"Subjectification in times of indebtedness and neoliberal/austerity urbanism"*

Cesare Di Feliciantonio
(Sapienza, Università di Roma, Dipartimento di Metodi e Modelli per l'Economia, il Territorio e la Finanza, via del Castro Laurenziano 9, 00161 Roma, Italia and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (EES)- Division of Geography and Tourism, Celestijnenlaan 200E, 3001 Heverlee, Belgium)
email: cesare.difeliciantonio@uniroma1.it

Abstract

How can we analyse the (re)emergence of squatting in relation to the current housing crisis in Italy? Centred on the case of Rome, the paper theorizes this return as resulting from processes of subjectification in the housing sector linked to the raising of indebtedness as a main dispositif of capitalism under neoliberal/austerity urbanism agendas. The political economy-oriented literature on neoliberal/austerity urbanism is bridged with the post-Marxist approach of Maurizio Lazzarato. Debt is seen as the archetype of social relations, shaping and controlling subjectivities, making the "work on yourself" essential to the reproduction of (indebted) society. However, given the circular nature of power, indebtedness can be generative of new processes of subjectification aimed at subverting the same power relation. In this sense, the paper operationalizes the conceptualization of Foucauldian subjectification recently proposed by Revel (2014), emphasizing how subjectification always results from i) an *action*/*gesture* and ii) a consequent deconstruction of the identity.

Key words:

Indebtedness- - subjectification- neoliberal/austerity urbanism- squatting- Rome

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1. Introduction. Real estate as a domain of contention

The recent mortgage crisis, originally started in the US and rapidly spread all around Western economies, highlights the crucial role of housing and real estate in the contemporary dynamics of capitalism. When considering housing, one of the basic contradictions of capitalism- i.e. between use-value and exchange-value- becomes particularly evident: a fundamental basic need is opposed to the process of circulation of capital that finds in real estate a way to escape crises of over-accumulation in the primary circuit of production through a 'spatial fix' (e.g. Harvey, 2014). This contradiction appears even reinforced in the current stage of neoliberalization characterized by the "financialization of home" (Aalbers, 2008) and the rapid dismantling of housing rights and public welfare policies, favouring the formation of an "asset-based welfare" (e.g. Doling and Ronald, 2010, Watson, 2009).

Building on this contradiction, the present paper is aimed at showing how housing and real estate can represent a main domain of contention to the hegemonic forces of capital reproduction in the present phase of 'late neoliberalism'. Previous analyses (e.g. Harvey, 2012, Peck, 2012) have already recognized the potentially contentious character of housing and real estate in times of crisis and austerity politics. However, in these contributions social movements' initiatives around housing and real estate are seen as forged by the violence of financial capitalism, a response to it in a dynamics of hegemonic power/resistance, thus failing to recognize how contentious practices in the housing sector can be brought by the same subjects that were previously involved in making the hegemonic process at work.

Centred on the case of Italy, the paper theorizes the emergence of these contentious movements as *resulting from processes of subjectification linked to the raising of indebtedness as a main dispositif of capitalism*. In doing so, the paper makes a step forward from the structuralist political-economy analyses of theorists like Harvey based on the opposition between hegemonic power and resistance, showing how the contentious character of these initiatives is given by a rupture in the process of subjectification as implied by the dispositif of indebtedness. Although many analysts have recently focused their attention to the disciplinary power of debt (e.g. Graeber, 2011, Heintz and Balakrishnan, 2012, Joseph, 2014), the paper relies mainly on the post-Marxist and post-structuralist analysis of Maurizio Lazzarato (2012), whose work - framed within the Foucauldian analysis of subjectification- is bridged with the political economy debate on housing. This kind of effort is not new, several contributions having framed the financialization of homeownership through a Foucauldian lens (e.g. Kear, 2013, Langley, 2007, 2008). However they focus on the formation and shaping of those subjectivities conforming- although never fully (e.g. Langley, 2007)- to the hegemonic

model of homeownership. On the contrary, the paper focuses on how subjectification linked to indebtedness has favoured the spreading of collective political initiatives challenging the hegemonic model. By recognizing how subjectification is both *produced* and *productive*, the paper shares both the Foucauldian and the workerist roots of Lazzarato's work (e.g. Tronti, 1966, Negri, 2015, Revel, 2015). Such a framework emphasizes the tensions between the *structural* "violence of financial capitalism" (Marazzi, 2011) and the *subjective* character of indebtedness as an archetypical power relation structuring the economy, thus revealing the complex and open dialectics of the processes at work in Southern Europe and beyond.

The focus of the paper concerns the re-emergence of squatting in Italy, meant here in its collective, political character addressing a public claim, thus not as the individual, non-organised occupation of land (e.g. Martinez, 2013, Vasudevan, 2015). In this respect, Italy is not an isolated case: indeed a massive movement around housing (the *Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca*, PAH), connected with the 'traditional' squatting movement, has emerged in Spain (e.g. Martinez and García, 2015). The analysis of the Italian situation contributes to the increasing literature on social movements around housing in times of crisis and austerity by showing how housing represents a main domain of contention even in those national contexts where the rising of indebtedness is related to long-standing processes of impoverishment beyond housing.

When considering the appearance of squatting initiatives in relation to indebtedness, the paper situates them in a very specific urban context characterized by severe austerity measures, i.e. Rome, the Italian capital. "Austerity urbanism" (Peck, 2012) appears thus as a key-concept to understand the conditions under which squatting initiatives have been taking place. Three theoretical considerations motivate this focus on the *urban*: i) cities represent the main sites of capital accumulation and reproduction, so urban spaces highlight the most violent contradictions of capitalism (e.g. Harvey, 2012); ii) cities are the primary sites of "biopolitical production", constituted by "living dynamic of cultural practices, intellectual circuits, affective networks and social institutions" (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 154) and iii) cities play a pivotal role in fostering social movements as they favour the creation of ties and interconnections that are fundamental for grassroots' mobilizations (e.g. Nicholls, 2008).

In the paper when referring to 'new' squatting initiatives emerged since the eruption of the current crisis, I do not underestimate the historical legacy of various forms of political squatting initiatives (e.g. Mudu, 2004, 2012). On the contrary, the focus on squatting is exactly a way to highlight the importance of historically, territorially and socially embedded political practices. Although individual and households' informal squatting initiatives had a long-

standing relevance in the urban geography of Rome (e.g. Martinelli, 1985), they are not part of the analytical perspective of this article. Moreover since 2003 the neo-fascist group CasaPound[1] has squatted a building in the central neighbourhood of Esquilino. Because of making use of nationalist, racist, sexist and homophobic discourse and imagery, CasaPound has been intentionally left out of the analysis (for a similar position, see Cattaneo and Martinez, 2014): indeed the initiatives under scrutiny in the article have an inclusive orientation towards migrants and all those subjectivities experiencing discrimination, often converging in other social movements and struggles. However, the example of CasaPound is relevant to show how squatting is an 'elusive' political practice and social movement (for a detailed discussion on squatting as a coherent social movement, see Martinez, 2013, Pruijt, 2013, among the others).

Methodologically, the paper is the result of an eighteen months-fieldwork carried in Rome from the end of 2012 to the early summer of 2014 and based on a participatory action research (PAR) approach. The collection of data was realized mainly through: i) observant participation/participant observation within two specific squatting initiatives (*Communia* and the Hertz school) and the overall squatting movement of the city (and beyond), taking parts to assemblies, demonstrations, meetings, workshops; ii) seventy-six in-depth interviews (individual or in group) with several squatters of both *Communia* and the Hertz school and with participants to other squatting initiatives; and iii) a questionnaire submitted to the *Communia* squatters aimed at evaluating the social and political profile of the people involved.

The paper is organized as follows. In section two I present the theoretical framework of indebtedness as developed by Lazzarato; following a Foucauldian approach, I stress how this dispositif involves a process of subjectification that can be reversed in two phases according to Revel (2014). Moreover, the rise of indebtedness is situated in the current phase of "austerity urbanism" (Peck, 2012), seen as the *natural continuum* of neoliberal urbanism. In section three I present the impact of the current crisis and the austerity policies in Italy, focusing on indebtedness, impoverishment and the worsening of the "housing crisis". Section four analyses the re-emergence of squatting in Rome, focusing on its historical roots and how it embodies the subjectification process as conceptualized by Revel. Finally, in the conclusions I summarize the paper's findings and stress the need for further research on these initiatives in the housing/real estate sector, the specific forms they assume according to the specific

[1] After the occupation of the first building in Rome in 2003, CasaPound has rapidly spread all around the country, registering as a national association and running for elections on several occasions.

context and their relations with the main hegemonic processes at work in contemporary global socio-economic system.

2. The rise of indebtedness in cities shaped by austerity

When thinking on the relation between housing/real estate, finance and capitalist accumulation, the work of David Harvey (e.g. 1974, 1978, 1982) is the main reference to understand how financial institutions channel surplus produced in the primary circuit of capital (i.e. the single production-to-consumption cycle) into the secondary circuit (including the built environment and all infrastructures favouring the primary circuit). Capital switching is aimed at both avoiding overaccumulation crises in the primary circuit (e.g. Harvey, 1978) and searching for the most profitable, short-term destination (e.g. Harvey, 1974, 1982), the latter causing (or at least accelerating) rather than preventing crisis.

Building on Harvey, an increasing number of studies focused on the interconnections between the "finance form of capitalism" (Harvey, 1974) and real estate/housing (e.g. Beauregard, 1994, Charney, 2001, Gotham, 2009, Rutland, 2010, Wainwright, 2009), showing how real estate is particularly attractive as a financial asset, the tension between the fixity/immobility of real estate and the volatility of financial capital amplifying real estate cycles. The main result of this process has been the building-up of private debt on the back of residential real estate, but this cannot be infinite, as shown by the subprime mortgages crisis started in the US in 2007 (e.g. Aalbers, 2009, Langley, 2009).

The concern for the rise of indebtedness is the core of Lazzarato's book *The Making of the Indebted Man* (2012), in which he conceptualizes indebtedness as an economic process that is immediately *subjective*, i.e. it produces specific indebted subjects following specific moral imperatives functional to the reproduction of credit as key-paradigm of (uneven) social relations. Following Foucault (2008), debt economy involves always a "work on the self" that is able to conjunct together economy and *ethics* (see also Dardot and Laval, 2014, Read, 2009). According to Lazzarato, the "indebted man" represents a specific form of *homo oeconomicus* (p. 30) based on the control of subjectivity, thus the relation creditor-debtor overlaps the others- e. g. capital-labour, welfare state-user, corporation-consumer- transforming everybody (consumers, users and workers) in a "debtor". This shift requires also a new moral ideology: *promise* (to repay the debt) and *fault* (for having contracted a debt) substitute *effort* and *reward*, the moral values under labour economies. Going back to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Lazzarato reveals the archetypal character of the creditor-debtor relation within society, now devoted "to engender a person capable of *promising*, someone

able to *stand guarantor for himself* in the creditor-debtor relationship, that is, capable of honoring his debt" (2012: 40). In order to keep the promise to repay the debt, the resulting subject is endowed with a specific memory and conscience linked to debt obligations (*ibid*).

This "working on the self" links Nietzsche with the *subjective* analyses of the economy developed by French post-structuralism: indebtedness creates an individual subject that feels responsible and indebted towards its own creditor, this process concerning the whole society through the mechanism of public debt, so future generations will be already indebted when being born. Indebtedness creates a specific temporality of *promise* and *repayment* interconnecting the present and the future through an objectification of the future itself (i.e. the debt that has to be repaid) and the risks it brings. It emerges then as a mechanism of biopolitical governmentality, "a security-state technique of government aimed at reducing the uncertainty of the behavior of the governed" (*ibid*: 45). So the new subject shaped by indebtedness is the 'responsible' debtor always feeling guilty for their own condition, as well as anxious for not being able to fully perform the "self-entrepreneur" or the "financial subject" evoked by the neoliberal faith (e.g. Dardot and Laval, 2014, Langley, 2007). Following a Foucauldian approach, we see then how the dispositif of indebtedness forges new subjects, involving a process of subjectification.

By focusing on the process of subjectification, Lazzarato continues the long-standing tradition of Italian philosophy that since the 1960s has devoted a great attention to subjectification. Indeed Italian workerism (*operaismo)* contributed to an understanding of subjectification as the historical process of self-constitution founding the emergence of political subjectivities as well as the driver of the transformations of capital itself (e.g. Tronti, 1966, Negri, 1968, 1976, 1979). Workerists were deeply engaged with the intense social conflict of that time, political practices (including squatting in the 1970s) being at the heart of their theorizations; indeed the main assumption was that "subjectification of the political rupture takes place within struggles. (…) It is reversing theory into practice" (Negri, 2015: 24, author's translation). Subjectification has remained influential within Italian philosophy also after the 1970s, with leading authors such as Agamben (e.g. 1993, 1998), Esposito (2004, 2011) and Negri himself (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009) engaged in re-reading and transposing the Foucauldian perspective on biopolitics and governmentality. Although a detailed review of the different contributions to this debate goes far beyond the possibilities of the present paper, we can undisputedly state that their diversified engagement with the Foucauldian perspective is influential in Lazzarato's emphasis on the new subject shaped by indebtedness.

For Foucault (1982), subjectification implies always a process of objectification through two "modes of subjectification", the first being the production of subjects through knowledge and the second the production of subjects through "dividing practices" that label, fix, organize and hierarchize subjects. Balibar (2012) has recently highlighted the ambiguity of such a process, the subject being both *subjectus* and *subjectum*, thus containing a power relation. Since power is a circular force in the Foucauldian perspective (1982), it contains within itself the possibilities of rupture. Building on this main Foucauldian assumption, we can then address a crucial question: how can subjectification take place without ceding to pure subjection?

In the conclusions of his next book (2015), Lazzarato envisages the possibility for a collective process of subjectification blocking the process of capital accumulation and valorization. Here again the influence of workerism is evident, the author claiming that new political possibilities and democratic practices can be realized only through struggles. However Lazzarato does not develop a conceptualization on how to produce such a rupture in Foucauldian terms.

On the contrary, the work of Judith Revel (e.g. 2009, 2014, 2015), similarly rooted in workerism, has engaged widely with theorizing the possibility to reverse the process of subjectification in Foucauldian terms. In a recent paper (2014) mostly relying on Foucault's *The Subject and Power* (1982), Revel argues that the tension between subjection and subjectification can be solved through the deconstruction of identity, not meant as a sort of metaphysical process of de-subjectification as evoked by Agamben when theorizing the "whatever being" (1993) or the "form-of-life" (1998; for a direct confrontation of these positions see Revel, 2015). This means rejecting both the perspectives of a unitary objectification and the subject being the product of a dialectical and infinite relation between subjection and "free" subjectification. This is a way to practice what Foucault (1982) defined as *agonism* between power and freedom, between subjectivity through objectivation and autonomous subjectification. This process cannot lead to erase power, because power relations can never be fully cancelled and escaped. However, this process can lead to "building the selves as subjects" that materializes the counter-face of objectification within the process of subjectification. This part was defined by Foucault (1982) as "invention of the self", transforming the chiasm of the process of subjectification in a way that the 'new' subject cannot be anymore absorbed by the procedures of objectification. However, it results crucial to stress how the process of subjectification results always from a *gesture*, an action, it is not a predetermined identity (Revel, 2014), since "to be identified is to be doubly and paradoxically objectified: as object and as objectified subject of discourses and practices" (Revel, 2009: 46).

This *gesture*/action founds what Foucault (1982) defined as the "way of life" for the emerging subject, meant as "a way of being together, of being-with-others", constituting "a shared space, (…), the experimentation of a *polis*, that is to say, politics" (Revel, 2009: 48).

The process of subjectification involved by the affirmation of indebtedness as the main dispositif of neoliberalism needs to be *situated* in the primary sites for capitalist accumulation and biopolitical production, i.e. cities characterized by neoliberal and austerity urbanism. Indeed recent literature in geography and political economy emphasizes the importance of the *urban* in the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) and austerity politics. The intervention of national governments since the starting of the current crisis to save banks and companies "too big to fail" has led to a rapid increase of public debt in several countries, responded by financial markets with a new wave of speculation, betting against the sustainability of public debts (e.g. Lazzarato, 2015). This situation has led most governments to proclaim the need for severe austere measures reinforcing neoliberal rationality (e.g. Aalbers, 2013, Peck, 2013), cities being the most affected by the cuts to public spending.

Discussing the 'austerity discipline' used to challenge the (long-standing) crisis in US cities, Peck (2012) has recently introduced the concept of "austerity urbanism" highlighting how, paraphrasing Foucault, there is already at work a system-wide 'permanent fiscal tribunal' (p. 651). This new phase impacts both at the macro level, exacerbating the asymmetrical scalar relations linked to neoliberal processes, and the city scale, enhancing 'neoliberal urbanism'. Indeed states and local institutions are the most affected by austerity measures that have generated a proper fiscal crisis among various sub-federal institutions in the US. The current crisis appears then as primarily *urban* because cities rely more on public services and host the mean target of austerity politics (the 'undeserving' poor and marginalized communities). Moreover, the housing slump and foreclosures have affected primarily urban populations. "Cities are therefore where austerity bites. However, never equally"(*ibid*: 629).

So austerity politics emerges as the ultimate stage of neoliberal rationality, accelerating the implementation of neoliberal reforms in all the main domains of social and economic life, while widening inequalities through the dismantling of the welfare state (Fraser *et al*, 2013, Pavolini *et al*, 2015). Concerning urban and local policies, the reification of the neoliberal rationality has consisted mainly in the privatization and financialization of public infrastructures and services, while public housing stocks have been strongly reduced and global financial actors, like private equity funds, have entered the private rental market through the acquisition of large housing stocks (e.g. Fields and Uffer, 2014).

Far from being only an US trend, austerity has become a key-word among EU policy-makers led by the narrative "we lived above our possibilities", aimed at normalizing the adoption of severe cuts to public spending and the privatization of public services. In this respect, Southern European countries appear among the most affected because of high public debts and lack of fiscal discipline, these measures provoking an increase of unemployment and economic stagnation. We now turn our analysis to the interconnections of these processes in the Italian case, focusing on the impact of austerity in Rome.

3. Impoverishment, indebtedness and austerity. Three key-characteristics of Italian contemporary political economy

Together with other South European countries and Ireland, Italy has become a major protagonist of the current debt and financial crisis: lost of income and wealth, dramatic rise of unemployment, impoverishment and severe cuts to public spending, have become dramatic well-known events for many people living in the country (e.g. ISTAT, 2014). Following the theoretical perspective analysed in section two, it is possible to stress that the austerity policies adopted since the eruption of the current debt and financial crisis represent the natural *continuum*, the ultimate step of the neoliberal policies implemented since at least the early 1990s (Di Feliciantonio, 2015, Gallino, 2015). As a matter of fact, the implementation of neoliberal reforms has been not simply continued, but strongly accelerated, the unelected 'technical' governments ruling the country since 2011 reforming the main pillars of welfare, notably education, pensions and emplyment contracts, while approving severe cuts (e.g. Pavolini and Raitano, 2015).

So neoliberalism and austerity politics in Italy share the same (presumed) markets' rationality: reduction of public goods and services, private management of strategic services and resources, and a strong redistribution of wealth from low-income groups to high-income ones (Gallino, 2012). Several critical political economists and activists have denounced such a trend for long, far before the 'outbreak' of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, remarking the increasing precarization of working and living conditions, a dramatic impoverishment, the increase of inequalities and a deep neoliberalization of main national and local policies (e.g. Bologna and Fumagalli, 1997, Bruni and Murgia, 2007, Leon and Realfonso, 2008, Tiddi, 2002).

The roots of this long-standing process are found in the re-organization of the national economy since the end of the 1970s, with former main industrial companies re-orienting their activities towards finance and real estate (see, for instance, Kaika and Ruggiero, 2013, about

Pirelli) while the companies representing the 'made in Italy' model (mainly in the clothing industry) push for de-localization or more 'flexibility' in employment contracts and conditions (e.g. Gallino, 2001, 2009). With massive lost of occupation in manufacturing and the rising of the services sector, real wages have progressively declined, new precarious types of contracts have been introduced determining the spreading of 'atypical' contracts (not guaranteeing the same basic rights of 'standard' ones), while the effects on the occupation rate have remained limited (e.g. Gallino, 2001, 2009). Until 2007-2008 material impoverishment and precarization were balanced by rising housing prices, but the burst of the housing market and the credit crunch consequent to the global crisis worsened the situation; the adoption of severe austerity measures has then produced further deterioration of material conditions, notably for the most vulnerable.

For the scopes of the article, I proceed by focusing on three specific main characteristics of Italian contemporary political economy: impoverishment, indebtedness and austerity. Since they play a crucial role in determining the possibility to access housing for an increasing number of people, favouring a process of subjectification around housing. Although the analytical focus concerns the current (post?)crisis time, these characteristics must be connected to the abovementioned long-standing trends at work for at least three decades.

Impoverishment and indebtedness: an indivisible partnership

When considering indebtedness in relation to housing, Italy is usually represented as featuring a (relatively) small mortgage market (e.g. Aalbers, 2007) as a result of a closed and protectionist banking system. However the situation has changed rapidly, so a more market/mortgage-based orientation of the system has emerged (e.g. Aalbers, 2007, Baldini and Poggio, 2014).

In general terms, any reflection on indebtedness in Italy should consider the role of public debt as a neoliberal dispositif to control people and approve reforms, as discussed by Lazzarato (2012). Indeed Italy has a long-standing history of high levels of public indebtedness (e.g. Giavazzi and Spaventa, 1988, ISTAT, 2012), but in specific phases of financial turmoil indebtedness has been invoked as a threat to the possibilities of recovery in order to approve neoliberal reforms (e.g. Gallino, 2015, Lazzarato, 2012, 2015).

However, indebtedness as an economic, social and political relation is not confined to public debt but it now concerns directly the financial situation of more and more people. Despite registering lower levels in comparison to other OECD countries, the financial liabilities as percentage of disposable income have rapidly increased for Italian households, from 60% in

2004 to 81% in 2012 (source: Bank of Italy 2014b). In this respect, mortgages play a consistent role, accounting 43% of the financial liabilities of Italian households in 2012 (*ibid*). However according to the data of the *Survey on Household, Income and Wealth* of the Bank of Italy concerning 2010, we find that only 15% of homeowners in Italy have a mortgage. Data in table1 reveal the deep inequalities of this situation; for instance, the rate of homeowners with a mortgage is only 2% for people aged more than 65, while it is 32% and 37% for people aged 35-44 and 25-34 respectively. By combining them with recent data of the Bank of Italy (2014a), we take a wider picture of the weight of indebtedness for young generations: for instance the average ratio debt/income has been found to be 190% for people aged under 34 and 173,1% for people aged 35-44 (table1).

(insert here table 1 if possible)

If we consider also data on poverty, the situation reveals its dramatic character. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2014), relative poverty has increased from 11% in 2010 to 12.6% in 2013, while absolute poverty has increased from 4.6% in 2010 to 7.9% in 2013. To understand the increase of poverty, we should consider the worsening conditions of employment in the country, as highlighted by the rising of the unemployment rate: for people aged over 15, it rose to 12.7% in 2014 (see table 2), while the occupation rate fell to 55.5% in 2013.

Albeit dramatic, these data hide other lines of inequalities that make the situation even more difficult and precarious for specific groups, like young people and international migrants. Concerning the formers, data in table 2 show that the unemployment rate of people aged 15-29 and 15-24 was respectively 31.6% and 42.7% in 2014, this situation reinforcing the main trend of the Italian welfare system, i.e. wealth is privately redistributed among generations within the household (e.g. Poggio, 2008). Deep inequalities in the Italian socio-economic system concern also international migrants. As shown by data on poverty of the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2015), the absolute poverty rate was 23.4% for households of foreigners in 2014, while it was 4.3% for households of Italians, this reflecting the traditional exclusion of international migrants from the Italian welfare system (e.g. Poggio, 2008).

(insert here table 2 if possible)

Austerity and the housing crisis

One of the main effects of the worsening economic and financial situation of households in the country is represented by increasing evictions, this being the case particularly for the main metropolitan areas, Rome included. Indeed the city has registered a strong increase of evictions since 2007: if in 2006 and 2007 the evictions approved by the Court were a bit more than 5700, they increased to 7574 in 2008 and 8729 in 2009 (source: Ministry of Interiors). This is just one side of the housing crisis: indeed in 2008 30,000 households were recognised as eligible for social housing, but in the period 2008-2013, in the name of austerity, the municipality arranged only 750 new social housing units (source: Unione Inquilini). The 2009 study by Cresme, a neoliberal think thank, stated that the municipality needed 52,800 new social houses, mainly for households that cannot afford the rent (36,600).

With the housing crisis affecting more and more people, the response by institutions has been marked by an inadequate capacity to intervene, the new mantra of the unsustainability of public debt leading to adopt severe austerity measures, made of cuts to public spending, block of new hirings and cuts to social transfers in every domain. For instance, the social protection benefits for "housing and social exclusion" corresponded to just 0.1% of the GDP in 2009 (source: Eurostat).

Following Peck (2012), cities result the most affected sites from this dramatic crisis, unable to find alternative solutions as they are captured by the same austerity mantra together with a decrease of transfers from the national State. For Rome we can state that the triumph of the austerity reason is highlighted by the so called '*Decreto Salva Roma*' (Decree to Save Rome), approved by the National Government in April 2014. It is aimed at reducing the public debt of the municipality of Rome through heavy cuts and the rigid control from a sort of national 'Troika' (made of the Government Presidency, Minister of Interiors and Minister of Economy and Finance) over the measures approved by the municipality. This way, the capacity of local institutions to intervene is not just completely blocked by austerity politics, but there is exactly the same kind of "permanent fiscal tribunal" at work, as denounced by Peck (2012, see section two) paraphrasing Foucault.

On the same time, urban policies shaped by the ideology of austerity have not erased the main characteristics of neoliberal urbanism, made of massive land speculation and sprawl, determining the concrete expulsion of low-middle class households, notably young and migrants, from the central, compact city to the peripheral, low-density suburbs lacking basic public services (e.g. Berdini, 2010, Di Feliciantonio and Salvati, 2015, Iacovino, 2014). The result is a city marked by strong inequalities in the housing sector, with more than 50,000 social houses needed (Cresme, 2009) and 30,000 households eligible for social housing, while

200,000 flats are estimated to be vacant and more than 50,000 to be unsold (source: Unione Inquilini). Nevertheless, mega-projects to build new residential areas as well as to 'recuperate' abandoned and under-valued buildings in attractive neighbourhoods are promoted, like a new football stadium with a complex of luxury housing units and a shopping mall in the area of Tor Di Valle.

If in such a context of a *neoliberal/austerity urbanism continuum* formal institutions were not able to provide a concrete solution to the housing crisis, it is thanks to the direct action of the "indebted (wo)men" directly affected by the crisis and austerity policies that material solutions have been experimented, this being the object of the next section.

4. Collective subjectification involved by the re-emergence of squatting in Rome

The aim of the present section is to highlight how the re-emergence of squatting in Rome has represented a process of collective subjectification involving the two phases Revel (2014) associates to subjectification. However before discussing the two phases (the action/*gesture* and the consequent deconstruction of identity), it is important to focus on the long-term roots of squatting and autonomous politics in Rome in order to unveil how such a 'new' process of subjectification relies on a consolidated background of what Bosi and Zamponi have recently defined as "direct social action" (2015). Indeed they analysed the continuities and discontinuities in the (limited) repertoire of practices and actions adopted by social movements in Italy in three different recent moments (the 1970s, the end of the 1990s and the current phase of austerity politics). In this respect, occupation appears as a distinctive political practice of both the 1970s and the present, although the authors recognize that "at no point in the last three decades had housing occupations reached the scale, level of co-ordination, or sheer centrality in the public sphere as they have now in the context of the economic crisis" (*ibid*: 375). This is the case particularly in Rome, for sure one of the cities in Europe with the highest amount of people living in squats and presenting a rich variety of initiatives and projects (e.g. Mudu, 2014).

A rooted 'Tsunami' denouncing speculation

When considering the role of real estate and the built environment in the dynamics of accumulation of capitalism discussed in section two, Rome represents an illustrative case, since rent and speculation have traditionally been the main drivers of the city economy, as well documented by historians and urban scholars (e.g. Berdini, 2010, Insolera, 1962, Vidotto, 2001). At the same time, the "housing crisis" has continued to affect thousands of households

since at least the times of fascism, when massive amounts of people, mostly from the South, moved to the capital to escape extreme poverty. However the response of institutions has mostly relied on tolerating informal settlements in peripheral areas, often outside the city limits indicated by city Masterplans, in order to favour land speculation (e.g. Berdini, 2010, Martinelli, 1985).

At times of strong social conflict, notably the 1960s and the 1970s, characterized by the origin and spreading of workerist thought, housing represented one of the main claims addressed by social movements, squatting emerging soon as one of the distinctive practices of Italian *Autonomia*, breaking its alliance with the institutional communist party -*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI (for an in-depth analysis see Mudu, 2004, 2012). The metropolitan areas of the country were the main laboratories of both autonomous thought and political practice (e.g. Mudu, 2004, Ruggiero, 2000), with Rome occupying a very prominent role. In the same years, there was also the appearance of the first self-managed social centers (*centri sociali occupati autogestiti, CSOA*), the first one being squatted in Rome in 1974; this political practice got spread very rapidly, so in 1977 there were already around fifty social centers across Italy (Ginsborg, 1990). In line with transnational cases analyzed in the literature (e.g. Chatterton, 2010, Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006, Martinez, 2002, 2007, 2013, Montagna, 2006, Squatting Europe Kollective, 2013, 2014, Vasudevan, 2015), in Rome too social centers have performed a multiplicity of political and social functions: spreading non-market oriented counter-cultural events, organizing political demonstrations and networks, offering an alternative to the increasing commodification of places for meeting and sociability, offering self-managed services to people excluded by formal institutions, notably migrants, among the others. Moreover, they have served since the beginnings as physical infrastructures for the spreading of autonomous thought.

Although addressing different claims, the CSOAs and the housing movements have traditionally had very tight connections, notably in organizational terms. For instance, one of the most established squatting networks of the city, *Action- Diritti in Movimento*, has always included both squatted houses and CSOAs. In this respect, we can easily recognize the function performed by social centers as key-infrastructures for fostering activism/militantism and social movements, connecting different domains of social and political struggle (e.g. Martinez, 2002, 2007). From my fieldwork data, I can state that in Rome social centers have often performed as 'entry points' to political engagement for several militants of the housing movement.

Despite such a solid background for squatting, the early 2000s registered a sort of decline for both housing and CSOAs. However with evictions and foreclosures increasing since the worsening of the debt and financial crisis as seen in section three, a new wave of squatting projects has (re)emerged, this time involving also innovative kinds of places, like theatres, cinemas and parks, the main claim addressed being the common(s) (e.g. Quarta and Ferrando, 2015). Concerning housing, squatting networks- that register the demand for social housing needs through their open help desks- have launched a big campaign against abandoned public buildings and speculation-oriented ones in order to denounce the overall problem and affirm the political claim of the right to housing: the 'Tsunami Tour'. It was launched at the end of 2012 by the three main metropolitan squatting networks (*Action-Diritti in Movimento*, *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani, Coordinamento di Lotta per la Casa*), leading so far to the simultaneous squatting of ten buildings on the date of 6th December 2012, then fourteen more buildings on the dates of 6th/7th April 2013, four more squatted buildings at the beginnings of October 2013 and six more in April 2014.

Aiming at redefining the right to housing in the current phase of crisis and austerity politics, the 'Tsunami' has been able to provide a shelter to around 2000 people, mostly migrants, notably belonging to the 36,600 households that cannot afford the rent and the 4400 students not receiving any economic support from public institutions, as highlighted in the Cresme report (2009). As seen, most of them are excluded from (mortgaged and indebted) homeownership, but still result indebted because of the increasing precarious conditions of the labour market in the Italian context and now cannot even afford anymore to pay the rent.

Concerning strategies, the 'Tsunami' marks a novel phase as respect to the recent past in terms of typologies of buildings squatted. Indeed one of the main strategies of the squatting movement in Rome has consisted for long in occupying mostly abandoned public buildings (or vacant social housing units) to denounce the lack of serious engagement of public institutions with the housing question, while opening (mostly informal) negotiations with the owning institutions in order to get the legal assignation of the building, thus ensuring the survival of the initiative (the issue of 'institutionalization' of squatting initiatives has represented a main concern in the literature; see, for instance, Martinez, 2014). On the contrary, the 'Tsunami' has concerned mostly privately-owned buildings in order to denounce the speculative character of vacant real estate stocks as stores-of-values under financial capitalism. In this respect, we find different examples, like a historical building object of a renewal project by a local real estate agency and aimed at creating luxury housing units in a

central but traditionally working class-neighborhood (*Communia* in San Lorenzo), or a vacant building owned by a global private equity fund in a very central area (SpinTime Labs in the Esquilino neighborhood).

These different examples give also an idea of the peculiar spatial strategy of the 'Tsunami', spreading all around the city, including middle/upper class neighborhoods, like the students' housing project *Degage* situated at the intersection of the Nomentano and the Salario neighborhoods. Nevertheless South-Eastern neighborhoods (Pigneto-Prenestino-Centocelle) appear as the most prolific for squatting, as shown by figure 1. After this short account of the roots and strategies of the 'Tsunami', we can proceed to discuss the process of subjectification at work with the re-emergence of squatting, following Revel's conceptualization (2014).

Phase one: the action/gesture

In order to understand the central role played by the action of squatting itself in the process of subjectification of "indebted (wo)men", I here analyse the case of BFF[2], aged between 35 and 45, relocated in one of the initiatives linked to the 'Tsunami'.

BBF arrived in Italy as a clandestine before 2005. In the mid-2000s s/he was finally able to obtain a regular permit of stay; having a Master degree from their own country, s/he could find a job in a NGO involved in social services running projects mostly funded by the municipality. So s/he decided to live with their partner and their children by their own, the partner working without a contract in the care sector. After the right-wing coalition won the municipal election in 2008 and severe austere measures were undertaken by the new City Council, involving notably cuts to social services, the household started having financial problems because the salary of BBF was not regular anymore, the NGO being unable to pay salaries to the workers on a monthly basis. After a first loan taken in the mid-2000s to buy a car and renovate the house, the household was forced to re-negotiate it through a second loan with another financial institution. However the working conditions of BBF did not improve in the following months/years, the salary being paid every three or four months, so their partner decided to go back to the home country with the kids because of the most affordable cost of life. This way we see how a subject starting with an already precarious condition (because excluded from the Italian welfare system) gets indebted, their situation worsening because of increasingly precarious working conditions as a consequence of austerity measures.

[2] The vagueness of most of the data about BBF (as well as the research partners quoted in the prosecution of the text) responds to the ethical commitment of guaranteeing full anonymity to the squatters involved in the research project.

Affected by the separation from their family, BBF started to be unable to pay even just the rent for a room in a shared flat, so, inspired by a friend who had found a housing solution through squatting, s/he approached one of the main networks claiming housing rights in Rome. Having lost their job in the meanwhile (and the loan remaining mostly un-repaid), s/he had to wait around nine months before being inserted in one of the initiatives of the 'Tsunami', defined in their own words as "the only real alternative someone like me can access" (personal interview, author's translation). Indeed in our interview s/he explained how "it is frustrating to realize you are not able to fulfill even the basic needs of your family and yourself, you have worked hard, done so many efforts but the money is never enough and housing is crazily expensive in this city, (…) Why is a low-income precarious person not entitled to live in the city? (…) Through squatting, our claim is properly this: poor people must have the right to housing in the city!" (*ibid*).

Such a renovated awareness about the structural inequalities determining the housing crisis is combined with the frustration and anxiety of being indebted; indeed the debt is still there as a dark threat, as emphasized by the following words:
"Do you know the most funny part of the whole story? I still have the debt with (*name of the financial institution*), they continue to call me menacing to foreclose my properties, which properties? I ask them (*smiling*). I have only a scooter and few clothes. I have worked and struggled so hard for many years and the only result is that I am indebted, not even owning a house. (…) I often feel like having an incurable degenerative disease: you know it is there and it can only worsen but you do not know exactly when it will happen, so it is a permanent state of anxiety" (*ibid*).

However, having the possibility of accessing home through squatting is source for new hopes and aspirations, firstly in terms of reuniting with their family, thus political engagement opens new horizons. Indeed "squatting a building re-defines the meaning of *politics* for the people involved, (…), you become aware that the only way to take back your rights is struggling together. It is what we do here: we struggle for a decent life" (*ibid*).
BBF story and words highlight the drama attached to indebtedness, precarity and the lack of housing opportunities offered by the welfare regime. However in their case the terrible circle is broken through the involvement in the 'Tsunami', thus the *action* and *gesture* of squatting produce a new political conscience (and subjectivity) rejecting the disciplining power of indebtedness. Following Revel (2014), for this process being successful, the moment of the

action itself is not enough but must be followed by a process of deconstruction of the identity: how do the "indebted (wo)men" deconstruct their identity when squatting in Rome?

Phase two: the deconstruction of identity

As seen in section two, assuming that identity can be deconstructed through an action involves a non-essentialist perspective on identity: identity is not a predetermined unity but results from different social processes, norms and power relations that shape the way we think and perceive ourselves. In the case of indebtedness, this means first recognizing the role played by debt under current capitalism in disciplining the everyday formation of subjects and norms, their relation to work and the future. Indeed the indebted neoliberal subject is constructed as being the lonely 'responsible' for its actual situation (Lazzarato, 2012). In a context shaped by increasing precarization and impoverishment like the Italian one, this means erasing the *structural* conditions forcing people towards deprivation and the need to rely on credit in order to try to maintain decent living conditions. So the formation of an oppositional subjectivity, aware of the social and political power of debt, necessarily relies on the deconstruction of the "indebted identity".

In the case of squatting initiatives in Rome, all my research partners entrapped in debt stressed the continuous feeling of anxiety and personal failure associated with it. As stated by FJX, aged between 50 and 60:

"you were somehow used to believe that if you work hard and keep a regular and responsible conduct, you will manage to live decently, (…) I did it, most of my life has been around working and try to save money to get a decent house but I have been rewarded with losing everything, indebted and a sense of failure. (…) 'You have not been able to maintain your standard' is what I have been told many times, this cost me so much, (…) a continuous sense of failure, of not being 'man enough'" (personal interview, author's translation).

Beyond the deeply gendered affective dimension of FJX's self-narrative, what emerges clearly is the complete sense of personal responsibilization associated to material conditions and constraints. Squatting militants are strongly aware of this *subjective* process: this is why squatting metropolitan networks accord a great importance to what we could define, paraphrasing Foucault (2008), as the "working on the self" for the new squatters, trying to erase the sense of shame and failure associated to being unable to access a decent 'regular' housing solution. This is realized through collective discussions, workshops, assemblies and

meetings in which people share their personal experiences; as stated by Y7D, a well-known leader of the squatting movement in Rome:
"the poor must learn that he is poor because of complex social and economic inequalities, that he lost his job because of economic restructuring and austerity, that he is indebted because it was a way for capital to promote consumption and profits. (…) Feelings of guilty, shame, failure must be erased, (…) but it is an extremely difficult process, because we are still used to think that it is our fault if we are poor! (…) Changing how people perceive themselves and their condition is the most difficult task because it is also the most dangerous for the system: the angry poors can pose a big challenge to capital interests! (…) We help them to understand that they have to fight for their rights and only fighting collectively you can achieve a better material condition" (author's translation, personal interview).

So beyond the action of squatting itself, thus giving an immediate solution to a serious problem, it results crucial to "build the selves as subjects" (Foucault, 1982, see section two), this being a shared element among my research partners. For instance P4V, aged between 35 and 45, has stressed the tension between understanding the structural process at work and the persisting feeling of shame when their poverty becomes manifest, notably with their children. In a similar vein DD2, aged between 30 and 40, has emphasized the persisting sense of failure, although recognizing how the political engagement with the squatting movement helped to perceive themselves as part of a collective process of re-appropriation of a deprived basic right.
Given its complexity, such a process is started well before the action of squatting itself: before accessing squatting initiatives concretely, people are asked by the networks to attend regular meetings and assemblies "to learn that they are going to enter a pre-existing political project that have specific values and rules, (…) they must learn how to live together, to share, to think themselves as part of a collective, (…) you learn that is not anymore about *you* or your family but about *us*" (Y7D, personal interview, author's translation, emphasis added).

This kind of organization opens easily the way to tensions and the formation of strong power relations. Indeed several criticisms have been addressed on how decisions are taken about "who" is going to be part of the initiatives. As a matter of fact, this is usually decided by the coordination of the network without a non-transparent procedure, although on the basis of common criteria like participation to demonstrations or other political activities, households' composition (priority is usually given to households with babies or kids), dis/ability or

gender. For instance the initiatives of the network of Y7D are mostly addressed to non-partnered migrant women with babies or kids because considered as the most vulnerable subjects of society.

The lack of transparent procedures assigns a consistent power to pre-existing hierarchies and leaders, this becoming particularly relevant in the case of someone thrown out from a squat. Although these decisions are usually taken collectively during the general assemblies of the initiative, leaders are able to influence the general decision through their position. Main leaders are usually experienced activists not facing (anymore) personal housing problems, often coming from other interconnected social movements; however during my fieldwork I have seen several "indebted (wo)men" previously not involved in activism 'growing up' in terms of leadership and political charisma thanks to the involvement in the squatting initiatives. While a deep and structural analysis of the power relations inside squatting initiatives cannot be developed in the present paper, the aim of these considerations is to show how, following Foucault and Revel, these projects are not exempted from strong contradictions and power relations, a serious engagement with them demanding severe scrutiny inside the literature on squatting.

5. Conclusions. Recognizing and investigating processes of subjectification

With the effects of the crisis and austerity politics worsening around Southern European cities, squatting initiatives have emerged as political collective responses to the housing crisis, challenging neoliberal institutions and power relations, thus revealing the contentious character of housing and real estate under capitalism. Through these initiatives, "indebted (wo)men" take charge of their own lives, needs and problems breaking the main power relation of the dispositif of indebtedness. Following Lazzarato (2012), the paper has emphasized the specific role of indebtedness in forging new subjectivities, 'responsible' debtors feeling guilty and anxious to repay their debts. However, given the circular nature of power, this archetypical relation can be broken through an action reversing the chiasm of the subjectification process, i.e. not ceding to subjection, as recently discussed by Revel (2014). In order to fully understand how this process of subjectification has been made possible, I have also taken into account the role played by austerity politics in worsening the effects of the crisis. This combination has shaped the formation and spread of squatting (and other) initiatives, the paper focusing on the case of Rome. However these 'new' initiatives reveal the importance of history and political embeddednes: indeed Rome has a long-standing tradition of squatting practices and the 'new' initiatives are deeply linked to pre-existing networks and

social movements. Through the 'Tsunami', "indebted (wo)men" have practiced a political action to re-assert the right to access housing, this gesture producing new political subjectivities that are aware and conscious of the inequalities generated by the "violence of financial capitalism" (Marazzi, 2011).

These examples reveal the *subjective* character of the socio-economic processes and power relations at work under neoliberalism, highlighting how the same subjects -as both *subjectus* and *subjectum* as analyzed by Balibar (2012)- are able to break the hegemonic relation that was previously objectifying them. This way, subjectification emerges as a collective political process challenging hegemonic power relations. In the case of squatting, this process contends one of the main principles of capitalism (private property), reversing the contradiction about the commodification (and, more recently, the financialization) of housing. Proving to be successful, such examples are important not just to favor the proliferation of this kind of initiatives but also to highlight that alternative models and claims are still practicable, challenging all-encompassing and negative views of capitalism and neoliberalism leaving no space for hope and possibilities. This does not mean romanticizing these processes and initiatives, their relations with hegemonic forces must be analyzed and severely scrutinized, highlighting the inescapable tensions, contradictions and power relations shaping them. Indeed, as discussed by Revel (2014), the deconstruction of the identity does not mean de-subjectification, so in any case the new emerging subject won't be exempted from power relations.

More research is needed within political economy to understand how subjectification is produced and practiced in relation to the main power relations at work in the current socio-economic system we usually define as neoliberalism. Further research should focus on the specific forms of these alternatives within and beyond the housing sector, as they are place-embedded. Indeed squatting is only one of the multiple possible forms of contention that housing can take; as already mentioned, in Rome its re-emergence is linked to the long-term history of autonomous politics there. Other places and contexts can feature different forms of contention. Analyzing how these movements and initiatives are structured together with their contradictions represents an important and useful decision primarily for these alternatives themselves, critical research being an excellent ally in their 'world-making' effort (Muñoz, 2009).

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Table1. Generational inequalities in the Italian housing (mortgaged) sector

Age group	% homeowners with a mortgage[1]	Average ratio debt/income[2]	% under poverty line[2]
Up to 34	**37***	190.0	21.5**
35-44	**32**	173.1	18
45-54	**23**	155.7	18
55-64	**12**	99.4	10
65-	**2**	81.9	5

1. Source: *Survey on Household, Income and Wealth* of the Bank of Italy for the year 2010
2. Source: Bank of Italy (2014a)
* Aging group: 25-34

**Aging group: 19-34

Table2. Unemployment and occupation rate in Italy

Year	Unemployment rate (people over 15)	Unemployment rate (people 15-29)	Unemployment rate (people 15-24)	Occupation rate (people 15-64)
2010	8.4	20.3	27.9	56.8
2011	8.4	20.5	29.2	56.8
2012	10.7	25.4	35.3	56.6
2013	12.1	29.8	40.0	55.5
2014	12.7	31.6	42.7	55.7

Source: ISTAT, 2015, data available online: http://dati.istat.it/Index.