Political infrastructures of care:
Collective home making in refugee solidarity squats

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Abstract

Since 2015, Greece has emerged as a major stopover in refugees' journey seeking a better life in Europe. In Greece, as in the rest of Europe, the long summer of migration has given rise to official discourses about 'Europe's refugee crisis' and the management of migration flows. The Greek state in collaboration with global, European and national actors, adopted various housing practices in order to provide temporary accommodation to refugees. At the antipode of such discourses and policies, refugee solidarity squats have been organised in Greek cities through common struggles among local activists and people on the move. This article contributes to contemporary debates around migrant struggles for housing by conceptualising refugee solidarity squats as *political infrastructures of care.* By bringing into dialogue Jacques Rancière's political writings with feminist scholarship on care and social reproduction, the article argues that refugee solidarity squats are not only sites of struggle against anti-migration policies but also stages for the collectivisation of care through the enactment of transversal equality. Through a close urban ethnographic reading of the Orfanotrofio housing squat for migrants in Thessaloniki, Greece, the article narrates the process of collective home making in the squat. In doing so, it analyses the everyday practices through which Orfanotrofio's participants materially reproduced and affectively cared for each other and investigates how activists and refugees negotiated their different subject positions and challenged the differential lines of power that defined the squat's participants, such as gender, political background, race and so on. Based on this, it manifests that distancing themselves from humanitarian approaches to housing that revolve around a disembodied care from a distance, spaces like Orfanotrofio construct in the here and now common political spaces of home and give birth to collective political subjects.

Keywords

political subjectification, collective care, home making, migrant housing struggles, Greece

Introduction

The paper contributes to contemporary debates on migrant struggles for housing by conceptualising refugee solidarity housing squats as political infrastructures of care. To do so, it focuses on the Orfanotrofio housing squat organised in Thessaloniki, Greece in December 2015. Orfanotrofio was part of a polymorphous refugee solidarity movement that, through changes and transformations, remains active today. Since 2015, solidarity has become part of the everyday life of many people in Greece in their attempts to support newcomers—refugees and migrants—through practices such as the organisation of solidarity kitchens, cultural events for children in refugee camps and grassroots networks of legal counselling (Oikonomakis, 2018; Rozakou, 2016). A core part of this solidarity network is the housing squats that were mainly organised in Athens and Thessaloniki. In Athens, in 2016, there were at least ten self-organised squats, with City Plaza Hotel and Notara 26 standing out as prominent and long-lasting examples (Raimondi, 2019; Kotronaki et al., 2018). In Thessaloniki, three refugee solidarity squats, namely Orfanotrofio, Nikis and Hürriya, were created in 2015. Orfanotrofio operated as a self-organised refugee squat for seven months, until July 2016, when it was evicted. It housed around 100 people from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Senegal, Morocco and other countries, among them several families and children.

Since 2015 and in the wake of what has been widely called a "Refugee Crisis", a burgeoning scholarly debate has been inaugurated analysing migrant struggles through three main strands of scholarship (Birey et al., 2019). First, social movement theory focuses on structural aspects of protests by analysing the organisational repertoires of contention as they emerge through the mobilisation of collectivities that seek to challenge the status quo (Cinalli & Giugni, 2011; Cinalli, 2016). Second, critical citizenship studies explore the counter-hegemonic characteristics of migrants' struggles by focusing on the micropolitics of grounded political struggles. Migrant squats are examined as practices of resistance to the European border regime but also as spaces of urban commoning and inhabitance that are situated outside and against humanitarian and statist forms of assistance (Dadusc et al., 2019; Dadusc, 2019; Ataç et al., 2016; Raimondi, 2019). Finally, the autonomy of migration calls for a destabilisation of citizenship-oriented approaches and foregrounds the autonomous and dynamic dimension of migratory movements. Citizenship is here understood as a 'regulatory mechanism of inclusion and exclusion' (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013, p. 182) that is always coexistent with borders and sovereign control. Moving beyond citizenship, scholars of this strand of literature argue that mobility precedes immigration regimes and focus on the uncontrollable dimension of migratory movements (Tazzioli & Walters, 2019; Mezzadra, 2016).

Notwithstanding the important insights that the aforementioned literatures contribute to the understanding of migrant struggles as spaces of resistance, there is an aspect that remains under-explored until today. Refugee solidarity squats are not only spaces that disrupt the dominant socio-spatial ordering but they are also collective spaces that prioritise the day-to-day survival of people and the constituent communities. Through the forging of communities of care, they are part of what Silvia Federici calls 'self-reproducing movements'

(2012, p. 12). Taking this aspect into account, this article seeks to move a step further to account for the spatialised process of political subjectification as well as the critical dimension of care and social reproduction that is inextricably linked to refugee solidarity squats but has not been specifically analysed until today.

To do so, I introduce the notion of *political infrastructures of care* to conceptualise refugee solidarity squats not only as sites of struggle against anti-migration policies but also as stages for the collectivisation of care through the enactment of equality. The notion foregrounds equality and care as co-constitutive practices; equality becomes embodied through the collectivisation of care while care becomes politicised through the enactment and presupposition of equality. Conceptually, the paper mobilises Rancière's framework on political subjectification and extends it by drawing on feminist scholarship on care and social reproduction. While Rancière's work is significant for exploring Orfanotrofio as a space where new collective political subjects were created through the presupposition of equality, his framework remains remarkably disembodied and not adequately linked with everyday socio-material practices, engaging rarely with questions of gender, race and ethnicity as well as with the material articulation of politicising claims. To address this gap, this article draws on feminist and geographical scholarship on care and social reproduction. This body of work is of particular use here because it enables an understanding of refugee solidarity squats as spaces—or collective homes—where locals and newcomers '*materially* reproduce and *affectively* care for [themselves]' (De Angelis, 2012, p. xv, emphasis in the original). Moreover, feminist scholarship provides a valuable framework for drawing out the complexities of political struggles that engage heterogeneous actors, accounting for the emergence of new political subjectivities within, across and beyond borders.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section analyses the key conceptual axes that underlie the fabrication of political infrastructures of care. Specifically, it draws on Jacques Rancière to foreground political subjectification as a space-making process and on feminist scholarship on care and social reproduction to highlight the dimensions of embodied care and transversal equality. The second section details the methodological approach employed for the ethnographic research in Orfanotrofio, reflecting on my positionality as well as the ethical and political challenges of activist ethnographies. The third section analyses Orfanotrofio as a political infrastructure of care through four intertwined foci of analysis: dissensual spatialisation; emancipatory spatialities of collective care; grassroots institutions of collective care and transversal equality; and the building of a community of care through everyday life.

Fabricating political infrastructures of care: transversal equality and embodied care as space-making practices

During the last ten years, Jacques Rancière's political writings have constituted a valuable source of reflection in scholarly attempts to analyse political struggles and especially those struggles of undocumented migrants and refugees (Dikeç, 2013; Swerts, 2017; Darling, 2014; Schaap, 2011; Karaliotas & Kapsali, 2020). For Rancière, there are two opposing logics

of being together: one that 'distributes the bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility' (2004, p. 28) and another that 'disrupts this harmony through the mere fact of achieving the contingency of the equality […] of any speaking beings' (*ibid.*). The former is the logic of the *police* where everyone 'has been given [their] due share of the common' (Arsenjuk, 2007, p. 4); some discourses are heard while others are recognised as noise, some activities are visible while others are invisible. For the *police*, space is about fixing. The spaces of the *police* are spaces where ways of being, ways of saying and ways of doing are properly allocated and everyone has a 'proper' place in a seemingly natural order of things. On the counterpoint, politics is based on a radically different logic; it is an 'activity antagonistic to policing' (Rancière, 2004, p. 29). It arises when 'the given order of things is questioned; when those whose voice is only recogni[s]ed as noise by the *police*/ policy order claim their right to speak, acquire speech, and produce the spatiality that permits exercising this right' (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 7). To Rancière, politics occurs when the logic of the *police* meets with the logic of equality. Politics, in this sense, is not a struggle for power (Dikeç, 2005). Rather, it is about the construction of different, competing worlds (Rancière, 2011; Dikeç, 2013).

The enactment of equality or as Rancière puts it, the enactment of 'the assumption of equality between any and every speaking being' (2004, p. 30) is the basis upon which political subjects are created, disrupting the *police* order. It is thus the basic presupposition for the process of political subjectification. Political subjectification refers to a process of disidentification; it occurs when people are coming together and act 'as political subjects in the interval or the gap between two identities, neither of which we could assume […] between names, identities, cultures and so on' (Rancière, 1995, p. 61-62). In other words, political subjectification is when "the part of those who have no part" deny the identities and roles attributed to them and appear as political subjects, acting 'in the name of difference' (May, 2008, p. 64). For Rancière, political subjectification is an inherently spatial process; it revolves around the production of emancipatory spatialities. In this way, spatialisation departs from understandings that view it solely as a process for 'the consolidation of […] orders and hierarchies' and becomes an emancipatory process of space-making and appearance in space through the coming together of heterogeneous political subjects (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2016, p. 8). The spaces created through this process are always 'specific, concrete, particular and contentious, but stand as the metaphorical condensation of the universal' (Karaliotas & Swyngedouw, 2019, p. 377). This does not mean that there are pre-determined spaces that politics can occur but that politics is about the reshaping of space, in its symbolic and material dimension, by questioning the geographies of the *police* order.

Fabricating political infrastructures can, thus, be understood as a process of collective world-making, a process of political subjectification through which bodies, materials, ideas and beliefs come together to *make space*, to open new spaces of living-in-common. Makeshift infrastructures are constitutively political (McFarlane & Vasudevan, 2013, p. 258; Vasudevan, 2017). Through their construction, precarious groups claim their presence in the city, gaining visibility and asserting their own being. They deny the identities given to them by the *police* order and present themselves as active political subjects (ibid.). Moreover, the material

politics that underlie the setting up of political infrastructures and extend from the act of squatting to architectural experimentations and the division of rooms demarcate 'a new micropolitics of connection and solidarity' (Vasudevan 2014, p. 12; Minuchin, 2013; Simone, 2004). The construction, organisation and maintenance of socio-material infrastructures are also inextricably linked with the shaping of the community and the developing of solidarity bonds. Infrastructures are, as Amin states, 'deeply implicated […] in the experience of community, solidarity and struggle for recognition' (2014, p. 137). In a similar vein, Simone urges us to understand 'people as infrastructures' i.e. 'platform[s] providing for and producing life in the city' (2004, p. 408).

Although the Rancierian framework enables us to conceive political subjectification as a spatial process of equality, it does not engage with the everyday conflicts and negotiations that emerge through the process of *collective* political subjectification (Karaliotas & Kapsali, 2020; Karaliotas, 2017; García-Lamarca, 2017). Moreover, geographical scholarship that draws on Rancière to analyse political movements such as the 2011 Occupy protests (Davidson & Iveson, 2014; Kaika & Karaliotas, 2016), tends to disproportionately focus on the discursive articulation of the urban political while paying less attention to its material and affective dimension. Indeed, the key focus of research on politicising movements often rests on their composition, tactics, forms of organisation and impact of political discourse. However, by emphasising protest and claim making, such studies tend to marginalise issues of social reproduction that are central in anti-capitalist and emancipatory struggles (Thorburn, 2017; Jeffries, 2018). As Shukaitis argues, 'we all too often fail to appreciate the on-going work of social reproduction and maintaining community that these acts entail' (2007, p. 144). To address this gap, I suggest that an engagement with feminist scholarship on care and social reproduction can provide fruitful insights towards an understanding of transversal equality as an embodied political act of everyday care.

Care and social reproduction is about 'the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis' (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 382). Following Barbagallo and Federici (2012), care work is part of reproductive work. The emphasis on care is not used as a way to differentiate care and affection from domestic work and material activity. Rather, it is used to foreground 'the relational character of reproductive activities […] for all care work requires domestic work and all domestic work requires, to lesser or greater degrees, some care work' (*ibid.*, p. 2-3). Thus, the notion of care and care work enables us to explore the 'fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (Katz, 2001, p. 711) in refugee solidarity squats and politicising initiatives by foregrounding the impossibility to separate material from immaterial labour. As such, care work should be acknowledged as the work that encompasses activities linked to (i) the material means of subsistence, such as securing housing, preparing food, taking the bus and accessing healthcare and (ii) the affective elements of social reproduction linked to kinds of labour, such as providing domestic care and emotional support, spending time with friends and generally all of the activities that generate love and care to the communities we participate in.

Care is vital for human existence and the maintenance of life (de La Bellacasa, 2017). Theorising housing as a pivotal infrastructure of care, Power and Mee note that 'care is not just necessary; it is a practice that holds people in relations of interdependence across the life course' (2020, p. 490, also Ortiz & Boano, 2020). Nevertheless, caring is neither a natural instinct nor an *a priori* ethically good practice (Tronto, 1993). It is a political practice that always involves power relations (Graziano et al., 2020). Under capitalism, care labour has been unequally shared along lines of gender, race, class, ability and age (Bakker, 2007) and it has been also pushed to the private feminised sphere. Since the 1970s, feminist activists and scholars have emphasised that care work and social reproduction is a terrain of struggle and a vexed concept. It constitutes a contradictory terrain for the unfolding of capitalist social relations and exploitation but at the same time a stage of possibilities for their transgression (Dalla Costa & James, 1972; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017). Indeed, social reproduction is the realm through which we can re-imagine our everyday lives and re-constitute them along different axes, 'by developing the confidence and capacity to reconstruct frayed social fabrics, transform our relationships and share the means by which we can carry on and thrive' (Jeffries, 2018, p. 581; Federici, 2013). Drawing on feminist struggles over social reproduction like Wages for Housework,[1] it is now more urgent than ever to put care work and social reproduction at the center of political struggles. As Federici argues 'we have to ensure that we do not only confront capital at the time of the demonstration, but that we confront it collectively at every moment of our lives' (2010, p. 6).

The fabrication of political infrastructures of care relies on the creation of 'communities of care' (Federici, 2012, p. 12). While care is often seen as a private and personal issue Dowler and colleagues (2019) call for a radical care praxis where care is collectively practiced based on the deep and holistic acknowledgment of vulnerabilities and differences. Care, first and foremost, stands for a relationship that only becomes possible if we conceive ourselves as inherently interdependent to others; if we produce 'ourselves as a common subject' (Federici, 2019, p. 110). It is an embodied practice and a corporeal relation which materialises through embodied encounters and the forging of communities in and through which people meet realising 'the body's necessity of embodied other for survival and dignity' (Vaittinen, 2015, p. 112). Yet, political relations of care are not woven easily and straightforwardly. Interdependence involves tensions, contradictions and conflicts.

Feminist scholars and activists have inserted the notion of transversality to discuss the 'democratic practice of alliances across boundaries of difference' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 206; Cockburn & Hunter, 1999). Communities of care are forged through transversal equality or what Yuval-Davis (1999) calls "difference by equality". Departing from accounts of politics that reify boundaries between groups and homogenise communities of struggle, transversal equality insists that the differential perspectives and positionings of the members of a community should be acknowledged; that 'notions of difference should encompass, rather than replace, notions of equality' (Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 95). As Mohanty notes, analysing how political community is conceptualised within feminist practice, 'community […] is the

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[1] Wages for Housework was organised in the 1970s as a grassroots women network that fought for recognition and payment for caring work in the home and outside (see Toupin, 2018; Federici 2012).

product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly revaluated in relation to critical political priorities; and it is the product of interpretation' (2003, p. 104). Transversal equality, thus, centres the importance of the translation of differences between the participants of refugee squats. Rather than being fabricated under common denominators and a unitary language, political infrastructures of care are spaces of porous boundaries where new political subjects emerge through the challenging of predefined—by the *police*—subject positions.

Methodological notes: a feminist activist research in Orfanotrofio

Doing research on refugee solidarity squats in Greece in the turbulent period of the "Refugee Crisis" involves several methodological challenges and ethical complexities. In this section, I discuss the methodological challenges of the research on which this paper is based, after first situating myself and my research in relation to the squat. I am a Greek, white woman who has lived in Thessaloniki since the last 15 years. In 2015, during the outbreak of the "Refugee Crisis", I was an activist participating in a political initiative which was active part of the refugee solidarity movement in Thessaloniki. In parallel, I was a second-year PhD student at the School of Architecture; in a period when I was expected to define my case studies and begin my fieldwork. Orfanotrofio was selected to be part of my PhD research (Kapsali, 2019) in late January 2016, two months after already being involved in its operation as an activist. During this process, I found myself in a position of insider-outsider, inhabiting 'an inherently unstable space of betweenness' (Katz, 1994, p. 67).

Research in Orfanotrofio was conducted as an urban 'ethnograph[y] of situated struggles' (Birey et al., 2019, p. 4), informed by an activist and feminist approach to research squatting. It can thus be considered as part of those studies that investigate squatting through militant methodologies (Chatterton et al., 2008; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013). Doing research in solidarity and being part of a living struggle entailed complex methodological challenges, especially in terms of crossing the borders between academia and activism (Butcher, 2020; Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999; Routledge, 1996). Recent research on squatting has upended the idea that being a researcher and an activist at the same time is irreconcilable, by uncovering the importance of engaging into activist research (Di Feliciantonio, 2017a, 2017b; SqEK, 2010). Moving the emphasis from identities to relations is crucial for embracing 'a collaborative and dialogical approach to knowledge production' (SqEK, 2010, p. 380) that acknowledges that activists do produce knowledge, just like any other social actor. Moreover, an activist approach to research squatting is informed, in my study, by a feminist epistemology, in which research participants are active agents in the research process (Harding, 1991; Rose, 1997) and knowledge is understood to emerge through everyday socio-material practices and daily interactions and relations (Butcher, 2020). Feminist scholarship underlines that knowledge production is shaped by power and recognises that gender, race and other kinds of difference are always coproduced (Faria & Mollett, 2016; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Importantly, uneven power relations are not only a matter of concern in terms of the relations between the researcher and the research object/subject but also between the members of the community.

During my research, I was aware of the privilege of being a Greek white woman who was engaged as an activist and researcher in the squat. This affected the relations that I developed as an activist-researcher with both other activists and refugees in different ways. On the one hand, my activist role enabled me to be familiar with many leftist and anarchist groups in Thessaloniki and I also had personal relations with specific people. Although I was aware that activists-research informants would have unavoidably connected me to the political initiative I was part of, this enabled me to have already established relations of trust with local activists. On the other hand, my gender, racial, educational and political background affected my relations with refugees, more or less profoundly. Spending weeks with refugees-inhabitants as an activist enabled me to establish relations of trust with them. Yet, after beginning my research and while I was approaching them for interviews or informal discussions, I clarified that I was not there only as an activist but also as a researcher and I clearly explained the context of my research. In this way, I sought to establish ethical relationships that would not only respect them but also promote their autonomous agency (Mackenzie et al., 2007) in terms of whether they wanted to participate in the research or not.

Within such a framework, the methodology developed to study Orfanotrofio comprised of participant observation, interviewing and document analysis. Being an active participant, I participated in Orfanotrofio's everyday activities, such as demonstrations, collective housework, assemblies and organisation of events and I had informal conversations with locals and newcomers. The nexus of activities in which I was engaged provided me with significant insights on the power dynamics between the participants, the time, energy and material and affective labour invested on different activities as well as the discourses constructed through everyday encounters in the squat. In addition to participant observation, interviewing was a particularly challenging task, as it required an increased sensitivity towards newcomers. The respect of their well-being in the squat and their recovery—to the degree possible—from the harsh experiences they have lived was a key priority. In this way, I tried to actively practice caring in and through my research. Thus, I conducted only five interviews with newcomers, all of them with men and ten interviews with activists. All the interviewees were between 25 and 35 years old. Additionally, a core concern was the period for the conduction of the interviews. No interviews were conducted while the squat was active. Refugees were in an unstable condition, while activists were preoccupied with the upkeeping of the squat. Thus, interviewing took place in the end of 2016 and the first months of 2017. Needleless to say that in what follows all names have been anonymised. Finally, concerning document analysis, I regularly collected and analysed Orfanotrofio's publications (brochures, reports and open letters) as well as media and social media entries.

Orfanotrofio as a political infrastructure of care in the midst of Greece's long summer of migration

Dissensual spatialisation: caring at a distance versus caring for each other

Given its geographical position, Greece has operated, since 2015, as the 'European gatekeeper' (Christodoulou et al., 2016, p. 324), attaining the role of the state responsible for stemming and controlling refugee flows. The long summer of migration revealed a divided and increasingly unequal society in which people's social reproduction depended on an over-simplistic categorisation and differentiation of people on the move into migrants or refugees (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). The *police* order that was instituted was anchored on a regime that differentiated people, lives and bodies between those worth living and those not; those allowed to cross the border and those not; and those eligible to being "cared" for and those not.

Much like Maria Kaika argues in respect to Europe's financial crisis, the "refugee crisis" in Greece brought to the fore a Janus-faced response: on the one hand, 'the ugly form of hate, xenophobia, racism and nationalism' and on the other hand the 'beautiful image of compassion, charity and philanthropy' (2017, p. 1276). The diffusion of camps and bordering policies implemented by the EU and the Greek government was accompanied by the emergence of a hybrid 'shadow state' (Skleparis, 2015) comprised of local and international NGOs and humanitarian agencies. Within this context, newcomers were constructed either as threats by securitising discourses or as people in need by humanitarian ones (Birey et al., 2019; Dadusc et al., 2019). The *police* order was articulated around either racism and xenophobia or a disembodied care at a distance; both practices of apolitical affection that are 'equally divisive and "othering"' (Kaika, 2017, p. 1277). Nevertheless, the *police* order 'can only ever be contingent' (Van Wymeersch & Oosterlynck, 2018, p. 40). This seemingly naturalised order was disrupted by solidarity struggles of locals and newcomers who refused to be the Other that is either dangerous or in need of help and appeared instead as political subjects in solidarity.

Affirming Oikonomakis' argument (2018) that the refugee solidarity movement was developed in relation to the EU's and the Greek government's moves, activists squatted Orfanotrofio after a European Council's order for the evacuation of the Idomeni makeshift camp.[2] This eviction was expected to leave many people with no shelter and no support as the majority of the NGOs that supported Idomeni withdrew. The building that was chosen to host Orfanotrofio was part of previous housing struggles in Thessaloniki as it operated for seven years, between 2005 and 2012, as a housing squat. Standing unused for three years, it became, on 5 December 2015, the political space in and through which newcomers and locals voiced their demands against the exclusionary *police* ordering and built their common life for seven months. Mobilising existing solidarity and social networks forged in the Idomeni camp, activists communicated Orfanotrofio's existence to refugees. Narrating how he arrived in Orfanotrofio, Farid mentioned:

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[2] Idomeni makeshift camp was located close to the Greek-Macedonian borders and hosted around 14,000 people.

> A girl that I knew from Idomeni told me about Orfanotrofio. I thought she was from an NGO. They helped us, they gave us this place to sleep at night. I felt safe. And the next days, I saw many people, refugees, Greek […] and day after day I understood what Orfanotrofio was (refugee, interview 2017).

Occupying Orfanotrofio was, for activists, neither an act of charity nor a humanitarian act of support to people in need. Rather, it stemmed from a deeply politicised understanding of solidarity that was cultivated since the outbreak of the financial crisis through counter-austerity 'urban solidarity spaces' (Arampatzi, 2017, p. 2155; Rozakou, 2016; Dicker, 2017). Activists recognised themselves as precarious subjects who in and through the squat would organise their common struggles with refugees against oppressive statist policies. Much like other refugee squats in Athens which embraced slogans like "Common struggles of migrants and locals" or "We live together, we struggle together" (Raimondi, 2019; Kotronaki et al., 2018), Orfanotrofio's assembly noted: 'We set up structures in our cities and our neighbourhoods as places of resistance, as places where our struggles meet migrants' struggles. We struggle together, share our thoughts, experiences and needs' (Orfanotrofio, 2016, p. 3). The squat can, thus, be understood as a political infrastructure that 'open[ed] new possibilities of hybridisation' (Raimondi, 2019, p. 567) through the convergence of the struggle of local activists and people on the move; a struggle based on an axiomatic understanding of equality.

On 27 June 2016, the squat was evicted and the building was entirely demolished. Even through its short operation, Orfanotrofio manifested the existence and the meeting of two competing worlds (Dikeç, 2013); the one of the *police* order and the other of equality. While the *police* order is a system that establishes borders, the opening of Orfanotrofio as a political infrastructure of care challenged the existing geographies of the *police* and allowed the meeting of refugees and locals as a collective political subject. Political infrastructures 'invariably meet with the violence inscribed in the functioning of the *police*' (Swyngedouw, 2014, p. 174). However, their short duration does not minimise their politicising dynamics. In addition to providing a safe collective home for many people and materialising more egalitarian and humane forms of life, Orfanotrofio manifested the contingency of the *police* order and informed future solidarity struggles in Greece and beyond.

Emancipatory spatialities of collective care: re-arranging space, mobilising resources, building solidarities

'The "commoning" of the material means of reproduction is', according to Federici, 'the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created' (2019, p. 108). Indeed, practical and material concerns were at the heart of the fabrication of Orfanotrofio as a political infrastructure of care. The building that hosted the squat was a two-storey structure with an inner courtyard. The spatial structure of the building, which was built and operated as an orphanage between 1934 and 2000, facilitated its transformation into a housing squat; there were enough rooms, big meeting spaces and a spacious kitchen. The first step taken by activists after squatting the space was the transformation of the

unused building into a collective home (Mara, activist, interview 2017). Activists commenced by producing a detailed architectural record of the building to evaluate the bed capacity of each room and the capacity of the storage rooms. The ground floor hosted the common spaces, such as the kitchen, the assembly room, the storage room and the pharmacy, while the upper floor was used for bedrooms. Notwithstanding the allocation of specific uses in each space, boundaries between "public" and "private" spaces were often transgressed. Corridors and the staircase were often used as a playground while bedrooms were regularly transformed into living rooms where meals were shared with housemates.

The materialities of housing shaped the ways in which the squat was experienced as an infrastructure of care. Besides, housing is not just a container in which we live and practice care; it also actively shapes inhabitance (Power & Mee, 2020). Newcomers and locals in Orfanotrofio adapted the physical space of the building to better suit their needs and employed specific caring practices for the arrangement of rooms in order to encourage everyone feel safe and meet their needs. Newcomers were allocated to their rooms upon arrival by the Welcome Group following not only a 'collective need-based model' (Caciagli, 2019, p. 738) as it often happens in housing squats but also and more importantly a care-oriented model. While women as well as families with children were invited to stay in smaller rooms for ensuring their privacy and safety, men were grouped together in larger rooms. A further criterion for the allocation of the rooms was the religious and cultural background of the inhabitants.

Notwithstanding the specific care that participants sought to practice in order for everyone to feel comfortable and safe, challenges and tensions were not uncommon. As Sami emphasised, 'it was like normal life. Sometimes we had fights. It was not easy but we made it' (refugee, interview 2017). The limited physical space in relation to the people living in the squat, and the different ethnic, cultural and religious background of the inhabitants created micro-conflicts that had to be resolved individually. Moreover, tensions in the process of sharing space arose because of the sensitive psychological condition of refugees. Describing the integration of a man, who had experienced physical violence before arriving in the squat, Mara mentioned:

> at the beginning we suggested that he lived in a room alone to get familiar with what's going on and how we run the structure. But there was no space and two or more people had to stay in the same room. He was afraid. I sat with him for a whole day in his room to calm him down, then we went out and met the people with whom he would share the room. After this, he felt somehow calmer (activist, interview, 2017).

As manifested from the above quote, the living together in the collective house was conceived by participants not only as a practical issue but also as a continuous process of care and empowerment. Care is an embodied practice; traces as well as absences of care are imprinted on our minds and bodies (Hoppania, 2015). The care-based model of cohabitation in the squat was built upon the necessity to acknowledge the vulnerabilities of each and everyone in the squat and to employ a collective process of mutual understanding and support. Even in cases where conflicts were not possible to be resolved, Orfanotrofio's

activists and newcomers sought to get involved in a process of compromising, as they conceived themselves as interdependent.

In addition to spatial re-arrangements, activists and newcomers embarked on an intense everyday struggle for securing the material resources necessary for everyday life. Existing and newly emerging solidarity networks were mobilised for organising the squat in a non-commodified way. Provisions, such as mattresses, heaters and furniture, were donated by individual activists, neighbours or solidarity groups. Kostas described this process as follows:

> Each of us contributed based on his (*sic*) will and knowledge. Those who knew about electrical works or plumbing were undertaking these tasks; others who had cars did many routes from the one point of the city to the other to transfer beds, mattresses and other stuff (activist, interview 2017).

The act of transforming Orfanotrofio to a living material infrastructure of care involved a collective process of sharing knowledge and learning through practice. This was a deeply political process of commoning through which the very moment of construction of a grassroots infrastructure of care, like Orfanotrofio, was collectivised and politicised (Minuchin, 2016). Newcomers were also actively involved in the material transformation of Orfanotrofio into a living infrastructure. For instance, Nizar mentioned:

> I was free all day long and I felt safe. So, I started doing things, fixing something, painting the walls, making translations […] sometimes I went to the hospital with people that were alone. I started learning things that I didn't know (refugee, interview 2017).

Moreover, Orfanotrofio's participants sought to involve the adjacent neighbourhood with a view to not only secure the necessary resources but also build relations of trust and integrate the squat with the surrounding area. A *List of needs* was suspended permanently outside the squat and was posted on the squat's social media page informing neighbours about the daily needs of squatters. Contrary to accommodation structures organised by official actors, Orfanotrofio's participants did not only seek to cover "basic" human needs, such as food, water and shelter, but attributed special attention to the various needs of different age and gender groups. Thus, they equipped the space with board games, hygiene products for women and toys and books for children.

Grassroots institutions of collective care and transversal equality

Refugee solidarity squats are political infrastructures of care not only because their participants embark on a collective process of constructing, in material terms, emancipatory spatialities but also because they collectively establish the rules of their cohabitation. Everyday life in Orfanotrofio was horizontally organised based on multiple organisational modalities that required activists and refugees to work together and experiment with new ways of organising everyday care and social reproduction, investing a lot of emotional and affective work.

To begin with, Orfanotrofio's participants established, since the first days, a set of rules to regulate their everyday life. These rules dictated collective ownership; non-discrimination

on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, gender and colour; necessary and equal participation of all in housekeeping activities; and exclusion of smugglers, drug dealers and traffickers from the squat. Although such rules can be easier agreed and respected by activists in homogeneous housing squats, the process becomes more complex when locals and refugees squat together, as people do not necessarily share the same political beliefs and they do not have similar backgrounds. In Orfanotrofio, for example, several refugees seemed unfamiliar with the idea of collective ownership and activists had to embrace a quasi-pedagogical stance in order to emphasise its centrality for the organisation of the squat. As Nikoleta explained, 'some people, when firstly arrived, over-used some things but it was ok […] we explained to them that these are for all the residents [of the squat] and everyone respected it' (activist, interview 2017). In other cases, such as regarding the rules for the exclusion of smuggles and traffickers, collective decisions had to be taken. For instance, when a man accused for sexual assault approached the squat willing to stay there, the protection of the woman/victim—who was already living in the squat—was the primary concern of each and everyone. This resulted in the non-acceptance of the alleged perpetrator in Orfanotrofio after an assembly decision (Mara, activist, interview 2017).

While there was no specific coercion to oblige participants to comply with these rules, newcomers and refugees sought to develop a sense of mutual commitment about the necessity to find respectful modalities of cohabitation. Activists' political and cultural capital undeniably made them privileged subjects in relation to refugees in terms of understanding and respecting the rules. As manifested, activists often operated in a pedagogical way 'teaching the refugees how to collaborate in an "anarchist" way' (Raimondi, 2019, p. 568). Although this implies that the us/them divide was not completely suspended in the squat, it does not disqualify Orfanotrofio's dynamics as a political infrastructure of care. The ways in which power imbalances were negotiated and sought to be challenged was part of the process of *becoming* a collective subject. Enacting transversal equality was not a goal to be achieved but a presupposition that was verified and enacted in praxis by acknowledging and challenging hierarchies and privileges.

Moreover, Orfanotrofio's everyday social reproduction was organised through the housekeeping assembly, which was held three times a week. Both activists and newcomers participated in the assembly in different degrees and through different roles throughout the seven months. During the first few weeks, activists' role was crucial in the housekeeping assembly, as they had to organise the squat activating their pre-established solidarity networks in Thessaloniki. Moreover, the transit status of most of the refugees and their (often) short-term stay in the squat hindered their active participation in the assembly. However, over time, refugees familiarised with what Orfanotrofio is and how it is run and attained an active role. Also acknowledging their privileges, activists actively sought to step back from the housekeeping assembly and allow it to become the main space in which the squats' inhabitants, i.e. the refugees, discuss and solve their everyday problems. As Anastasia commented,

> for me, the ideal was to transform Orfanotrofio into a space where refugees could live
> by their own. I don't mean that I was not willing to support them, but that my support

would not have been necessary for the smooth everyday living of those people (activist, interview 2017).

The housekeeping assembly was gradually developed into an organisational structure mainly sustained by newcomers, where activists had only a supportive role. It was a meeting space through which newcomers undertook responsibilities, shared their concerns for their collective home and negotiated their different priorities. Given that Orfanotrofio's inhabitants spoke different languages, such as English, Farsi and Arabic, they all agreed for the assembly to be held in English, as most of them were more or less familiar with it. In cases where somebody faced difficulties, other inhabitants volunteered as translators in helping them understand or express themselves.

Finally, Orfanotrofio's participants run various working groups and organised every task in the house through shifts. Some of the groups focused on affective support, such as the Medical and Psychological Support Group and the Legal Support Group, while others engaged with material issues of everyday living-together, such as the Kitchen Group, the Maintenance Group and the Heating and Electricity Group. Working groups and shifts were run by both refugees and activists, based on their personal interests and skills and were spaces where collective knowledge was shared and expanded. They were not only conceived as a responsibility for participants, but they opened up spaces of multicultural encounter and learning. As Karam documented,

> many people were coming each day and we were gradually becoming friends. We had shifts and cleaned the house together on a daily basis. I didn't have shifts only with people from Syria, it was an international mix. I learned many things in Orfanotrofio (refugee, interview 2017).

Horizontal decision-making processes and the rotation of duties and responsibilities contributed to the sharing of power among participants as well as to the sharing and expansion of individual and collective knowledge and skills. Through such processes, a common space of collective care and empowerment was weaved. The rules of cohabitation were not pre-defined by an authority—as in the camps or other official accommodation schemes—but were created by participants through the translation, in literal and metaphorical terms, of different views into a constantly negotiated framework built upon the presupposition of transversal equality.

Building a community of care: everyday life in Orfanotrofio

Everyday life in Orfanotrofio was shaped by both the differential lines of power that defined the squat's participants, such as their gender, race, religion, sexuality and so forth and their subjective positions defined by their habits, desires, needs and priorities. However, quotidian reproductive practices like housework and leisure activities opened up spaces for the negotiation of these different subject positions and constitutively differentiated Orfanotrofio by camps and humanitarian accommodation structures.

Housework activities required the necessary and equal participation of all Orfanotrofio's residents. Instead of being an easy and straightforward process, the sharing of duties among refugees and activists as well as among men and women brought about minor hierarchies and moments of unevenness. Many refugees approached Orfanotrofio as a temporary station in their long journey to the places that they headed. As such, they did not often recognise themselves as part of the community and stepped back from housekeeping activities. Not undertaking responsibilities was also a result of their need to rest and recover from the multiple traumas that they have experienced before reaching the safe space of the squat. However, activists sought to encourage and actively empower them in being part of Orfanotrofio by undertaking everyday chores. As Nikoleta highlighted,

> we clarified that we also wanted them to follow their own paths and leave if they want, but in order to live now, you should take care of yourself now. We encountered difficulties, both we, the locals, and them. We had to take care of possible police attacks or maintenance works; but they should have also taken care of their everyday needs, what to eat, drink and where to take a shower (activist, interview 2017).

The guest-host relations were gradually destabilised as newcomers, and especially those living long-term in the squat, undertook many responsibilities. Men were willing to cook and do chores, while women were often more oriented towards 'taking care of themselves and creating a cosy environment, because many of them were traumatised' (Mara, activist, interview 2017). Although men's involvement in housework may be attributed to their numerical preponderance, it was also the result of a continuous process of negotiation of stereotyping gender roles. Women activists urged women refugees to participate in the squat's "public" activities and to get to know the neighbourhood and the city (Stella, activist, interview 2017) and in parallel tried to de-balance gender stereotypes that were well-established in men refugees. Anastasia described, during our interview, that when she tried to encourage a man, who lived in Orfanotrofio with his family, to be involved in daily chores, she met his unwillingness and his persistence on the fact that chores are his spouse's or Anastasia's responsibility. In her own words:

> I insisted that "I am a woman but that does not mean that I will do all the housework in here for you" and we were telling similar things to women refugees. We were telling them that it's not ok to sit in their rooms, they should take care of themselves and of the building, the kitchen, and the toilettes. We tried to talk to them not as if to rebuke them but in a more familiar and personal way, to tell them that they should start getting familiar with their space because it's their own space (activist, interview 2017).

Orfanotrofio was day-by-day transformed into a space where housekeeping chores were collectively organised, challenging patriarchal patterns of gendered social reproduction according to which housekeeping is 'women's "natural" duty' (Lonergan, 2015, p. 109; Power & Mee, 2020). Caring and reproductive activities, that are often privatised, re-emerged as political processes of living-in-common by reintegrating them as collectivised practices. The fact that patriarchal norms were not always unsettled and transgressed does not minimise Orfanotrofio's political significance as an emancipatory spatiality. It is exactly the testing of and experimentation with collective forms of self-management of everyday life

that verify that transversal equality is a powerful, unstable and constantly re-evaluated process (Mohanty, 2003); a product of interpretation and a precondition of collective political subjectification.

Everyday life in Orfanotrofio was also structured around moments of entertainment and spending time together. Activists and refugees organised various cultural events and activities, such as music nights, open-air movie screenings and collective kitchens. They also held events of political networking and information-sharing, such as the Café Sans Papiers, book presentations and discussions with other solidarity groups of Thessaloniki and other Greek cities. Language differences posed challenges in the participation of everyone in these events. Some of them were held in English, whenever possible but also many of them were held in Greek. Yet, this aspect was acknowledged by activists and refugees and there were always volunteers to act as translators and facilitate everyone's participation in the discussions. In addition to organised events, spontaneous encounters and everyday tedious activities were crucial aspects of cohabitation. As Nizar mentioned,

> In the camp, food was not good, tents were full of water when it rained, but sometimes what I wanted more was company, I had nothing to do, days were long and they offered us nothing, you know like a ball to play or something. In Orfanotrofio, it was different. I didn't feel bored, because I met so many people everyday, I learned many things. Sitting in the evening with others was like going outside in the bar with a friend. We played games, you could learn many different languages. It was very nice (refugee, interview 2017).

In contrast to camps and official accommodation structures, Orfanotrofio was an 'everyday space of (be)friending' (Askins, 2015, p. 475) and meaningful encounters. Participants shared their different languages or practical skills, exchanged music or cooking recipes and played games. Besides, as Henri Lefebvre wrote, tedious tasks are constitutive of everyday life, but they always coincide with satisfaction and pleasure ([1968]1996). Although often taken for granted, such activities contributed to the development of 'socialities of solidarity' (Rozakou, 2016) and fulfilled people's need for interaction. This was particularly important for people who had experienced the isolating conditions of camps and hotspots, which leave deep emotional scars.

Conclusion

The paper provided a reading of Orfanotrofio housing squat as a political infrastructure of care with a view to place care and social reproduction at the centre of the analysis of migrant political struggles and housing struggles. As manifested, political infrastructures of care democratically (re)produce alternative modalities of care and social reproduction through the sharing, co-establishment and self-regulation of collective spaces. While cities are transformed into spaces of containment and exclusion by the *police* order, migrant housing struggles as they unfold in the midst of the 'refugee crisis' bring to the fore a different, competing world. A world that is built upon everyday care, embodied affection and transversal equality. This paper manifested that the important work of migrant squats is not

only the challenging and disruption of militarised border regimes but also the organisation of alternative ways of inhabiting cities by living together. Nevertheless, the preceding analysis sought to avoid presenting a blithe romanticism about Orfanotrofio. Rather, it consistently drew out the contradictions and tensions that emerged in the process of the formation of a political community of care in the squat, aiming to uncover the lived geographies of care and equality.

The paper presented transversal equality and embodied care as co-constitutive practices in the process of collective political subjectification that occurred in Orfanotrofio. It manifested that the creation of communities of care is inseparably interwoven with the material constitution of grassroots political infrastructures. Occupying Orfanotrofio and organising it as a refugee housing squat was an act of appearing in space, a foundational act of space-making which occurred through the construction of a socio-material infrastructure of care. In Orfanotrofio, newcomers and locals produced their own geographies of collective care: spaces and times to think and play, to protest and cook, to share and disagree. Care circulated among participants: they cared about themselves, they cared for others, they cared for the building. Moreover, the collective subject was constructed as an open community based on the in-betweenness of pre-existing identities. Living- and fighting-in-common was materialised through a process of disidentification; a process through which subjects rejected their assigned roles and positions and created a community of equals. Although minor hierarchies and unequal power relations emerged, collective practices that were tested and negotiated every day resisted their stabilisation. This required a continuous process of translation and negotiations 'between views, between actions and between subjectivities' (Stavrides, 2016, p. 42). It was also achieved through the establishment of institutions of commoning and care that contributed to the sharing of power to all the members of the community. Orfanotrofio's participants balanced between a continuous process of universalisation and particularisation of their claims. Rather than seeking to reduce differences to common denominators, translating the common was an open and experimental process based on collective care and transversal equality.

Political infrastructures of care, like Orfanotrofio, risk being temporary as they always stand a certain distance from the *police* order and yet constantly encounter it. Despite their precariousness, they encapsulate the essence of egalitarian space-making as they make possible what was until then impossible and unimaginable. Orfanotrofio was not only a struggle for survival. More importantly, its participants prefiguratively politicised urban everyday life, experimenting with new ways of collective home making. In closing, the preceding analysis highlighted the necessity to broaden the scope of scholarly debates towards an understanding of political movements and everyday struggles as generative of grassroots infrastructures of care where 'we put much more of our lives in common' (Federici & Jones, 2020) and we establish collective forms of urban life.

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