared similar goals with the PAH but was



Table 1. PAH demands and framing contexts.

Demand	Type	Implications	Framing contexts
#1 Mandatory 'non-recourse debt' for principal homes	Specific/Legal change of mortgage regulations	Voluntary option for banks at present. International standard	Addressed impoverished homeowners. Sparked initial mobilization. Targeted banks as culprits of financialization and economic crisis
#2 Affordable rental prices	Specific/Legal change of tenancy contracts	Possible rent control. Challenge to prevailing homeownership	Addressed a broad population unable to be housed. Widened social support beyond homeowners. Targeted landlords and property investors as culprits of financialization and economic crisis
#3 Moratorium of principal home eviction	Specific/Temporary policy measure to face housing emergency	Subsidies and relocations in social housing	Addressed impoverished homeowners. Sparked initial mobilization. Targeted banks as culprits of financialization and economic crisis
#4 A comprehensive housing policy	General/Long-term measures for housing policies	To increase social housing stock. To decrease rate of empty houses	Addressed a broad population unable to be housed. Widened social support and provided a long-term strategic view. Targeted corrupt politicians as culprits of financialization and economic crisis
#5 Fight energetic poverty	Specific/Legal change of basic home supplies	Gas, water and electricity supplies must be guaranteed for poor households	Addressed an already housed but vulnerable and impoverished population. Widened social support beyond homeowners. Targeted privatized companies as culprits of economic crisis

Source: <http://las5delapah.com/las-5-de-la-pah/> and author.

only backed by precarious and activist youth, and it experienced a quick decline (Aguilar & Fernández 2010). In addition to the different contexts of both movements, the PAH developed a more mature organizational structure with more efficient internal dynamics, more qualified professionals as activists and higher capacities for mobilization and protest through both conventional and non-conventional means. Moreover, in comparison to previous urban movements such as left-libertarian squatters, the PAH was eager to influence concrete policies and legal regulations, engage in debates with corporate media or negotiate with political parties and banks. But the expansion of its social base to newly empowered women, migrants and working-class people can be regarded as a crucial condition:

Very normal and also desperate people became politicised and helped us [experienced activists] to redefine fear and fear of authority ... This has very concrete and tangible results. It is quite spectacular to rehouse forty families from the street all of a sudden, to provide them with a normalised life and see how they fight to keep it ... Over the first year we [experienced activists] set the agenda of the meetings. We were four Spaniards with a militant background and all the rest were migrants. Latin women, mainly, and some from Bangladesh and Pakistan. No men, surprisingly. They did not attend because of their shame and responsibility [for the mortgage] ... The Latin women in their forties and fifties came and took over the management of the group. Once a family came to ask for help and present their case. After the 'collective consultancy' they stood up ready to leave. Then, a Bolivian woman also stood up and told them: 'Stop. This is not an NGO. You do not come here to a counter, collect a form and go away. I help you to solve your case because you help to solve mine. I go to your foreclosure because you come to mine. So, sit down until the meeting ends.' (I037, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

These new recruits became rapidly politicized, empowered and engaged in very horizontal ways of self-organization and mutual aid. The most experienced activists, many with a middle-class origin, led the initial organizational tasks, but their leadership was quickly neutralized by the newcomers:

In the beginning, the PAH groups were mainly made up of militants. Now there are still militants, but most members are people affected [by foreclosures], who became politicised and remained in the assembly while helping other people. (I038, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

Unconventional protest repertoires

The PAH's demands are meaningful in relation to organizational forms and political practices. However, such forms and practices are shaped by socio-political contexts where other organizations and institutions interact with one another differently over time. Remarkably, the PAH is a very autonomous organization: no labour unions, NGOs, political parties, state agencies or private companies were members, funding partners or formal allies. Such autonomy can be regarded as a direct political inheritance from past social movements, particularly those that arose during the global justice movement's wave of protests in the late 1990s (Flesher, 2014). Nevertheless, spokespeople and personal leadership are more prominent in the PAH than in more radical autonomous groups. An additional distinct feature of the PAH, absent from other autonomous movements, is its self-help characteristic along with the essential aid and involvement of various professionals, regardless of their respective housing situations; this feature was also a salient strength of the citizen movement in the late 1970s (Castells, 1983). These sociological strengths are pointed out as crucial in the activists' understanding of their success:

Lawyers have a lot of merit in our judicial success [to negotiate and stop evictions]. However, I am convinced that no matter how skilful our lawyer is, should the judge wish to strictly apply the law ... All that social awareness [about housing issues according to the PAH's views] has had a lot of influence on all the favourable verdicts that are coming out ... Social sensitisation is our major success. (I055, PAH activist; A Coruña, January 2017)

The communication style of the PAH, to know how to communicate, is a very important factor. On that matter Ada Colau [the PAH's most well-known spokesperson before being elected Mayor of Barcelona] has been very important. She had a great capacity to communicate ... She came to give a talk in Getafe and she told [us] that we have to go to [negotiate with] the institutions but also to ... confront the banks, obstruct evictions, occupy the town hall. (I039, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

Following a large number of highly repressive police responses to autonomous protests, direct actions aiming to prevent home evictions were framed by the media with a surprising positive outlook for the PAH. The Stop Evictions Campaign entailed not only the risk of being removed, beaten and arrested by the police but also criminal charges for obstructing court injunctions. The context of the economic crisis contributed to this framing as much as the spread of the PAH's discourse. The outlook of radicalism usually attached to direct actions, even those strictly adherent to nonviolent civil disobedience principles, was largely compensated for by images of evicted individuals and families, many of them with young children, elderly people or ill relatives, who had been offered no compassion or policy measures to house them. Dramatic scenarios of people shouting, crying, hugging, barricading front doors and sitting in before being quashed by riot police sparked widespread solidarity. Less widely known are the long negotiations involving every PAH branch conducted to prevent repossessions, obtain nonrecourse debts and press for affordable rentals. What was equally demanding and only portrayed in some clips and media reports about the PAH were the long sessions of welcoming, offers of emotional and technical support, exchanges of personal stories, organizational training and tactical meetings, all of which added to the daily lives of activists (Di Felicianonio, 2016; Ortega, 2017).

Nonetheless, two PAH campaigns were more controversial to mainstream media audiences. One of these campaigns, The Obra Social, was launched in 2011, giving rise to the occupation of buildings owned by banks that had been bailed out by the government. Instead of naming them 'squats', the PAH opted for the term 'recuperated buildings' in an attempt to distinguish the actions from the more radical squatters' movement. The banks that had been rescued by the government were framed as illegitimate owners, denoting that occupation by the impoverished was justified. Furthermore, the PAH squatters continually expressed their sincere will to pay rent of up to 30% of their respective incomes, thereby opening room for negotiation (Abellán, 2015; Alvarez *et al.*, 2015). Instead of a predominantly youthful composition, such as those seen in most anticapitalist squats, homeless people from various household types, immigrants and women participated in the occupations. All such significant differences, in contrast with the squatters' movement, contributed to placating the negative connotations of squatting. However, public discourses in praise of homeownership and private property are still hegemonic and thus neutralize the political legitimacy striven for through these specific PAH actions.⁹

The 'escrache' campaign was symbolically borrowed from Argentinian slang and a political context where activists unmasked those who collaborated with the dictatorial regime (Romanos, 2013; Flesher, 2015). The campaign also resembled the informative pickets of

workers' strikes. The PAH called for this action from February to June 2013 to invigorate their citizen-initiated legislation (CIL). The *escraches* involved demonstrations next to politicians who opposed the CIL, mostly from the ruling conservative People's Party (PP). Given the nature of the *escraches*, in which an individual is the focus of a protest that is sometimes performed at his or her place of residence, the movement was labelled with such terms as 'harassment', 'violence' and 'terrorism' by mainstream media and the political establishment, even though neither physical attacks nor personal intimidation occurred.

In summary, the PAH coordinates many branches nationwide as well as local housing organizations initially not affiliated with the PAH, such as those in Seville (Díaz-Parra & Cándon, 2015) and Madrid (Abellán, 2015), and not without strains (Gonick, 2015). Eventually, the subsequent convergence with 15M activists and former left-libertarian squatters was a favourable contextual condition of the protest cycle (García-Calderón & Janoschka, 2016; García-Lamarca, 2016; Martínez & García, 2015). Regarding its repertoire of action, the PAH was more inclined to employ institutional means of pressure, such as lobbying and negotiation (especially when engaging with financial corporations, municipal governments and the central parliament) and taking part in judicial trials, than other radical activists who still favoured direct action. This choice resulted in the expansion of its social base of membership, supporters and sympathisers, as well as in a practical focus on short-term goals by helping to solve individual cases. In addition, they articulated this specific social mobilization with a strategic discourse that changed the prevailing meaning of the housing problems. The context of the crisis and neoliberal-austerity policies was reframed as a 'scam' which legitimised the PAH's actions by targeting banks, property investors, privatized supplying companies, corrupt politicians and landlords as the culprits of the economic crisis, instead of impoverished homeowners and tenants (Di Feliciano, 2017; García, 2015).

Types and scope of outcomes

The PAH's social and political impacts stand out compared to other urban and housing struggles; 2045 effective 'stop evictions' blockades and 2500 rehoused squatters according to their website (December 2017). Comments by online newspaper readers are usually very supportive of this organization and its civil disobedience practices. International media outlets praised the PAH as an extraordinary case of success. PAH activists also share this general assessment:

[This has been the most successful struggle within the protest cycle initiated in 2011 because] first, it focuses on a very particular issue that became a general concern and, second, due to its powerful spokesperson in the mass media, everybody was aware of it -my mother, my grandmother, my neighbour. In addition, it is very creative when it comes to performing protest actions such as the '*escraches*' ... It is also a very concrete thing; either victory or defeat is decided in just a moment ... You are there with other bodies and you are able to stop the eviction, and this gives you a special [immediate] reward. (I038, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

However, as shown in Table 2, a critical evaluation should also take into account the shortcomings of the PAH's achievements, its unintended consequences and the contexts that mediate the reach of its impacts, as suggested by the review of the literature above and hardly attempted by previous publications on this subject. In my analysis, I also discuss



Table 2. Outcomes associated with the PAH's demands and significant contexts.

Demand	Achievement	Unintended consequences	Contexts
#1 Mandatory 'non-recourse debt' for principal homes	Failed to induce legal change at the national level, but CL engendered parliamentary and social debate (thus, visibility via agenda setting). Legal changes in regional laws were repealed by the PP/central government. The topic entered the political agenda. More banks agreed to cancel debts after foreclosure	The CIL mobilized PAH supporters and new allies such as the EU and UN. The PAH exhibited higher levels of legitimization and self-reproduction. Emergency measures were implemented by the central government	Nonrecourse debt and abuses by banks at the core of the financialization of housing. Strong alliance between the PP and financial elites. Splits between political elites (PSOE shifted stance). EU and UN exerted pressure on austerity policies on housing and the CIL
#2 Affordable rental prices	Largely unaccomplished, although more banks and developers signed temporary agreements	Greater legitimization for residential squatting once squatters expressed their will to pay affordable rent. Provided strategic orientation to the housing movement. Tenants' unions claiming for rent controls	During the crisis, new property investors preferred dwellings without tenants. Small rental market. Landlords and developers favoured by rental legislation
#3 Moratorium of principal home eviction	No general moratorium obtained. Thousands of cases practically halted and a moratorium dictated by the government only for extreme cases of poverty. Many effective negotiations to prevent repossessions on an individual basis, case to case	Legitimation of some actions of civil disobedience. Further criminalization of protests by social movements	Larger numbers and long-term wave of home evictions. Relative cohesion between political elites surrounding the criminalization of protests despite international condemnation
#4 A comprehensive housing policy #5 Fight energetic poverty	Partial influence in new regional legislation on housing subject to judicial appeals from the PP/ central government. More political parties (especially the PSOE) endorsed the PAH's proposals	Regional and municipal support broke cohesion in the political elites (PSOE and other parties took sides with the PAH). PAH and 15M activists became municipal representatives and quit activism	2015 municipal elections continued to erode unity among dominant political parties, especially in major cities such as Madrid and Barcelona where new left populist governments formed coalitions with PSOE
#1 – #5 All	Increasing self-reproduction and expansion. Broad social legitimization despite two controversial protest tactics. Blockades were less risky and less necessary over time. Access granted to state institutions. Sustained challenge against power holders	Politics of care and anti-neoliberal subjectivity were examples for other social movements. Tenants unions inspired by the PAH	Antagonistic discourses on the interpretation of the financial crisis. Shifting strategies of economic and political elites to cope with anti-neoliberal movements

Source: <http://las5delapah.com/las-5-de-la-pah/> and author.

the issue of the movement's self-reproduction and legitimization as a fundamental outcome in urban and housing politics.

Agenda setting and institutional activism

First of all, the PAH failed in making nonrecourse debt compulsory by law. However, following the rapid rise of the PAH, this topic did come under intense public scrutiny. It was placed at the top of the political agenda, and all political parties apart from the two dominant ones (the PP and Spanish Socialist Workers' Party [PSOE]) supported the PAH's demands as early as 2010. Furthermore, many other civic and professional organizations adhered to the demands. This prompted the PAH to launch the CIL for a second time following the failure of the first attempt, thereby forcing a parliamentary debate. The collection of 1.5 million signatures far exceeded the 500,000 legally required, thereby confirming the wide social backing of the legal amendments and efficient nationwide organization of the PAH. Therefore, the petition process served as a crucial contribution to the self-reproduction and legitimization of the PAH. This success was based on media coverage that deviated from the standard 'protest paradigm' (McLeod, 2007) and equipped the PAH's claims with positive visibility. Such widespread mobilization and alliances with workers' unions and other grassroots groups, strategically performed by the PAH activists, could not be easily ignored or demonised.

Financial and business representatives, especially the Spanish Banking Association, backed the government's reluctance for any legal reforms to mortgage regulations. At the peak of the PAH's campaign in 2013, the organization's main spokesperson, Ada Colau, attended a parliamentary hearing for the CIL, where she accused bankers of behaving like criminals. Her straightforward and emotive speech went viral and improved the public's outlook towards the PAH. Although the CIL was rejected, to show acknowledgement and placate public outcry, the central government passed a piece of legislation to address urgent housing emergencies.¹⁰ This unintended consequence was supplemented by a shift in political stance within the members of the PSOE, who were in favour of the CIL, which, in turn, facilitated the approval of new housing laws in five regional governments (Catalonia, Navarra, Andalusia, Murcia and Valencia) between 2013 and 2017. Various degrees of support for the implementation of nonrecourse debt and other PAH demands were included in these regulations despite the central government's judicial attempts to invalidate them.

We made a state-wide campaign to change the law. A CIL is the only available tool we have to change laws from civil society. And we got one million and a half signatures, and all that process ends up in a blockade [by the Spanish Parliament] ... At that moment we were the true opposition to the [central] government ... Then, we formulated another strategy ... 'To break up from below' ... And we started campaigning with the CIL or lobbying to change the law at the regional level. We succeeded first in Catalonia. Then it was replicated in Murcia and other regional governments. Madrid is also currently engaged in the same process. (I051, PAH activist; Barcelona, January 2017)

The influence of the PAH on banking practices is notable. The PAH successfully persuaded many banks to apply nonrecourse debts in thousands of cases (endnote v). Individual negotiations on numerous cases were not easily conducted; hence, contentious and direct actions were required to reinforce them. Such social pressure transformed what had previously been a voluntary practice for banks into a government recommendation as a 'good

practice' in 2012.¹¹ This institutional activism was also rewarded with alliances with other political bodies such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), who had repeatedly urged the Spanish government to modify the mortgage legislation.

In March 2012, the Minister of Economy, Luis de Guindos, presented the Code of Good Practices to protect the most vulnerable bank clients facing foreclosure. The Code was voluntary, no bank was forced to comply. One year later, more than a hundred banks adhered to the Code, 291 nonrecourse debts were granted, and mortgage conditions were revised in 691 cases ... The banks' association declared that 11,441 nonrecourse debts, in the case of a principal home, were also granted apart from the Code. (Eldiario.es 24 April, 2013)

We haven't been able to change the mortgage legislation, although we had the opportunity in 2013 ... We experienced that defeat with pain, but we didn't give up. Actually, if you see the laws passed by the PP that are mere patches, news headlines ... they ended up accepting everything we demanded and were viewed as revolutionary, anarchic and leading to judicial insecurity before. The government changed from saying 'we will never accept nonrecourse debt' to legislating a shitty 'Code of Good Practices', in which nonrecourse debt is recommended as a 'second chance'. All these concepts are useless, but they ended up introducing ours -social rent, a stock of social housing, a moratorium on evictions, etc. They haven't done it as they should, but they ended up [accepting them] ... (I051, PAH activist; Barcelona, January 2017)

Unreachable goals

The demand for 'affordable rental prices' was initially intended to accommodate mortgage holders as tenants in their lost properties after foreclosure. Increasingly, many banks agreed to this arrangement despite their reluctance to do so before 2009. In this case, some municipal governments acted as mediators, especially those in which former PAH activists or supporters became elected (Barcelona, Madrid, Cádiz, A Coruña, etc.). However, this goal remains largely unaccomplished, because banks or developers did not have many opportunities to sell or let properties in the short term. Further transactions are frequently easier if dwellings have no tenants. Moreover, despite the slowdown in the property market that lasted until 2015 (and quickly recovered afterwards, especially in major cities), profits gained by banks after winning foreclosure injunctions were still significant. A bank could assume ownership of a house for only 60%¹² of the original estimated value and continue to receive the remaining payments from the debtor.

An unintended and mostly unnoticed yet salient outcome of demand #2 is that it legitimised squatting (Di Feliciano, 2017; García-Lamarca, 2016). PAH squatters are always prepared to pay rent that is affordable to them. This is socially accepted for being consistent with the dominant homeownership mindset, even though it seldom occurred in practice. By contrast, more traditional squatters who rejected any legal or commercial agreement with owners challenged more deeply conventional notions about private property.

This, in turn, contributed to root the PAH in a firm practice of direct actions (squatting and eviction blockades) combined with manifold negotiations (with political parties and banks) that could last years. Therefore, although not many 'social rents' were obtained, the demand was socially legitimised even in the case of being attached to radical actions such as squatting:

The PAH works as a strict assembly; self-management is absolutely strict and much more developed than in previous social movements. The PAH has clearly promoted disobedience. For me, the great rupture is the incorporation of negotiation, which does not come either from

previous militancy nor from the 15M spirit ... In the PAH of my neighbourhood, I regularly negotiate with banks, with the police and whoever I need to ... [Squatting actions] are discussed separately ... But there are always 100 people attending and new people. It's really surprising. Cases are prioritised according to emergency. And we do not accept any case without a file of documents because, otherwise, negotiations – which are extremely hard to conduct – become slow and messy. So, the condition is 'come to the assembly and bring your own documents'. (I037, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

As mentioned, demand #2 was also aimed at modifying the regulation of rental contracts to favour tenants. The PAH lobbied municipal and regional governments to press for the implementation of rent control measures. However, these issues depended on a legal framework at the national level that had been previously reformed by both the PSOE and PP governments with a stronger liberal orientation; that is, less protection for tenants such as a fast-tracked eviction procedure in case of unpaid rent and a shorter minimum tenancy period. Consequently, despite this demand being highly specific, nothing significant was achieved. In practice, the demand functioned more as a strategic goal to catch the attention of the actual and potential renter populations and inspire more progressive regulations on housing matters. An indicator of unintended impacts of such a claim is the creation of a tenants' unions in Madrid and Barcelona by May 2017. These new unions became distinct organizations, but many PAH activists were strongly involved in their promotion (as I directly observed at the launch meeting they held in Barcelona as well as online, in their presentation in Madrid).

Legitimation of resistance

The pioneering PAH campaign strove to prevent home evictions, at least temporarily, by appealing to both the exceptional measures required to face the economic crisis and the violation of human rights that repossessions usually entail. The main result of this campaign was the considerable number of cancelled evictions after blockades, negotiations and online debates promoted by housing activists. These measures benefited more than 2000 households, despite the central government's reluctance to pass a general moratorium – only a limited one for the most extreme cases of poverty.¹³ As part of its institutional activism, the PAH obtained the formal commitment of hundreds of municipal governments to interfere and mediate in cases of home evictions as much as possible, especially in large cities like Barcelona after 2015.

Every single prevented eviction represents an uncontested victory. Equally as notable is the activists' declaration that sit-ins and physical blockades became increasingly less risky and even less necessary over time. Instead, the activists became more engaged in routine negotiations with banks to delay and prevent evictions as a last recourse.¹⁴ Mobilization based on the accumulation of individual victories represents a practical path of action and invigorates the resilience of activism. However, despite this celebrated outcome, a more general assessment should not be overlooked. The total number of failed attempts to prevent evictions is not so easily measurable. In addition, thousands of repossession files have avoided PAH scrutiny because the people affected did not contact housing organizations. The official figures for residents evicted from their primary dwellings (e.g. more than 36,000 in 2014; endnote v) outnumber prevented and postponed cases, which render such cases exceptional. Therefore, given the whole picture, although the PAH understandably feels

proud of its progress regarding the cases they assisted and the high rate of successful outcomes, it also acknowledges the bitter taste of the wins.

Here in Getafe [a municipality next to Madrid] we were able to halt all the foreclosures except one for now ... There were around fourteen cases of 'stop evictions' calls within three years. All the rest were halted due to our pressure on the bank. In all cases we guaranteed the right to housing. In half of the cases we gained a non-recourse debt. In other cases, the banks agreed to apply the Decree [to prevent eviction of the most extreme cases of poverty¹⁵] by saying: 'OK, you almost match the requirements, let's wait and we will see in two years' time' ... We achieved that everyone either remained in their home or in another house provided by the bank [with affordable rent] ... The most difficult thing is to obtain the cancellation of the debt once the house has been auctioned ... Finally, three or four people gave up and returned the keys of their homes [to the bank]. These could be considered our own mistakes – not to keep these people fighting for their home until the end. (I039, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

We are focusing very much on individual cases, but it would be better to achieve a broader project ... a new housing policy in the medium and long-term ... Individual cases are important to show the face of disgrace in order to press for more. (I055, PAH activist; A Coruña, January 2017)

García (2015, p. 182) defined the PAH's most salient impact as the 'institutionalisation of resistance'. My interpretations of interviews, news and documents are consistent with that view. Regarding the execution of a judicial sentence, confronting police, even by peaceful means, is a serious criminal offence. Before 2009, the notion that such action could be practised heavily on a regular basis for so many years did not exist in the prevailing political imagination. Even support for specific individuals and households was not considered sufficiently political within the milieu of social movements, despite the feminist motto 'personal is political' that resembles the exercise of reframing individual and moral issues into collective concerns. The PAH was able to politicize individual home evictions as a question of social justice and fundamental human rights that should be protected by international conventions. Up until 2009, according to the hegemonic discourse, impoverished individuals with mortgages bore responsibility for becoming financially broken. The Stop Evictions Campaign was decisive in altering this social outlook by targeting banks and politicians as the culprits of property financialization, the construction bubble, tolerated banking malpractices and mismanagement of the resulting wave of evictions. Therefore, this specific civil disobedience concerning foreclosures became fully justified.

[New] discursive frames were brought into the protest camp such as 'this is not a crisis but a scam'. Suddenly, this opened up a new stage to understand politics and the economy. This is crucial to me. The 15M and its surroundings introduced new issues in the political agenda, which are a top priority for me. The PAH's struggle on housing and on the normalisation of the fight for basic rights is one of the most remarkable ruptures [with the past] ... From the beginning, the 15M was shaped by demonstrating without permission, sit-ins and 'we shall not move', and the 'stop evictions' and occupations of banks by the PAH ... This is a disobedient practice that is fully normalised right now. In my neighbourhood [a working-class area in Madrid] everyone protests at foreclosures and rebukes the police. (I037, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

Resistance was the protest method of the 15M movement and squatters' movements. Together with the PAH, these movements have contributed to the recreation and revitalization of a political culture of legitimate civil disobedience at the grassroots level. The main unintended impact, a reaction of the political elite to this achievement, was a new bill on

criminal legislation, known as the ‘Gag Law’, approved by the PP and brought into force in July 2015.¹⁶ Fines of up to €40,000 may now be enforced on anyone who interferes in the execution of home evictions and disobeys police instructions. Additional sanctions aimed at suppressing demonstrations next to the parliament house, online calls for allegedly unauthorised demonstrations and visual records of police officers were promulgated. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN condemned such sanctions as a step back in terms of the democratic rights to assembly and freedom of expression.¹⁷

Multiscalar influence

The main outcome related to demands #4 and #5 was to influence political debates before the municipal elections of May 2015, and the general elections of December 2015 and June 2016. The Catalan housing law (24/2015) had already met these demands despite being subsequently challenged by the central government in high courts.¹⁸ The PAH had been active in Catalonia, lobbying the former regional government, but had failed to yield any significant change (Colau & Alemany, 2012, p. 154). However, in support of the measures proposed by the PAH to sanction the owners of empty houses and promote affordable rent issued by banks, 120 town halls across Catalonia enforced Law 24/2015.¹⁹ Between 2011 and 2013, approximately 200 Spanish municipalities officially declared their intention to follow the PAH’s suggestions to prevent evictions with measures such as providing welfare assistance and relocation to social housing.²⁰ The PAH’s focus on municipal institutions was intended to ‘drill into the foundations of the political parties that block [the CIL] in the Parliament’ (Colau & Alemany, 2012, p. 138), which I interpret as a means to disrupt the cohesion among the political elites and to seize the opportunity of a weaker PSOE at the national level in particular, by forcing them to side with the PAH at all state levels (central, regional and municipal).

The municipal elections of May 2015 represented progress. Many housing and 15M activists became representatives and members of local governments, and this constitutes an unintended outcome for such a nonpartisan organization. Housing activists thus nurtured left populist parties such as Podemos and electoral platforms such as Ahora Madrid, Barcelona en Comú and Marea Atlántica in Galicia. Most often, this new instability within the political elites turned into coalitions between the new parties including housing activists and the PSOE, most notably in Madrid and Barcelona.²¹

Podemos and Ahora Madrid have signed the ‘PAH commitment’ on housing. Thus, PAH grants them its endorsement and a ‘non-aggression pact’ without taking part in the parties ... In my housing assembly there are several city representatives who are PAH members ... One does not attend any more ... In addition, people who quit were very hard-working guys and we clearly notice it. We are now overcoming the [municipal elections campaign] cycle but the transfer [of activists to political parties] has been devastating. (I037, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

In PAH Getafe [one municipality next to Madrid] ten activists became involved in the electoral process. [Since then] they haven’t been as regularly active in the PAH as before. I am the only one who keeps away [from electoral politics]. They represent around 95% of the activist core. (I039, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

Disruption, defiance and resilience

One noteworthy issue is the PAH's sustained capacity to disrupt and challenge power holders 'by means of repeated public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment' (Tilly, 1999, pp. 257). Concerning the reproduction and expansion of the PAH, the core group of promoters demonstrated their dedication explicitly (Colau & Alemany, 2012, p. 103) to achieve replication of the 'model' on as large a scale as possible. The lengthy duration of the economic and political crisis, as well as the absence of substantial reforms in housing policies over successive electoral cycles, sustained the PAH's appeal. Local groups mushroomed all over the country. According to other observers (Alvarez *et al.*, 2015), the survival of the organization lies in a dual communicative strategy consisting of intense contact with mainstream media and horizontal online communication between the PAH branches.

Opinion polls have shown highly consensual sympathy for the PAH's demands.²² Such legitimation has enabled the movement to access state institutions and players such as national and European legislators, parliamentary committees and municipal representatives (Flesher, 2015, pp. 469–471). A major breakthrough not observed in other Spanish social movements is the PAH's creation of trust, community, solidarity, self-esteem, dignity, fearlessness, care and empowerment among its members (Colau & Alemany, 2012, pp. 93–100, 135). These factors articulate personal aspects related to activism in everyday life, including those dealing with a diverse population in terms of ethnic background, age, class and family situation within the context of property financialization. The PAH framed impoverished individuals with mortgages as victims of a financial system oriented towards continuous profit-making, where financial powers not only take advantage of powerless clients, but also abuse the system wherever possible, operate in grey and fraudulent areas of the law, and enjoy costly inflows of public cash in the event of financial collapse. As argued by Di Felicianantonio (2016, pp. 107–111), this articulation successfully engendered anti-neoliberal subjectivities through a combination of direct action and the deconstruction of the hegemonic identity of debtors as the organization's sole responsibility. This simultaneous politics of care and anti-neoliberal subjectivity were disseminated, albeit not purposively, among many other social movements according to activists' declarations and comments propagated through various media (see, for example, multiple references in outlets such as *Elsaltodiario.com* and *Roarmag.org*).

The PAH is able to realise an alternative way of participation, decision-making and action ... that was claimed by the 15M movement ... We are common people and we are going to fight for our demands, no matter how ... This is a new form of syndicalism that exceeds housing and reaches the territory, neighbourhoods ... More new PAHs are still being created, but its demands will be deeply incorporated by the new municipal governments. (I039, PAH activist; Madrid, June 2015)

Conclusions

This study assessed the Spanish housing movement led by the PAH from 2009 to 2017, which has often been labelled a highly successful protest. In contrast with the prevailing literature on the outcomes of social movements and as an addition to it, my analysis highlights substantial achievements but also failures regarding the most ambitious demands.

In particular, I identify hidden aspects of the movement's impacts in terms of unintended consequences, the self-reproduction of its principal organization and the crucial social, political and economic contexts that mediate between demands and outcomes. Contexts are seen as structures that determine the constraints and opportunities of the movement, so its impacts are also dependent on them. But the political environment is also a source of events, practices and meanings that frame the interpretation of both demands and outcomes. As it is referred to above, the literature on social movements has provided key insights questioning the linear causality between demands and outcomes, but there are no contributions that simultaneously include unintended impacts and significant contexts in the analysis. Even less frequent is a systematic application of those approaches to urban and housing movements despite some valuable recent studies (Madden & Marcuse, 2016; Pickvance, 1994; Polanska, 2015). Regarding the PAH, observations about its socio-political impacts are scattered and partial, so my analysis provides a more comprehensive interpretation.

In sum, the PAH stands out as a grassroots movement with greater leverage than previous housing movements. The organization served as a leading body among various emerging social struggles ignited by mass mobilization on 15 May, 2011, and it lasted longer than other movements, most of which were on the decline by 2014. By raising public concerns regarding the housing crisis and placing this topic at the core of the political agenda, the PAH gradually gained legitimacy, recruitment interest, access to state institutions and practical victories for thousands of vulnerable individuals and households who asked for help and ended up as regular activists. More banks than ever before agreed to cancel debts after foreclosure trials and requisitions, and many home evictions were prevented. In many cases, affordable rent was negotiated, and, as a last recourse, homeless people were rehoused in squats. These agreements were made even beyond the limited regulations in the cases of extreme poverty that the central government implemented in order to placate the movement's demands.

A combination of pressure exerted on the economic and political elites through civil disobedience, street mobilization and institutional channels proved to be fruitful for many beneficiaries, especially for those who joined the PAH. The continuous self-reproduction and expansion of the PAH over almost one decade and its high capacity to achieve legal and political changes at municipal and regional levels, enacted in response to their demands, frequently satisfied these housing activists. What was barely noticed by most observers was that the PAH was able to unify and coordinate a diverse milieu of housing struggles mostly ignited by the 15M movement (Abellán, 2015). In addition to solidarity, collective learning, horizontal decision-making and respect for internal differences (primarily related to gender, race and age), other movements have given particular praise to the PAH's exemplary politics of care, mutual emotional support, the celebration of every single triumph regardless of scope and the cultivation of empowerment (Di Feliciano, 2016; Gonick, 2015).

Compared with the 15M movement and past antiglobalization, anticapitalist and autonomous movements (Flesher, 2014; Martínez & García, 2015; Romanos, 2013), the PAH was more exposed to mass media, did not reject organizational leadership and proposed feasible reforms. Once the wall of media silence had been overcome, politicians and bankers were confronted. A specific campaign named 'Break Up from Below' was initiated by the PAH within its first few days. In contrast to traditional practices of individual negotiations over debts, bank managers in local offices were approached by activist groups, which subsequently extended to direct contact with the higher ranks within financial corporations. Television talk shows and news reports were animated with protest actions such as the

occupation of bank offices. Although more banks were eager to cancel debts in foreclosure processes, they rarely did so without PAH involvement. Moreover, banking associations remained opposed to the further regulation of making nonrecourse debts compulsory.

As suggested by other researchers (Alvarez *et al.*, 2015; Di Feliciano, 2016; Flesher, 2015; Gonick, 2015; Romanos, 2013), the political economy framework should be considered as the main driver of PAH mobilization. Within the context of the global financial crisis, the PAH successfully framed the ‘personal’ drama of home evictions with an alternative discourse of ‘systematic fraud’ orchestrated by financial and state powers that ultimately engendered serious human rights violations (García, 2015). Equipped with this discourse, the PAH evolved from a self-help group to represent a political model or toolbox for other anti-neoliberal movements. However, in my analysis I have also added the increasing divisions and reconfigurations of the major political parties as crucial contextual factors to favour the advance of the PAH’s goals. In particular, the PSOE’s ambivalent decisions concerning housing made at various institutional junctions and in different periods, their internal strife and their shrinking electoral support were key conditions for the relative success of the PAH’s CIL and the ‘Break Up from Below’ campaigns. PAH’s moves in the international sphere granted them powerful allies, such as the EU and UN, that undermined the legitimacy of the PP in the issues of housing both at home and abroad. Finally, the municipal elections of 2015 reinvigorated the actions taken by the new left-populist governments on housing according to the PAH’s agenda. This was possible due to the influence of the PAH in the electoral campaigns (with ‘escraches’ to politicians who were reluctant to support their claims) as well as the transfer of PAH activists to some municipal governments (Madrid and Barcelona as the most well-known).

Despite all the aforementioned pressures and a state-wide campaign, the CIL was not approved. The few affordable tenancy rents that were achieved did not evolve into a more comprehensive policy and legislation, nor did the central government intervene to postpone home repossessions except in the cases matching the criteria of extreme poverty. In contrast to the scholarship on this matter, I argue that these failures can be neither overlooked nor isolated from other consequences and contexts I have outlined before. Among them, the political decisions and legislative bills on housing made at both municipal and regional levels are substantive and positively valued outcomes of PAH activists. These partial victories also contribute to undermine the cohesion of political elites operating at different state levels and forced the central government to make minor concessions. Although these concessions were criticized and rejected by housing activists, many confirmed that the behaviour of banks has started to change since their implementation. However, as a backlash to the intense tide of social movements – the PAH included – the PP passed a new criminal code to increase the repression of protests in general, particularly civil disobedience. This legislation created more obstacles for the regular operations of the PAH but it came into force once the main bulk of foreclosures and evictions was already executed and some cases were alleviated by the central government’s policy measures. Furthermore, evictions of tenants instead of homeowners has become the new pattern in the recent years, so the example and experience of the PAH was highly influential in the formation of tenants’ unions.

The above evidence, analyses and arguments suggest that research on housing movements should take into consideration how socio-political contexts shape the changing expression of demands and the different dimensions in which both intended and unintended outcomes are manifested. Although this and other studies on the PAH reveal a key role of the

economic recession in the emergence and development of this housing movement, future research needs to further explore how the articulation between the movement's agency (in short, organization and protest repertoire) and other contextual structures (such as the instability of dominant political parties and ideological framings, as I have shown) occur. Finally, my study also substantiates the argument that the self-reproduction of a given social movement over time, and its linkage and diffusion with other movements, is the significant socio-political impact, rather than a mere organizational resource.

Notes

1. Data according to the PAH's website: <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/contacto/> [accessed 30 December 2017]. An interviewee (I051, PAH activist; Barcelona; January 2017) mentioned the figure of 370 PAH branches all over Spain which, probably, includes many affiliated housing groups not necessarily using the PAH label in their organization name.
2. According to my interviewees I060 from Barcelona (2017), and I040 (2015) and I047 (2016) from Madrid.
3. See, for example, the translations of their main textbook (Colau & Alemany, 2012) into various languages and the training offered by the PAH to other foreign activists such as the Irish Housing Network: <http://www.broadsheet.ie/2017/01/10/judgements-in-favour-of-vulture-funds-will-explode-in-2017/> and <http://www.broadsheet.ie/2016/12/21/midnight-at-the-apollo/>. PAH activists are also deeply involved in international organizations such as the International Alliance of Inhabitants (<http://www.habitants.org/content/search?SearchText=pah>) [accessed 30 January 2017]. Media outlets such as The New York Times have paid attention to this movement on various occasions; for example, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/16/world/europe/16spain.html> and <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/21/world/europe/leading-the-charge-against-spains-mortgage-crisis.html>.
4. This was also verified by many of my interviewees. For example, I037 (2015) and I047 (2016) from Madrid.
5. As one interviewee noted: '2012–13 is when the PAH got popular in mass media. All the PAH groups worked together in a nation-wide campaign [the Citizen Initiated Legislation]' (I051, PAH activist; Barcelona, January 2017). In order to assess the significance of my sample, I checked the amount of news items concerning the PAH in four major newspapers until 20 December 2017 with the following results: 2269 in *eldiario.es*, 1618 in *El País*, 917 in *El Mundo*, 313 in *La Razón*. My sample of 360 news items represents 16, 22, 39 and 115%, respectively.
6. <http://las5delapah.com/las-5-de-la-pah/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
7. One of these notorious abuses by banks is the 'mortgage floor contracts'. A recent European Court of Justice's ruling has overturned it and obliges Spanish banks to repay customers more than 4.1 billion Euros. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-21/spanish-banks-lose-eu-case-over-mortgage-interest-repayments-iwyp8kih> [accessed 30 January 2017].
8. Only in 2013 did the Bank of Spain start releasing official figures about evictions of primary homes (36,519 in 2014, 34,570 in 2013, 39,051 in 2012). These statistics also indicated that non-recourse debts for primary homes were applied by banks in 33% (2013), 43% (2012) and 45% (2014) out of the total cases of eviction: http://www.bde.es/f/webbde/GAP/Secciones/SalaPrensa/NotasInformativas/Briefing_notas/es/notabe300715.pdf. Another source estimates 67,359 evictions in 2015, 68,091 in 2014, 82,860 in 2013, 91,622 in 2012 and 77,854 in 2011 (compared to 25,943 in 2007) according to the CGPJ (General Council of the Judicial Power): <http://www.poderjudicial.es/portal/site/cgpj/>. This data comprises all kinds of properties and legal circumstances, not only mortgaged residential ones. In the 'battle of numbers' the PAH activists reported different calculations: <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/RETROSPECTIVA-SOBRE-DESAHUCIOS-Y-EJECUCIONES-HIPOTECARIAS-EN-ESPA%C3%91A-COLAUALEMANY1.pdf> [accessed 30 January 2017].

9. A noticeable illustration of the moral panic promoted by mass media about squatting is the coverage of apartments and buildings occupied by criminal gangs throughout 2016. The progressive Madrid mayor also echoed this phenomenon as a serious issue that should be prosecuted, which in turn meant a direct criticism to the PAH squats <http://ctxt.es/es/20170111/Politica/10489/Carmena-madrid-ayuntamiento-PSOE-ganemos-ahora-madrid.htm> [accessed 30 January 2017].
10. These measures were considered insufficient and criticized in detail by the PAH as ‘useless, illegal and violating human rights’: <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2013/05/28/respuestas-pah-a-la-ley-12013-clausulas-abusiva-partido-popular-que-vulnera-derechos-humanos/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
11. <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2012/04/12/pdfs/BOE-A-2012-4987.pdf> [accessed 30 January 2017].
12. It was at 50% before a slight legal reform was introduced by the PSOE in 2011.
13. The so-called anti-foreclosures decree, was first enacted in March 2012 and then renewed in May 2013 and March 2017: <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2017/03/18/pdfs/BOE-A-2017-2985.pdf>.
14. http://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/pasando-desahucios_0_499750885.html [accessed 30 January 2017].
15. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2017/03/18/pdfs/BOE-A-2017-2985.pdf>.
16. <https://news.vice.com/es/article/ley-mordaza-entra-en-vigor-autentico-retroceso-democratico-para-espana> [accessed 19 May 2016]. The official regulation was published here: <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2015/03/31/pdfs/BOE-A-2015-3442.pdf> [accessed 30 January 2017].
17. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/01/world/europe/spains-new-public-safety-law-has-its-challengers.html> [accessed 30 January 2017].
18. <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2016/04/18/campana-de-adhesiones-en-defensa-de-la-ley-242015-contrala-emergencia-habitacional/> [accessed 30 January 2017] and <http://ilphabitatge.cat/es/aprobada-por-unanimidad-la-ilp-contralos-desahucios-y-la-pobreza-energetica/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
19. <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2014/12/17/la-mocion-de-la-pah-para-recuperar-la-vivienda-vacia-en-manos-de-la-banca-ha-demostrado-que-una-vez-mas-si-se-puede/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
20. <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2014/01/20/mociones-ayuntamientos/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
21. <http://las5delapah.com/primeras-respuestas-de-los-partidos-a-las-exigencias-de-la-pah-para-las-elecciones-del-20d/> [accessed 30 January 2017] and <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2015/12/18/decian-que-no-cabian-pero-las-5-de-la-pah-entraron-de-pleno-en-la-campana-electoral/> [accessed 30 January 2017].
22. For example, percentages above 70% support for the PAH were reported by these surveys: <http://metroscopia.org/la-pah-premiada/> [accessed 30 January 2017] and <http://metroscopia.org/no-olvidar-lo-importante/> [accessed 30 January 2017].

Acknowledgements

This article has been substantially improved thanks to the comments of three anonymous reviewers. Criticisms raised by the participants in the academic meetings where the paper was presented – especially the conference on ‘Housing Activism: Beyond the West’ (Stockholm, May 2016) convened by Dominika V. Polanska, Katia Valenzuela Fuentes and Anne Kaun – were also very helpful. Interviewed activists provided information and discussions that crucially nurtured my analysis as well.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This study was fully supported by a grant from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (project number 11612016-CityU).

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