



## Casal Bruciato: the besieged house

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On May 6, 2019, in the area of Casal Bruciato, a neighbourhood on the eastern outskirts of Rome, some residents took to the streets to protest against the allocation of a popular housing to a Roma family from Camp La Barbuta<sup>1</sup>.

A 40-year-old Bosnian man, his wife and 12 children, the youngest of 2 years and the oldest of 21, all born in Italy, are the 14 members of the Omerovic family who, as part of the Romany Plan of the Municipality<sup>2</sup>, have received the assignment of a 110 square meter apartment with empty rooms and without electricity connection, on the second floor of a building in Via Sebastiano Satta.

While the assignee's family is accompanied to their apartment, a volunteer and intercultural worker of the association Opera Nomadi who is with them, is insulted by a group of people. It is suspected that someone leaked the news of the assignment of the accommodation voluntarily, with the intention of creating tension among the citizens of Casal Bruciato and the Roma family<sup>3</sup>. The transport of mattresses and parcels in the house

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<sup>1</sup> The institutional shantytown La Barbuta is located in the Town Hall VII, outside the GRA, in via di Ciampino 63. It was expanded in 2012 by the Capitoline Administration; in 2018 the surveys and interviews collected by the Association 21 July estimate the presence of 500 guests welcomed (see: The margins of the margin. 2018 Report of the Association 21 July), who live in precarious sanitary conditions and whose human rights are constantly violated. On May 30, 2015, the Civil Court of Rome recognized the "discriminatory character" of La Barbuta, accepting the appeal filed in 2012 by the Association July 21 and ASGI (Association of Legal Studies on Immigration) with the support of Amnesty International Italy and the European Centre for Roma Rights (ERRC). It was fully accepted the thesis of the two organizations, which supported the discriminatory nature of the equipped village because it represented a large housing solution aimed at a specific ethnic group. "It must in fact be understood as discriminatory," writes the judge, "any large housing solution aimed exclusively at people belonging to the same ethnic group, especially if implemented, as in the case of the settlement located in La Barbuta, so as to hinder the effective cohabitation with the local population, access in a condition of real equality to school and social health services and located in a space where the health of the people housed within it is at serious risk. According to the Association 21 July, this ruling is a historic achievement because for the first time in Europe a court has confirmed the discriminatory nature of a "nomadic camp".

<sup>2</sup> On May 26, 2017, the Capitoline Council adopted the "Roma Capitale Address Plan for the inclusion of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Populations" (so-called "Roma Plan"). The Plan was to be developed in accordance with the principles of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti and initially provided for a series of interventions to overcome the settlements to be implemented on an experimental basis in the camps of La Barbuta and Monachina. On June 28, 2017, the plan was modified, the experimental measures for inclusion are also extended to the Roma present in the Camping River settlement, which became the first settlement in which to implement the measures of the Roma Plan.

<sup>3</sup> "When we went up the front door he was talking to a neighbor and said that he knew from this morning at 5 a.m. that they were coming. Then I say: who leaked this news? I didn't know either and the assignees didn't know the house



is done with the protection of police officers in plain clothes. Some antiracist activists express their solidarity with the family of Imer and Sedana Omerovic, comforting the besieged and spending the night in the apartment with them.

On Tuesday, May 7, after having accompanied their children to school, the family participates in a meeting in the Campidoglio at the end of which they decide to stay in the house assigned to them, which represents the opportunity for a new life. When some members of the family return to the house, it is all a chaos of shouting and shoving, even an unpronounceable “I rape you” to the Bosnian mother with a child in her arms, pronounced by one of the activists of CasaPound.

The neighbourhood on the eastern outskirts of the capital has been divided in two: on the one hand, the CasaPound gazebo, installed inside the courtyard of the building where the Roma family lives; on the other, the Asia Usb movement<sup>4</sup>, which, along with other organizations, has demonstrated in solidarity with the Roma. To separate them, two police cordons in riot gear.

This episode in Casal Bruciato, adds up to the one that took place on April 2 in Torre Maura, another suburban area of Rome, where, in protest against the transfer of some Roma families to a reception centre, some citizens set fire to garbage bins, threw on the ground and trampled on bread brutally<sup>5</sup>.

Also, in Casal Bruciato, harshly contested was the Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi, who went there to visit the Roma family threatened by some residents and hostage of CasaPound. At the end of the visit, the Mayor said that the family was the legitimate assignee of the accommodation and had the right to enter, invited to resist and seek an

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number of the apartment”, Patrizia, Opera Nomadi volunteer, as reported in: “Roma, proteste a Casal Bruciato contro casa assegnata a rom. ‘Vi tiriamo una bomba’”, *la Repubblica*, 6 maggio 2019.

<sup>4</sup> “It was also thanks to the call for the mobilization of Asia USB, moved first and in solitude, that finally in Casal Bruciato the Roman antifascism met, with a large and determined garrison, turned into a parade despite the attempts of provocation by the police, to reiterate that in the working-class neighborhoods there is no room for those who want to stir up the war among the poor”. (See. “Asia USB baluardo contro i tentativi di invasione fascista delle periferie”, Asia USB, 9 maggio 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See “Torre Maura, i rom e l’emergenza infinita” di *Cronache di ordinario razzismo*, 3 aprile 2019. The Roma had to leave the center. Also in this case, the protests were attended by representatives of CasaPound and the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome opened a file for crimes of harm and threats aggravated “by racial hatred”.



insertion in the neighbourhood, divided between those who welcome and those who reject<sup>6</sup>. The Shroud, moreover, responded harshly to the militants of CasaPound, inviting them to respect the laws and not to speculate on people's skin. Together with the Mayor, present at the meeting with the family, were some neighbours, the director of the diocesan Caritas of Rome and Fr. Gianpiero Palmieri, auxiliary bishop of East Rome, according to whom only the two parents with the youngest daughter remained at home, while the other 11 children had returned to Camp La Barbuta fearing the reactions of the demonstrators.

One of the dark points of this affair is the management of public order by the Questura di Roma. Many people have wondered how it was possible for CasaPound to set up a gazebo inside a condominium courtyard to do its propaganda action and how permission was granted to the sit-in organized by militants of the extreme right, which took place on May 8th in front of the entrance of the condominium, as opposed to the one organized by anti-racist activists. A CGIL delegation met with Carmine Esposito, Chief of Police of Rome, highlighting how unacceptable it is to tolerate demonstrations characterized by repeated threats and intimidation by the militants of CasaPound<sup>7</sup>.

After the May 8th demonstration in Via Satta, some associations<sup>8</sup> decided to present a complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome against CasaPound, assuming the

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<sup>6</sup> "Those who insult children and threaten to rape women should perhaps examine their conscience. This is not a society where you can continue to live", these are the words of the Virginia Raggi syndicate reported on *La Stampa*, 9 maggio 2019.

<sup>7</sup> "In the meeting we highlighted how unacceptable it is to tolerate demonstrations that prevent the allocation of houses according to the procedures provided by law. Demonstrations, we reiterated, characterized by repeated threats, verbal aggression and intimidation against a woman - guilty, according to the militants of CasaPound, of being the legitimate assignee of a social housing - and her children. To take advantage of a right guaranteed by the Constitution, such as the right to demonstrate, to prevent by violence the respect of the law is intolerable (...). The Quaestor emphasizing that it is the duty of the Police to defend the democratic system of the country and the respect of the legitimate allocations of housing on the basis of the law and confirming that the demonstration of CasaPound, authorized in a place far from the apartment concerned, took place outside the democratic rules, informed us that all participants were referred to the judicial authorities and that the members of CasaPound who made threats and intimidation were denounced", See press release of CGIL di Roma e Lazio, 8 maggio 2019.

<sup>8</sup> LasciateCIEntrare campaign together Nonna Roma, Sportello Tuteliamoci-Astra 19, A buon diritto, Alterego-Fabbrica dei Diritti, Baobab Experience, Adif, Arci Roma, Focus Casa dei diritti sociali, Lunaria e molti singoli e privati cittadini.



crime of threat and propaganda, incitement to commit crimes for reasons of “racial” discrimination up to the apologia of fascism<sup>9</sup>.

On the other hand, it is inexplicable how politics, in the last thirty years, has not intervened on one of the great social problems of the country: that of housing discomfort that still involves thousands of families and that would require the launch of a new public housing plan. The economic and social difficulties do not directly produce hatred and racism but, if nothing is done to remove them, they can be very cleverly used to foment propaganda and racist violence.

In the end, the family was not kicked out: today, it can still live in Casal Bruciato, also thanks to the mobilization of housing movements, grassroots unions and individual citizens who have been in solidarity with the family involved in this vile affair.

Casal Bruciato, like Torre Maura, exemplify very well how a fact that should be ordinary (the assignment of a Municipality house) can provoke a vortex of xenophobia and racism, when political propaganda becomes an instrumental interpreter of popular unease and artfully feeds dramatized and simplistic media representations of the suburbs of big cities. In Casal Bruciato, there were not only the intimidations of CasaPound and the self-styled spontaneous neighbourhood committee, but also many supportive citizens. Many pieces of news, however, describe the “tensions” and the organized protest against the arrival of the Omorovic family, leading the reader to think that the entire neighbourhood is involved<sup>10</sup>.

Alberto Campailla, one of the activists close to the family during the days of the protest, explained it well: “It has been a long time, however, that for every foreign family to which a house is assigned there is a protest organized or actively supported by

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<sup>9</sup> "In fact, the umpteenth little theater put on by CasaPound in one of the suburbs of our city, supported by a small group of people, cannot be qualified as a "protest" by the residents. As well as the inexplicable attitude of the police forces that, not intervening promptly and not even after the evident violations of the CasaPound exponents, have made it possible for them to act undisturbed for more than two days. Those same law enforcement agencies that, in riot gear, have hindered the activists and citizens who arrived yesterday to show all their solidarity with the family affected by this despicable event". See: *Articolo21*, 9 maggio 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Sturaro P., “Roma, casa popolare ai rom: tensione a Casal Bruciato, rabbia e lacrime tra i residenti”, *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 maggio 2019; “Ancora tensioni a Casal Bruciato: residenti e CasaPound contro casa a famiglia rom”, *RomaToday*, 7 maggio 2019.



CasaPound or other neo-fascist forces with the attempt to make media cases and to involve the citizenship. The fact that these events hold their own in the press and on TV is an established fact. These are scenes that lend themselves to being emphasized, mediatized, spectacularized. The reality, however, is not exactly as it is often told. It is not true that CasaPound manages to involve the citizens in these protests. In Casal Bruciato we did not see the neighbourhood take to the streets to drive out the Roma family. Instead there were, as always, 30 or 40 fascist militants shouting slogans against migrants, Roma and protesters who oppose their political initiatives”.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See: Campailla A., “L’assedio è rotto”, *Jacobin*, 10 maggio 2019, disponibile qui: <https://jacobinitalia.it/lassedio-e-rotto/>.