RESEARCH ARTICLE

RETHINKING PUBLIC HOUSING THROUGH SQUATTING.
The Case of Housing Rights Movements in Rome

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the contribution of housing squats and Housing Rights Movements (HRMs) in Rome in envisioning a new model of public estates that could respond to the surge and complexification of the post-2008 housing crisis. The first part of the article fleshes out the theoretical and methodological framework for investigating the peculiarities of housing squats in comparison to other forms of housing informality and urban squatting. In the second part, it analyses the development and composition of housing struggles since the post-Second World War. It then details the new demographics of the housing crisis in Rome to provide a framework for the innovation in the HRMs' confrontational politics and demands towards a more comprehensive notion of the 'right to the city'. Their emphasis upon the role of city developers and real estate agents, and the opposition towards the exclusionary nature of contemporary social welfare, have in fact redirected squatting actions towards different urban vacancies that are repurposed for habitation. I conclude by suggesting that these practices prefigure a new model of public housing estates that is economically, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive, whereby it pivots around use value and commoning.

1. Introduction

In the prolonged aftermath of the 2008 crisis caused by the explosion of the subprime mortgages' bubble (Caudo and Memo 2012; Rossi 2013), housing precarity, deprivation and displacement have been constituting one of the more radical manifestations of the inequities entrenched in post-neoliberal urbanism, whereby the differential allocation, and accumulation of different forms of housing represents one of the epicentres of post-capitalist operations and logistics (Enright and Rossi 2018; Mezzadra and Neilson 2019). In response to this polarisation, manifold manifestations of self-made housing (Chiodelli and Grazioli 2021) have emerged globally as part of a larger pattern of self-made urbanism (McFarlane and Lancione 2021) that points towards the temporary as well as permanent satisfaction of residential (and existential) ambitions and necessities that could not be satisfied through legally sanctioned actions. Among them, squatting for housing purposes stands out as a peculiar form of popular mobilisation (Leontidou 2010) and grassroots welfare reappropriation in Southern European contexts (Leontidou 1990, 1993; SqEK 2013, 2014; Di Feliciantonio and Aru 2018) where the gap between housing precarity (and thus request for public housing), and the mostly privatised housing stock could not be compensated by the social welfare already shrunk by austerity urbanism (Peck 2012; Mayer 2013). In Rome, squatting for housing purposes has been promoted mostly by Housing Rights Movements (henceforth HRMs), that have consolidated since the 1970s as grassroots urban movements who could organise, and mobilise, the inhabitants of the urban shantytowns where the urban poor and internal migrants had been displaced since during the Fascist regime, and whose demands for public housing and universal welfare (Di Feliciantonio 2017; Vasudevan 2017) were not as effectively represented by institutional political actors.

However, the ontologies and demographics of housing squatting in Rome have been changing consistently at least since the 1990s, when housing precarity began to intersect with migration (Montagna and Grazioli 2019) and the penetration of labour precarity, logistics and exploitation in all the realms of social (and spatial) reproduction as they 'hit the ground' (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019). These changes have upscaled in the prolonged aftermath of the crisis started in 2007-8, when thousands of housing-precarious (or utterly deprived) urban dwellers in Rome have chosen to join the HRMs and to realise the so called '*occupazioni abitative*' (housing squats). The latter are intended as diverse types of urban vacancies (either of public or private ownership) that are squatted, and then repurposed for habitation purposes without the consent of the owner, nor of public authorities (Grazioli 2021). Even though over 70 buildings in Rome are currently occupied in this capacity (Grazioli 2019; Di Noto 2020), the theoretical (and political) importance of these experiences is still underestimated, because the scholarship concerned with urban squatting (e.g. Prujit 2013) and informality tends to focus either on the issue of deprivation, or confuse housing squats with other Italian forms of housing self-production and promotion labelled like 'abusivismo edilizio' (Cremaschi 1990; Clough Marinaro 2020). Based on my activist ethnography (Graeber 2009; Boni, Koensler and Rossi 2020) inside the Blocchi Precari Metropolitani (hereby BPM) collective in Rome (Grazioli 2021), the article maintains that the experience of housing squats in Rome constitutes a fascinating analytical prism for unsettling obsolete conceptions of housing and welfare. The article therefore interacts with the issues raised in the current special issue as it as it shows a viable alternative (if not antidote) to the logics and functioning of housing marketisation, which by default requires extensive patterns of differentiation, selective access and marginality in order to keep housing a profitable resource. These issues are elaborated upon in the article starting from three consequential considerations.

Firstly, what HRMs and housing squats demonstrate through their confrontational politics and acts of reappropriation is that housing could be not only be made available to anyone, but radically re-conceived as a collective resource supporting alternative, cooperative models of social reproduction, if the urban estate was considered in the light of its use instead of exchange value. Secondly, the transformative practice of homemaking (Dadusc, Grazioli and Martínez 2019) through the reappropriation of vacancies temporarily deserted by capitalist operations and estate valorisation prefigures a radical connection between insurgent urban regeneration (De Carli and Frediani 2016) and the reaffirmation of housing as a use instead of an exchange value. Thirdly, the replicability of this regenerative practice (as epitomised by the presence of over 70 housing squats within Rome's ringroad) is exemplary for a new model of housing welfare, and estates, that could effectively solve the chronic housing crisis affecting Rome through the environmentally, and socially sustainable recuperation of neglected urban vacancies. In this perspective, I propose to overcome rudimentary, deprivation-based (Prujit 2013) conceptions of squatting and informality (Simone 2001) in order to grasp their radical, prefigurative potential as infrastructures of the urban commons (Linebaugh 2008; Stavrides 2016).

To make this argument, the second section of the paper contextualises the theoretical and methodological framework around which the analysis of the Squatted, self-made Rome, pivots. Firstly, it proposes to distinguish Rome's housing squats (*occupazioni abitative*) from other forms of urban squatting and informality to grasp their heuristic value for contemporary reconceptualisations of housing, the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996) and urban commons. Secondly, it outlines the activist ethnographic method (Boni, Koensler and Rossi 2020) I have been using to carry out the research and excavate theory (Grazioli 2021). The third section then outlines a genealogy of the squatted city, starting with the description of the processes of urbanisation, displacement and settlement fostered by the Fascist regime's conception of urbanism, and then with the affirmation of HRMs in Rome as sociopolitical actors capable of self-organising and mobilising the subaltern urban inhabitants who could not be co-opted by mainstream forms of habitation. This is preliminary to the delineation of the character of the current HRMs' in their relationship with the territories and conceptualisation of the 'right to the city', starting from the new demographics and setting of the post-2008 housing crisis. The fourth section elaborates upon the evolution of political actors like BPM from housing-oriented political actions towards a broader vision of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996) epitomised by the 'Movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare' (Movement for the Right to Habitation) self-recognition and contentious politics (Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Caciagli 2020). In their perspective, the reappropriation of the right to housing stripped by neoliberal urbanisation (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010; Grazioli 2021) represents the point of departure for repossessing multiple rights, recuperating indirect income, and experimenting with forms of daily life in common that are at odds with the nuclear social reproduction proposed by the neoliberal hegemonic model of urbanity and society (Linebaugh 2008; Cattaneo and Martínez 2014). Far from being an ephemeral response towards housing deprivation, the richness (and variety) of the housing squats' sociospatial experience ultimately prefigures a new vision of public housing and council estates that could be realised beyond the schemes of real estate urbanism. In fact, the insurgent regeneration (De Carli and Frediani 2016) and upcycling (Coppola 2012) of seemingly unproductive urban interstices (Brighenti 2013; Parisi 2019) represents a groundbreaking lead for a new vision of low-income, affordable housing subsidised by the State entrenched in social, economic and environmental sustainability. The conclusive section wraps up the main theoretical considerations about these matter, while offering insight in prospective lines of research that could derive from the intersection

between the persisting housing crisis, and the socioeconomic repercussions of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Theoretical Context & Methodology

Within the extensive scholarship concerned with housing informality, the coordinated forms of housing self-construction promoted by grassroots urban movements in Southern European cities like Rome tend to be analytically placed in the grey area between the ontologies of self-made urbanism (Lancione and McFarlane 2021) that pertain to illegal forms of constructions, and the urban squatting performed by social urban movements (SqEK 2013, 2014) as part of their anti-capitalist contentious politics (della Porta and Mattoni 2014; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). However, the ontology of housing squats differentiates substantially both from 'purely' political squatting (e.g. social centres, see Mudu 2004) and the forms of non-legally sanctioned construction that, in Italy, are identified with the label of '*abusivismo edilizio*' (Cremaschi 1990). On the one hand, the latter include all those forms of non-authorised construction, and real estate development, that aim at the satisfaction of private residential ambitions, homeownership models and lucrative opportunities on a nuclear (e.g. household) as well as corporate level (ibid.). In these cases, housing represents an exchange value, either in the form of a refuge good (Filandri, Olagnero and Semi 2020) and/or asset in the transmission of intergenerational family welfare (Arbaci 2019), or as a credit within the broader financialisation of housing (Caudo and Memo 2012; Rossi 2013) as it has manifested during the neoliberal heyday (Enright and Rossi 2018). On the other hand, existing taxonomies and configurations of urban squatting tend to focus on features such as the squatters' ideological background (Bouillon 2017), purpose in relation to mainstream forms of housing (Fuller and Jonas 2003) and degree of anticapitalist orientation (Piazza 2012) to gauge the squats' politicity. These elements of distinction weigh in the analysis of the squatting scene as it has been manifesting in Italy, whereby they emphasise overtly political forms of squatting such as social centres (Mudu 2004; Giannini and Pirone 2019), whilst they lead to framing squatting for housing purposes as deprivation-based infrastructures (Prujit 2013). However, these categories fail to capture the radically transformative potential of the urban politics, alliances activated by the coalitions of dispossessed urbanites (Lancione 2018) because of their conditions of shared deprivation. Besides, they neglect the political prefiguration entrenched in the everyday processes of homemaking (Dadusc et al. 2019) and living in common (Stavrides 2016) that start from the moment of cracking into a place (Grazioli 2021). As these actions work through the transformation of spatial and relational arrangements, they determine the re-making of a new sense of emplacement and political legitimacy (Ferreri 2020) in the city and its societal infrastructures (Simone 2008, 2018), as it has been unmade by processes of commodification, dispossession and displacement.

For these reasons, I contend that a thorough investigation of the housing squats' ontologies can unearth the composition of a new vision of the 'right to the city' (Grazioli 2017) that conceives 'urban commons' (Grazioli 2017); Stavrides 2016) as practices entrenched in the everyday life (Lefebvre 1991), and as the daily rhythms (Lefebvre 2004) of the manifold struggles carried out by disenfranchised urbanites to reconcile their precarious presence in the neoliberal city with the right to stay put, and move, within it (Purcell 2002; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Lancione 2018). Within this grounded vision of 'the right to the city', the withdrawal of urban interstices from capitalist accumulation (Mayer 2013), and then their insurgent regeneration (De Carli and Frediani 2016) for habitation purposes represent the key for demanding multiple rights connected to settlement and mobility beyond the formal enfranchisement provided by citizenship (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Grazioli 2017). In fact, those rights are claimed as attributes of the presence,

and transformative action, of those inhabitants of the city that are exploited and excluded from mainstream social reproduction (Merrifield 2011) and forms of inhabitancy (Grazioli 2021), and who therefore have to figure out their way of navigating cityness. In this perspective, the autonomous, squatted city (Vasudevan 2015) created by housing squatters in the city of Rome envisions low-income, affordable housing as use-value commons (De Angelis 2019) that should guarantee the collective right to stay put inside the city (Hartman 2002; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018). Furthermore, I propose a conceptualisation of the housing squats as urban commons as all those spatial, organisational, social infrastructures of habitation commoning (Linebaugh 2008; Larkin 2013) that are radically alternative to those established by neoliberal urban regimes (Gibson-Graham 2006; De Angelis 2019). First of all, their presence alters predefined geographies, uses and entitlements of the urban space through spatial and relational regeneration (De Angelis 2019; Grazioli 2017; Martínez and Cattaneo, 2014). By this token, the housing squats' urban commons can be identified as all that home and placemaking, crafting practices and everyday routines that allow a group of former strangers to make their daily lives in common and emancipate from the precarity and alienation they endure (Lefebvre, 1991, 2004; Linebaugh 2008; Dadusc *et al.* 2019; Montagna and Grazioli 2019). Hence, housing squats can be considered as urban commons when they become social and spatial infrastructures that nurture not only the satisfaction of deprivation-based needs (like having a shelter, see Prujit 2013) but manifold desires and necessities (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014) in saturated environments (Huron 2015).

Following these theoretical coordinates, I relate to the recent field of transdisciplinary scholarship that is concerned with urban squatting (SqEK 2013, 2014) as a fundamental manifestation of the urban and mobile commons (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; English, Grazioli and Martignoni 2019). In fact, the direct reappropriation of housing stability (Ferrero 2020) is the fundamental point of departure for repossessing those manifold, radical commons (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014; dos Santos 2020) concerned with settlement and movement (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013) that compose the contemporary 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996; Grazioli 2017; de Finis and Di Noto 2018). Besides, it relates to the literature that points to reframing of Lefebvre's right to the city (Lefebvre 1996; Merrifield 2011; Grazioli 2017) by paying attention to the proceedings of everyday life (Lefebvre 1991, 2004) inside conflicted and saturated urban settings (Bresnyhan and Byrne 2014; Huron 2015) like Rome's. Given this context, my direct, bodily engagement with the everyday life and politics of HRMs' in Rome has been a crucial tool for 'excavating' (Purcell 2002) theoretical conceptualisations that could be reflexive of the housing squats' richness and relevance on the ground. This commitment was methodologically translated in the activist ethnography (Graeber 2009; Boni et al. 2020) that I have been conducting inside the collective BPM since early 2015 (Grazioli 2018, 2021). Until 2019, I have carried out a comparative ethnographic study among housing squats that present similar features in terms of size and geographical location in post-industrial neighbourhoods (see Grazioli and Caciagli, 2017; Grazioli 2018). More recently, I have also expanded my focus towards the reflection about the possible impact of HRMs and squats on housing, welfare policies and urban planning, including preliminary considerations about the scenarios determined by the current Covid-19 pandemic (Grazioli 2021). During this ongoing process, theoretical conceptualisations as well as empirical accounts have relied on a panoply of ethnographic materials such as in-depth interviews and informal interactions; field notes and diary; visuals' collections; secondary data analysis and archival research (*ibid.*).

3. A Brief Genealogy of the Squatted City

The roots of Rome's contemporary housing crisis go back at least to the housing policies and urban planning realised during Mussolini's government, whereby the regime's grandiloquent ambitions of renovating the city centre to its imperial splendour clashed with the with the reality of the city's dwellers presence and patterns of habitation. In an article published on the 'Popolo d'Italia' newspaper in 1928, Benito Mussolini addressed urbanisation as the main obstacle to the recuperation of Rome's greatness, as well as to the full development of rural areas (Testa 2015). He then advocated for the necessity to forcibly displace the urban dwellers living in the city centre, while preventing by any means necessary the settlement of new ones. While encouraging the rural/urban divide, the regime then proceeded to the massive displacement of the city centre's public houses' dwellers to enable the demolition and urban décor plans that unfolded during the 1920s. In this context, the construction of public houses and neighbourhoods at the fringes of the consolidated city was meant to compensate for the emergencies created by the so-called city centre's 'evisceration' (sventramento; Cederna 1979; Villani 2012). On the other hand, the fascist regime tried to discourage the settlement of new urbanites in two main mains: it proceeded to the liberalisation of the rental market, and then approved the so-called 'Law against urbanisation' (*Legge contro l'urbanesimo*), which forbade forbid until the 1961 moving and being registered as an inhabitant in cities with a population above 25,000 inhabitants.

However, the Regime's continuous reference to Rome's greatness became a potent attractive drive for the internal migrants who kept moving to the city from the regional and the Southern inner areas as they same time when the city centre's renovation plans caused the drastic reduction of the available public housing stock. This is to say that the city's demographic growth was not adequately compensated by the offer of low-income, affordable housing and related services. It is then not surprising that, already in April 1931, the ISTAT's special investigation about habitations of April 1931 revealed that the 26.2 percent of Rome's population were living in overcrowded conditions (Liseo and Teodori 2016), while the shantytowns (*baraccamenti*) were proliferating in the interstices of the urban fabric (Villani 2012). The presence of these settlements, the dearth of adequate housing policies for low-income population, and the lack of public interest in planning yet persisted well beyond the fall of the Regime, becoming a benchmark of Rome's urbanisation in the following decades (Insolera 1962). While the new national and city governments were striving to plot the new industrial development, and conceived public housing as a means of accommodating the perspective industrial labour force (Pietrangeli 2014), the so-called 'baraccamenti' already housed almost the 10 percent of the population according to the 1951 census, and over 70,000 people at the beginning of the Seventies (Puccini 2018). However derelict, Rome's urban settlements were identified by long-sighted sociologists like Berlinguer and Della Seta (1976) as the epicentre of grassroots, transformative processes that would challenge the classist, exclusionary underpinnings of Rome's post-war urbanisation that were neglected by 'traditional', representative politics (Berlinguer and Della Seta, 1976, 352-8). When social movements started to thrive and organise the autonomous demands of subaltern urban dwellers since the end of the Sixties (Vasudevan 2017), extra-parlamentarian formations dedicated to the '*lotta per la casa*' (housing struggles) established themselves as propellers, and collectors, of the demands of those subaltern urban dwellers that had been pushed in the interstices of the consolidated cities (Di Feliciantonio 2017), thus representing their demand for housing first, and then adequate infrastructural and welfare services (Armati 2015). As part of their contentious politics, HRMs began to coordinate the shantytowns' inhabitants' struggles and demands for decent and safe housing, alongside undertaking the first squatting actions of

vacant council estates since early 1970s to leverage the construction and allocation of new ones. Lastly, they organised the demands of public housing tenants for rental and bill caps to be modulated according to the households' income levels (Martinelli 1989; Vasudevan 2017).

The conflict was so intense that, during the harbingers of the t1977-8 uprising, the Movement had to count even fatal casualties such as the young Autonomia Operaia militant Fabrizio Ceruso, who was killed in September 1974 by an unidentified police gunshot during the military eviction of a squatted public housing complex in the borgata San Basilio. As the revolt erupted, the City Council and the Italian government agreed to abort the police operation and transfer the evictees into regularly assigned council houses in Casal Bruciato (Vasudevan 2017; Grazioli 2018). Furthermore, these struggles led the Communist mayor Luigi Petroselli to scheduling the complete evacuation of the shantytowns through a massive public housing plan, and then through the infrastructuring of the new neighbourhoods within the framework of the 1982 General Regulatory Plan. During the following years, thriving on these achievements, HRMs remained active by retaining their role of propellers of grassroots mobilisations and watchers of the public action's evolution (di Feliciantonio 2017; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018). In fact, the interstice between the 1980s evacuation of the baraccamenti and the explosion of the 2007-8 financial recession has been the hotbed of Rome's contemporary housing crisis' new demographics, and therefore agents of housing struggles, whereby transcalar trends related to the socioeconomic function of housing intertwined inside the city's fabric.

In fact, the idea that a permanent infusion in the public housing stock would be a necessary compensation for the otherwise unbearable inequalities caused by real estate, capitalist development (Campos Venuti 1978) was soon trumped by the ideology of real estate valorisation and homeownership fostered by neoliberal urbanisation, of which the financialisation of housing (Aalbers 2016) has been one of the main pillars. In Southern European cities and housing systems like Rome's, the combination of housing commodification, rental markets' deregulation (Caudo and Memo 2012) and shrinkage of social welfare systems has thus made homeownership the tenure pattern (Buckley 2018), and asset of intergenerational welfare (Arbaci 2019) prevalently chosen "by households in the context of housing policies and markets which offered no alternatives" (Allen, Barlow, Leal, Maloutas and Padovani 2004, 20). Hence, neoliberal urbanisation in Rome has taken the shape of the accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 1989) through three main patterns:

1) the valorisation of the city centre towards tourist, real estate development and service-oriented economies (Gainsforth 2019; Grazioli 2021);

2) the imposition of the real estate sector as the first provider of legal habitation (Gentili and Hoekstra 2018);

3) the uncontrolled urban sprawl by the means of corporate real estate development (Marchini and Sotgia 2017) and white-collar informality (Erbani 2013), also profiting of a context of poor planning and substantial absence of rent control regulations since the end of the 1990s (Caudo and Memo 2012).

The latter also encouraged homeowners to consider housing properties as sources of additional (if not primary) income (Filandri et al. 2020) to place on a tenancy marketplace mainly targeting low-income and precarious urban dwellers (Mudu 2006, 2014; Marra 2012) who could not access homeownership nor public housing, and were therefore vulnerable to the swings of the market and gentrification processes (Annunziata 2014). Based on these elements, it is not surprising that the harbingers of the new squatted mestiza city (Città Meticcia) (Grazioli 2021) would already emerge in the Nineties, when the first experiments at 'migrant squatting' (Dadusc et al. 2019) (like the 1990s pasta factory Pantanella, see De Angelis 2014) were supported logistically and politically by HRMs. As these experiences anticipated the more recent struggles against the EU migratory system (see Dadusc et al. 2019; Montagna and Grazioli 2019), they also spoke

about the new composition and spatiality of the housing crisis, as it would be revealed in the prolonged aftermath of the 2008 financial recession.

In 2018, Rome's association of construction entrepreneurs estimated that 37,500 housing units have been vacant/unsold in Rome since the crisis' outset, whilst 57,000 families were experiencing conditions of housing inadequacy/segregation. These figures were aggravated by the steady growth of foreclosures and tenants' evictions lawsuits. In 2018 alone, the 73 percent of the overall 6,113 eviction notices issued in Rome were against economically defaulting tenants, whilst other 7,778 eviction requests were filed by single landlords, real-estate societies or banks that repossessed foreclosed properties (Sina 2018; Grazioli 2019, 2021). On the other hand, the request for access to council housing (Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica, hereby ERP) and/or 'housing emergency' facilities have surged. While the number of ERP applications topped 13,500 in 2020, only few apartments per year were allocated from 2017-2020 (57 in 2018, 300 in 2019), either because of the apartments' poor maintenance and the lack of staff for processing and expediting the applications. Furthermore, provisional figures point towards a further aggravation of the housing crisis caused by Covid-19 pandemic's socioeconomic repercussion. In Rome, one third of the families in a tenancy tenure have requested the Council or Regional rent check during the pandemic yet receiving only an average of 245 euros per household; on the other hand, the numbers of evictions and foreclosures trials have kept growing again (Sina 2021). This genealogy of the 'Squatted City' then shows how, in the same way as what happened during the 1900s, the deliberate disinvestment in low-income, affordable housing and welfare systems has made the current council estates' stock completely inadequate to cope with the magnitude, and demographics, of the post-2008 housing crisis (Puccini 2016), whilst the profit margin requirements of the housing marketplace feed the paradox 'houses without people, people without houses' (Gentili and Hoekstra 2018). At the same time, the permanence of HRMs as grassroots social movements in the city has enabled them to preserve the housing struggles' repertoire of action, while transmitting the knowledge of squatting as a viable form of popular mobilisation (Leontidou 2010) to the intersectional, young, largely migrant composition that nowadays forms the demographics of the housing crisis in Rome. The latter is also what undergirds the HRMs' nominal and political shift towards a comprehensive understanding of the 'right to the city' and its commons (Grazioli 2021).

4. From the Struggle for Housing to the Right to Habitation

In the light of the previous contextualisation, it is evident how the transition from the 'Lotta per la Casa' (Struggle for Houses) to the 'Movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare' (Movement for the Right to Habitation) is not a matter of semantics. It is rooted in the new political elaboration, and praxis, of HRMs and housing trade unions since the repercussions of the 2007-8 financial crisis conflated with Rome's structural dearth of low-income, affordable housing. The previous section already outlined how the linkage between settlement and mobility was already entrenched in the social composition of the post-war inhabitants of Rome's baraccamenti. However, the complexification of the contemporary housing crisis' demographics reflects the evolution of the connection among precarious housing and the differential forms of inclusion (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) entrenched in formal citizenship and social welfare as they have been weaponised to ensure the neoliberal governance of the city (Gargiulo 2020). On the one hand, it can be affirmed that the Italian households and individuals who are currently choosing to squat with HRMs represent that share of urban precariat (Jørgensen 2015) that got stuck in the trap of labour (Fumagalli and Morini 2013) and housing

(Mudu 2006) precarity because they could not rely on institutional, nor family welfare (Allen et al. 2004; Arbaci 2019) to stabilise their housing position, nor invest income resources into prospective homeownership (Adkins and Konings 2020). However, the larger part of the current HRMs' is formed by migrants with differential backgrounds, geographical origins and even statuses, who though share housing instability and discrimination for two main reasons. Firstly, they may be not formally eligible for public housing because of the proliferation of citizenship-related administrative borders (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Gargiulo 2020) that make them the main targets of sub-standard, segregated tenancy accommodations (Mudu 2006; Marra 2012). Among this group, the largest communities are the South American, Maghrebi (Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian), Habesha (Ethiopian and Eritreans), and Sudanese ones who share a history of 'migrant squatting' in Rome (see Dadusc et al. 2019; Montagna and Grazioli 2019) that has facilitated the access even of younger or more recent migrants to HRMs. Secondly, they might be part of those migrant populations that, because of their ethnicity (being Roma) or migratory status (e.g. being asylum seekers and refugees) are forcibly channelled into the 'Humanitarian Industrial Complex' (Dadusc and Mudu 2020) epitomised by reception centres, Roma Camps (Maestri 2019) and temporary housing structures (Grazioli 2019).

Furthermore, HRMS' have pondered the political agency of real estate and city developers in fostering housing precarity and segregation because of their role of primary providers of legal housing. Hence, they have identified the reappropriation of different vacancies (of public and private ownership) as the means for tackling the soaring demand for public, affordable housing that stems from the long haul of the 2007-8 financial crisis. In so doing, HRMs have engaged with updating their strategic (as well as tactic) repertoire of actions and demands (Bosi and Zamponi 2015; della Porta 2013) to acknowledge the new intersectional demographics of the post-2008 crisis housing crisis (Grazioli 2021). Throughout this process, HRMs have also reconceptualised the function, and possible ontologies, of public housing, starting from the housing squatters' experience of transforming for habitation purposes non-residential, vacant infrastructures such as factories, barracks, schools, warehouses, former hospitals, private practices, institutional facilities and so on. These elements have thus supplemented their political narrative about the reasons that undergird the deliberate institutional choice not to adopt decisive housing policies, and instead to criminalise housing squatters and activists as a socially dangerous threat to laws and order. Lastly, the new demographics of Rome's housing crisis has interrogated the movements' classic repertoire of welfare demands, fostering the passage from a struggle concerned with the pursuit of public housing as a right connected to the Italian social citizenship, to an urban scale of unionism speaking to multiple forms of dispossession and displacement intersecting class, race, ethnicity, gender and migratory status (Martínez 2019; Grazioli 2021).

The practical application of this new political elaboration was made visible during the so-called 'Tsunami Tours', that are simultaneous rounds of squatting of vacant buildings that were realised from 2012 to 2013 in different parts of the city featuring BPM, the Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per la Casa (City Coordination of the Housing Struggle, hereby CCLC) and other groups like Comitato Obiettivo Casa (COC, Committee Objective Housing), Action, and the grassroots tenants' union like A.S.i.A.-USB (Armati 2015; Caciagli 2016; Nur and Sethman 2017). This practice differentiated consistently from the Seventies occupations; whilst the latter that were mainly targeting unassigned council estates, the Tsunami Tours involved urban vacancies and interstices (Brighenti 2013; Parisi 2019) that were not necessarily meant for residential uses, nor of recent construction. Another element of distinction was the fact that the squatted buildings were not only public properties, but also private ones left vacant as the result of different speculative operations (e.g. discontinued productive sites; real estate funds' properties) (Grazioli 2021). This

innovative approach towards the struggle for housing in the city of Rome has been enshrined by the strategic coalition between BPM's and CCLC under the 'Movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare' (Movement for the Right to Habitation) signature (Nur and Sethman 2017; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018). From the Tsunami Tours onwards, this coalition has been gaining the strength to act upon the political centrality of real estate agents and city developers in Rome's urbanisation, acknowledging the rapidly mutating ontologies of capitalism and governmentality (Rossi 2013) inside the city. In fact, they have mapped the extent to which top-down processes of urban regeneration, the elimination of rent control legislations, and the sale of the public housing stock promoted by recent national legislations (like the 2014 Housing Plan) have reduced the available stock of public and affordable houses in the city, while fostering aggressive processes of touristification and displacement in central and semicentral areas (Gainsforth 2019; Lelo et al. 2019).

Hence, BPM and CCLC have been strategically mixing confrontational politics (Caciagli 2019, 2020) and multilevel negotiation with the 'traditional' institutional actors involved in housing policymaking in Rome to bring forward their new vision of housing as a fundamental urban resource, yet without being co-opted in representative politics (della Porta 2013; Bosi and Zamponi 2015; Caruso 2015). Besides, they tactically mobilise and campaign against evictions, police brutality, and the weaponisation of the social welfare system and administrative borders (Gargiulo 2020) against the urban squatters. For instance, they have been mobilising against the Article 5 of the 2014 National Housing Plan, which strips housing squatters of their entitlement to local social welfare (included healthcare and education) by denying registering their home address in a squatted abode. The article also forbids the squatters' legal access to utilities such as water and electricity, while excluding them from being subsidised public housing. On the one hand, the Article 5's declared purpose was to punish current squatters and discouraging prospective ones, starting from the assumption that social welfare is also a scarce asset that should be allocated to formally enfranchised, deserving citizens (*ibid.*). However, the HRMs' capacity to mobilise their consolidated repertoire of actions (squatting) organisational rites (assembly-based decision making; collective care of communal spaces; the sharing of carework and social reproduction) (Grazioli 2021) to stimulate the transformation of various urban vacancies into dignified houses and commoning infrastructures radically challenges this scarcity assumption. At the same time, the presence and quality of housing squats inside the city questions the traditional conceptions, and realisation, of public housing as agglomerates, and thus proliferating agents, of social marginality located at the fringes of what is construed and mapped as the city centre. In fact, the 'traditional' council estates' stock is modelled on the image of the white, working-class, 'native' households (Puccini 2016), whose residential trajectories and ambitions are affected by a marginalising conception of social, and spatial peripherality. By this token, the majority of council estates (and their inhabitants) in Rome are located at the borders of the Grande Raccordo Anulare ring road and the suburban areas, where the quality (and presence) of public services (e.g. public transportations) thins out and inequalities tend to increase (Lelo, Monni e Tomassi 2019). On the other hand, the repurposing of various urban vacancies located in central as well as peripheral parts of the city reveals a quick, and more sustainable, solution to cater enough public housing for all those who demand it without furthering land speculation, nor the real estate uncontrolled urban sprawl in already congested areas, while restoring the right to urban centrality (Purcell 2002; Merrifield 2011; Grazioli 2017). Lastly, the richness of many housing squats' everyday life and activities prefigures an alternative model of urban citizenship based on solidarity and commonality, instead of on the competition for the commodified urban resources along lines of class, race, ethnicity and so on.

5. Conclusions. Rethinking Public Estates Through Housing Squats

In this article I attempted at translating into theoretical considerations the manifold empirical inputs I have been experiencing during my activist ethnography inside BPM, and therefore inside the 'Movimento per il Diritto all'Abitare' in Rome. I have thus detailed how the complexification of the HRMs' demographics has stimulated the innovations of the movements' 'traditional' configurations of activism, space and demand for public housing in the post-crisis that has been configured by the prolonged aftermath of the 2007-8 recession. On the one hand, the existing quality and quantity of the current public housing stock is structurally (and administratively) inadequate (Puccini 2016) to respond to the to the expectations about the right to the city that are expressed by those urban inhabitants who cannot access marketised nor public housing, or who have withdrawn from the institutionalisation within the Humanitarian Industrial Complex (as in the case of asylum seekers, refugees and Roma population) (Dadusc and Mudu 2020). On the other hand, the recuperation of even non-residential urban vacancies dispersed inside the urban fabric promoted makes the HRMs the law-breaking policymakers (Aureli and Mudu 2017) of a sustainable, innovative model of public housing as the tenet of the 'right to the city'. In this perspective, housing is not gauged in relation to its market value, nor conceived as a matter of private ownership, yet in the light of the social and spatial outcomes it produces. Furthermore, the commoning of social reproduction that urban squatters enact to sort their life necessity speaks to a model of urban life that disrupts the privatised notion of habitation as the place where the individual households' life (and carework) unfolds. The latter is replaced by a public city model based on reciprocation, commonality and the hybridation of consolidated social roles (e.g. the sharing of childcare; the unsettlement of the clear-cut partition between private and public space) (Grazioli 2021). Hence, I contended that the grassroots reconversion of different urban vacancies operated by housing squatters suggests to policymakers a new way of conceiving, and then realising, public housing in a sustainable manner, as opposed to the predatory (and marketised) model fostered by real estate urbanism. This is even more urgent in a city like Rome that, as the paper discussed at length, has been suffering from the mismatch between the demand for public housing, and the type of habitation planned by urban institutions and developers, at least since the past century, and that has thus been extremely vulnerable to the socioeconomic repercussions of the crises erupted since late 2000s. The post-2008 housing crisis' complexification have thus broadened the scope of HRMs, that 'evolved' from housing-focused movements, to social urban movements concerned with the 'right to stay put in the city' (Hartman 2002; Grazioli and Caciagli 2017, 2018).

The latter is materialised by a new model of urbanity that considers the direct reappropriation (Bosi and Zamponi 2015) of housing stability (Ferrero 2020) as a point of departure for affirming different settlement and movement (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013) rights inside the city that cannot be 'covered' by traditional welfare systems, nor by traditional rights as they are conceived in relation to citizenship. Hence, this vision of habitation tallies with a non-formal, post-citizenship (ibid.) understanding of urbanity (Grazioli 2017) that is condensed in the self-definition of the HRMs' housing squatters as the 'Roma Meticcia' (mestiza Rome). As this definition has permeated also popular culture and music[1], it is important to grasp how it aligns with the debates that have animated post-colonial studies, feminist theory and cultural anthropology during the past decades, and that question the substance and conceptualisation of the relation between identity, space

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1 The rap group Assalti Frontali published the song 'Roma Meticcia' in their 2011 album 'Profondo Rosso'.

and culture (see Anzaldúa 1987; Amselle 1998). Within this vision of the city, the everyday life modalities that stem from the radical regeneration and 'upcycling' (Coppola 2012; De Carli and Frediani 2016; Grazioli 2021) of interstitial urban vacancies (Brighenti 2013; Parisi 2019) prefigure a completely new conception of housing and public estates, and therefore the radical revision of the political imagery associated to them. In fact, council estates are nowadays not a viable horizon for housing squatters, unless the policymaking approach towards housing and urban regeneration changes radically, like HRMs keep invoking. It is also a matter of fact that 'traditional' model (and stock) of council estates is structurally inadequate to respond to the needs, and desires, of an increasingly diverse composition of urban dwellers that conceive public housing as a point of departure for contrasting instability, precarity and exploitation within the labour, housing and reproduction marketplace. On the other hand, the richness of the squatted, mestiza city prefigures for policymakers an economically, environmentally and socially inclusive model of estates that radically differs from the traditional, post-Second World War one. In fact, the recuperation of so many urban vacancies that punctuate the entirety of the urban fabric (from the city centre to the so-called peripheries) shows that a great number of houses could be obtained by different types of urban constructions without further land consumption. This would interrupt pluridecennial patterns of real estate development and displacement, while debunking the neoliberal assumption that social welfare is (or should be) a scarce resource that should be contended by deserving, formally enfranchised citizens. Lastly, rethinking public estates through the analytical prism of housing squats radically challenges the idea that the private sector might rightfully extract profit from the emergencies entrenched in the urban social reproduction, as it is the only actor capable of investing adequate and efficient resources.

In conclusion, the HRMs' emphasis on the urban inhabitants as legitimate unionising actors in the negotiation of how to use urban resources and spaces for the general welfare draws a line towards social innovations that could be crucial in a post(?)-pandemic scenario where the socioeconomic repercussions of Covid-19 are only partly foreseeable. However, it can be said that the multilevel institutions involved in the governance of housing (starting with the national government) have instead chosen to weaponise welfare and citizenship rights to make the replicability of housing squats less attractive, while refusing to take action for solving the housing crisis. In fact, at the time of writing (August 2021), the criminalising attitude against HRMs and urban squatters persists, to the point of not lifting the Article 5. At the same time, public institutions do not seem dedicated to putting housing policies at the centre of the political arena, if not when debating how to modulate evictions and foreclosures after the moratorium ended in June 2021). In fact, the resources destined to housing by the final draft of the Italian plan for the Next Generation EU (NGEU), the 'Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza' (PNRR) once again converge towards a top-down conception of urban regeneration, concentrated on the renovation of private estates. Future lines of inquiry could then investigate how HRMs have been affected by, and then reacted to, the policymaking framework delineated by the PNRR and the NGEU on a local as well as transnational scale, since European coalitions are starting to mobilise and campaign together. Besides, future research could gauge whether multilevel policies have ultimately co-opted the grassroots movements' innovations to tackle the spike in housing poverty, or if they once again chose to feed in the vicious circle of emergency-driven, austerity-based approaches.

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