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### Focalizing new-Fascism

*Right politics and integralisms in contemporary Italy*

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# Focalizing new-Fascism: Right politics and integralisms in contemporary Italy

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/epc](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/epc)**Luiza Bialasiewicz  and Sabrina Stallone**

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## Abstract

In this article, we examine the role of fringe new-Fascist movements within broader right-integralist politics in today's Europe. Our focus lies with *CasaPound*, one of the most active movements in the Italian far-right galaxy, and highly visible in both the Italian as well as international mass media. We argue that while the strength of the movement itself should not be exaggerated, *CasaPound* has played a crucial role in the wider realm of integralist politics in Italy. Examining the movement's discursive as well as material interventions in both urban and rural spaces, we suggest that *CasaPound*'s extreme rhetoric and highly spectacularized performances deserve attention for they serve to focalize in distinct ways migration and precarization, and in so doing help sustain calls by more “respectable” political forces to reclaim the national community from the assault of globalizing and neo-liberalizing forces and increasingly racialized migrant others.

## Keywords

Fascism, Italy, migration, populism, far-right

Anti-Fascist protesters rally in Italy as Mussolini's heirs gain ground – headline article, *New York Times*, 24 February 2018 (Povoledo, 2018)

The Fascist movement that has brought Mussolini back to the mainstream – headline article, *The Guardian*, 22 February 2018 (Jones, 2018)

## A black wave?

Leading up to the Italian elections of 4 March 2018, watched with trepidation across Europe, a significant proportion of the media's attention – excessive, we will argue – focused

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on the growing presence of new-Fascist<sup>1</sup> movements. Judging by headlines in both the local as well as international press, a “black wave” (Cappellini, 2017) was sweeping Italy and, as a long-read article by *The Guardian’s* Tobias Jones (2018) warned, had “brought Mussolini back to the mainstream”.

The results of the 2018 elections were, in countless ways, a shock to the Italian political establishment, delivering a historical blow to the parties of the center-left, especially the governing *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party) that received less than 20% of the vote. Day-after electoral maps showed an Italy sharply divided into two, though now no longer split into traditional regions of center-left or center-right support (Agnew, 2002; Shin and Agnew, 2008). The dominant forces emerging from the electoral contest were the anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic right-separatist *Lega* (the League, formerly the Northern League, *Lega Nord*) that swept the North and Center of the country (including wide swathes of traditional stalwarts of left support such as the Emilia region), while the anti-establishment *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement, *M5S*) claimed the entire Italian South (including all electoral districts in Sicily). The *Lega* reached its highest percentage of the national vote to date at over 17%; the *M5S* received over 32% of the national vote. The feared entry of the new-Fascists into Parliament did not materialize, however. The two movements running in this electoral contest – *CasaPound* and *Forza Nuova* – garnered tiny percentages of the vote, with the more highly represented *CasaPound* receiving less than 1% in elections for both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and thus well below the 3% threshold necessary to enter into Parliament (Berizzi, 2018).

The months of tortuous negotiations that followed the elections – and finally the formation of a coalition government made up of the *M5S* and the *Lega* in early June 2018 – presaged an entirely different set of political perils that had little to do (directly at least) with the pre-announced “black wave”. The rejection of the first proposed coalition government by the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella brought the country to the brink of both an economic and constitutional crisis, and unleashed rhetoric as yet unwitnessed in public debate, including calls for the impeachment of Mattarella.<sup>2</sup> In an alarmed editorial on center-left daily *La Repubblica* in the midst of the post-electoral crisis, political philosopher Roberto Esposito (2018: 31) warned that Italy was reaching “a threshold of no-return”, risking to become once more, as in its past, “the laboratory” of a political experiment with far-reaching ramifications, throwing into question the very bases of parliamentary democracy, in the grip of a “new right with no limits”.

Esposito’s was just one of many cries of alarm raised about the profound impact of these “epochal” elections.<sup>3</sup> The political crisis was very, very real. So why was it that in the run-up to the contest of March 2018 so much of this alarmed attention (both of the mass media and political debate) lay less with the already then violent tones and illiberal proposals of the *Lega* and *M5S* but, rather, disproportionately with fringe far-right groups? In this article, we query the over-visibility in the mass media of new-Fascist movements in the months preceding the vote, and the effects of such an “excess of visibility” on both expert and popular assessments of Italians’ political malaise. Our focus will lie with *CasaPound*, one of the most “spectacularized” movements in the Italian far-right galaxy,<sup>4</sup> querying why this marginal movement succeeded in attracting just as much if not more attention than the *Lega’s* on-going incitements to racially motivated violence and actual violent acts, such as the shooting spree against African migrants in Macerata by Luca Traini, a former *Lega* activist, just weeks before the vote.<sup>5</sup>

In the article, we suggest that the disproportionate focus of the media on movements like *CasaPound* served, worryingly, to occlude much deeper transformations taking place within

Italian politics, that we will describe within the rubric of a wider set of creeping “integralisms” (as defined by Holmes, 2000, 2016). While new-Fascist groups like *CasaPound* did not “rally in large numbers in Italian piazzas” as Jason Horowitz (2018) pronounced on the front page of the *New York Times* just days before the election, the shifts taking place in Italian society and in what constitutes the acceptable boundaries of political discourse have been very significant: as we will argue here, privileging fringe movements in mediatised accounts deflects attention from the much wider allure of integralist imaginations that seep far beyond the pool of new-Fascist activists or supporters. A movement like *CasaPound* matters a great deal, we will argue, but it matters for reasons other than those highlighted in exaggerated media renditions. *CasaPound*'s extreme rhetoric as well as their often highly spectacular material performances deserve careful attention, rather, for the ways in which they have been able to successfully “focalize” migration, precarization and globalization and, in so doing, help sustain calls by more “respectable” political forces to “re-moralize” and re-claim communities from the assault of globalizing and neo-liberalizing forces.

The wider spread of such narratives has been described in detail by various commentators, including Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre in their *Vers l'extrême. Extension des domaines de la droite* (2014), noting how their extension and indeed, banalization risk subverting the very bases of liberal democratic politics *tout court*, as (far-)right and left politics increasingly find common enemies in a series of “globalizing” bogeymen, from international finance to European institutions. The two dominant political forces emerging from the 2018 Italian elections have made the “re-claiming” of Italian “popular sovereignty”<sup>6</sup> the very foundation of their politics, a politics that, as Boltanski and Esquerre suggest, confounds left and right issues and positions, and finds its common ground in “moral” solutions to “reclaim the national”. The ideas and imaginations of fringe movements like *CasaPound* have thus entered with full force into the Italian mainstream, reframing debates on issues such as the proper management of migration. These debates have been supplemented by other fundamental questions regarding “heritage and belonging, cosmopolitanism and national identity” (Mammone, 2015: xvii), part of a wider politics of “nostalgic deprivation” (Gest et al., 2018) within which the increasingly racialized migrant Other is just one of a series of “foreign” assaults on the national community. In such politics (frequently labeled as “populist”, though we will resist this term), economic and cultural resentment go hand in hand, drawing on

the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised who face the disjuncture between everyday lives that seem to become extremely anomic and uncontrollable, and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement. (Kalb, 2011: 14; see also Mouffe, 2018)

Both the *Lega* and the *M5S* have successfully made use of a combination of narratives of economic and cultural deprivation, albeit in different ways. What both parties hold in common, nevertheless, is a distinct geographical imagination of an Italy and Italians at the mercy of wider, globalized threats, ranging from the economic to the demographic. So what is the precise role of fringe movements like *CasaPound* in such politics? In attempting to discern the mechanisms (and effects) of the over-visibility of *CasaPound*, our analysis draws upon Mieke Bal's (2004) notion of “focalization” because we believe it is especially useful in bringing attention to how particular regimes of visibility are conjured and materialized, how they are “consolidated on the ground”. Focalization as a

narratological term in cultural studies is defined as the relationship between the elements presented (that which is seen or perceived), and the vision through which they are presented (Bal, 2004: 43) or, to use Peeren's (2015: 175) words, "asking who sees and what becomes visible (or invisible) through their eyes". We will suggest that it is through *CasaPound's* spectacularized interventions and rhetoric that the (political) gaze is drawn to the "degraded Italian city and landscape" and the growing precarity of the "Italians left behind"; it is drawn to a corrupt political caste and an economic crisis that impacts the weakest members of Italian society in disproportionate fashion. At the same time, the "eyes" (and acts) of *CasaPound* demarcate both the culprits and the solutions for this state of affairs – and lay claim to historical "right" to speak in their name, drawing upon a distinct imagination and legacy of "social fascism" (see Cammelli, 2017; Castelli Gattinara et al., 2013).

In investigating the ways in which *CasaPound* functions as a "focalizing" force for a wider right-nationalist politics, we are greatly indebted to the work of anthropologist Douglas Holmes (2000, 2016) and what he terms contemporary "integralist politics" in Europe. Holmes' ethnographic research on regionalist movements in Italy, on the Front National in France and the British National Party in the UK, provides a unique framework able to capture the ways in which movements like *CasaPound* have been able to successfully recast forms of economic and cultural alienation "within a distinctive historical critique and an exclusionary political economy" (2000: 4), imposing "a radical delineation of society in which 'cultural' idioms as opposed to abstract interests serve as instruments for expressing meaning and for deriving power" (2000: 5). What is particularly useful about Holmes' conception of a broader sphere of European "integralisms" is that it allows us to place the claims and acts of a movement like *CasaPound* within a much wider politics: a politics that may not be as spectacularly, as "virally" visible as that of *CasaPound*, but that nevertheless shares its principal tenets: claims to reclaiming and reconstituting social "coherence" and "organic" forms of territorial solidarity and sovereignty. It allows us to better understand how the actions of *CasaPound* matter not necessarily as a marker of the movement's own "success", but as a focalizing force for more "respectable" politics.

In order to provide some context to our discussion, we begin with an overview of some of the literature on new "integralisms" and new-Fascisms in Europe, in an attempt to locate *CasaPound* both within the wider far-right "galaxy" and within Italian politics, while also providing a brief history of the movement itself and of its Roman headquarters. We then address the work of targeted strategies of re-focalization in framing the contexts for *CasaPound's* most recent interventions, looking to two sets of interventions: those specifically aiming at inscribing precedence and continuity in urban space and time, a Fascism of "stone and marble" (to borrow Gentile's (2007) term) and those more directly linked to performances of "integral" community and "solidarity", in urban spaces as well as through initiatives in the Italian countryside. In closing, we return to the question posed at the outset of this piece, querying what an over-visibility of actors like *CasaPound* may obscure, suggesting that their spectacular presence in the public realm should be understood not in isolation but as functional to making possible a wider "integralist politics".

A brief note on methodology is in order: in our analysis, we rely primarily on secondary material, examining the discursive construction of *CasaPound's* presence and ideas in the mass media, as well as within the movement's own visual and textual production and physical "interventions". We supplement this with an ethnography of the movement's headquarters that included a guided visit provided by their "external relations" coordinator, and on-site conversations with activists present in the building, carried out by the authors in November 2017.

## Fascist genealogies

The past several years have seen a proliferation of attempts to describe and understand the emergence of a variety of nationalist-populist movements and parties across Europe, tracing their genealogies (intellectual as well as institutional) and querying the reasons behind their growing appeal.<sup>7</sup> It is not our intention here to provide yet another contribution to that already wide-ranging literature, but rather to note that while many similarities can be noted among such movements and parties, it is nevertheless important to distinguish those that draw directly and unabashedly upon ideological and symbolic repertoires with historical ties to (state) Fascism and Fascist thinkers. For while such movements certainly share numerous characteristics with other nationalist-populist forces, as Gusterson (2017) has usefully outlined, calling Fascists by their proper name is a crucial first step in distinguishing them from the broader “populist” catch-all, making visible not only their historical “biographies”, but also allowing for appropriate analytical distinction in analyzing their contemporary “agendas and styles” (Wodak, 2016). At the same time, calling Fascists “Fascists” allows us to better map out these movements’ “perilous proximity” (Holmes, 2016) to other political forces and ideas that “Fascist” may not be, at least by nomenclature – and thus, as we suggest in the introduction, to better understand how the far- and not-so-far right work in concert to produce a distinct politics.

In the contemporary European Fascist “black galaxy”, Italy has been a particularly important incubator and generator of ideas, as recently published histories of Fascism in Europe suggest (Mammone, 2015; Mammone et al., 2013; Ruzza and Fella, 2009).<sup>8</sup> While France has long been seen as the key locus for the production of proto-Fascist ideologies and groups in the post-war period – such as the highly influential *Nouvelle Droite* led by Alain de Benoist, whose writings and activism have inspired far-right movements across Europe from the 1970s on (Sternhell, 1996) – Italian post-war Fascism in many ways “may be seen as the vanguard of right-wing extremism in Western Europe for roughly forty years” (Mammone, 2015: xiv). The *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement, MSI), created on the ashes of the Fascist regime already in 1946, has continued to exist in various forms as a parliamentary force ever since.<sup>9</sup> While the MSI and its heirs never garnered significant electoral support, they represent a unique case that “despite its isolation and anomalous position within the framework of a republic based on an anti-fascist constitution, managed to maintain visibility in the political system” (Mammone, 2015: xiii). As Chiarini (2008: 22) has argued, the MSI was fully “fascist by identity” and only “democratic from necessity”, allowing for a politics that was both “bludgeon and double-breasted suit”.<sup>10</sup>

The two most active and “activist” movements that grew out of the conditions of possibility forged by MSI for a much wider “galaxy” of more extreme “extra-parliamentary” Fascist forces have been *Forza Nuova*<sup>11</sup> and the Rome-based group that took the name of *CasaPound*: as Mammone (2015: 213) describes it, “the most interesting, and atypical in some ways, right-wing enterprise of these recent years” that deserves attention if only “for the curiosity that it is generating abroad”.

*CasaPound* takes its name from the American poet Ezra Pound, inspired broadly by the latter’s admiration for (and ties) to Mussolini’s Fascist regime, but more specifically by Pound’s theorization of capitalist rent as usury.<sup>12</sup> The group was formally founded with the squatting of a state-owned building in the center of Rome in 2003, and has made the right to housing one of their central rallying points. The occupation of the building in Via Napoleone III, where the *CasaPound* headquarters is now also located, came at a moment when the Italian far-left was similarly engaged in battles for the right to occupy urban

spaces, most importantly through the so-called “social centers” (*centri sociali*), long key sites for the articulation of left-wing youth politics in Italy. *CasaPound*’s “Fascist squat” was thus both a direct response to these movements and an attempt to capture some of their sympathizers, as well as part of a strategic articulation of their ideology as “Fascists of the Third Millennium”, a positioning that was “neither left nor right”, and thus able to employ the discourses and tactics of both (Cammelli, 2015, 2017; Castelli Gattinara et al., 2013; Mammone, 2017; Rosati, 2018). *CasaPound* (and the wider De Benoist-inspired Fascist new-right) is not unique in this, for the *Lega* under Matteo Salvini’s leadership has very ably combined “left” and “right” appeals. Salvini unabashedly describes himself in his autobiography as a “Communist of the North” (and in a highly publicized interview suggested he was “an old-style Communist, further left than Renzi” (n.b. the former centre-left premier) (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 2015), while also feeding a variety of (unproven) urban legends about his youthful past as a member of one of the most active *centri sociali* in Milano, the “Leoncavallo”.<sup>13</sup>

Although the founder (and leader to date) of *CasaPound*, Gianluca Iannone, came from a long background in more “old style” Fascist activism and was indeed previously the head of the MSI youth organization, the new group grew more directly out of Iannone’s militancy with his rock band ZetaZeroAlfa, well known on the wider European “identitarian music” scene (Langebach and Raabe, 2013; Marchi, 1997; Shaffer, 2013).<sup>14</sup> From its inception, the organization focused its sights on entirely new forms of organizing and outreach from previous “institutional” Fascist youth organizations – and especially on capturing a new set of audiences and spaces. As we note above, *CasaPound* adopted both the organizational structure but also the political activist practices of “left” social movements, including a direct appeal to a Gramscian “metapolitical” approach, with a focus on broad-based cultural “interventions” that will lead the way to political transformation (see Di Nunzio and Toscano, 2011; Rosati, 2018). Iannone, in his various interviews republished on far-right magazines and websites has stressed this point repeatedly:

[*CasaPound*] works on dozens of projects and with various methods [...] the important thing is to generate counter-information and to occupy the territory. It is fundamental to create a web of supporters rather than focusing on elections. For elections, you are in competition with heavily financed groups and with only one or two persons elected, you can’t change anything. Politics for us is a community. [...] That is why we are in the streets, on computers, in bookshops, in schools, in universities, in gyms, at the top of mountains or at the news stands. That is why we are in culture, social work and sport. That is a constant work. (Iannone cited in Liddell, 2012)

In our visit to the *CasaPound* headquarters in November 2017, the notion of “metapolitics” was repeatedly invoked by our guide – *CasaPound*’s “external relations representative” Sebastien Magnificat (2017) – both in stressing the importance of the varied “cultural work” the group was doing, but also in remarking upon the symbolic “weight” of the building which we were about to enter:

Sometimes we have people visiting like yourself, foreigners or journalists, and they ask me was [the sign on the building’s façade] there before? Obviously, we wrote it. But because it is written in stone, in marble, just like the fascists used to make their monuments, it’s a way to tell everyone: we were there before and we will always be there. You are sending a metapolitical message to the police, to antifascists. [...] In fact, we can discuss with the police the brutality of manifestations but we will never discuss the eventuality of leaving this building. It’s not up for negotiation. Symbolically, it’s like an embassy, it’s got a flag.

## Integralist politics: (Re-)focalizing rights, community, and belonging

While it is important to situate the political vocabulary of *CasaPound* in its distinct Italian political lineage (right, as well as left), it is also crucial to locate it within the sort of wider “integralist politics” described by Holmes and, in particular, to understand such movements’ “deep roots and a distinctive genealogy in European intellectual history”, drawing “directly on the sensibilities of the Counter-Enlightenment for their intellectual and moral substance” (Holmes, 2000: 8–9). Holmes turns to Isaiah Berlin’s well-known 1976 essay on Herder and the Enlightenment to sketch out the three guiding ideological orientations that “underpin integralist politics and give it form and content”. Drawing on Berlin’s essay, Holmes notes how a combination of “populism, expressionism, and pluralism provide the basic conceptual structure of integralism and locate its roots in European intellectual history” (2000: 6; emphasis in original). We define these orientations here only broadly, principally to remark on the important resonances between the claims of new-Fascist movements such as *CasaPound* and wider and longer standing intellectual currents. In Berlin’s (1976) terms, “populism” is, at its very basic, “the belief in the value of belonging to a group or a culture” (153, cited in Holmes, 2000: 6). Most crucially, populism “by taking dispersed human practices and beliefs and by endowing them with a collective significance, creates singular political possibilities”. In particular, as Boltanski and Esquerre (2014: 27–28) argue, it allows political actors to lay claim to representation and defence of “a people” (more specifically, “the good people”) and their welfare. A “populist” rubric is a staple of new-Fascist politics and *CasaPound* is no exception, translated into the rhetoric (and material enactment) of an “exclusionary welfarism” that we describe in subsequent sections.

“Expressionism” for Berlin does not simply refer to a variety of forms of human creativity but also, importantly, endows these with a deeper, ideal meaning and “entail[s] such distinctions as those between integral and divided, or committed and uncommitted lives” (Berlin, 1976: 153 in Holmes, 2000: 7). In the case of *CasaPound*, its self-declaredly “metapolitical” strategies employ a variety of “expressionist” tools, both in its headquarters (as we describe subsequently), as well as in the variety of “creative” activities sponsored by the movement, strongly focused on young people in particular.

Berlin’s third concept, “pluralism” can be understood as “the belief not merely in the multiplicity, but in the incommensurability, of the values of different cultures and societies”. As Holmes (2000: 7) remarks,

In its embrace of “incommensurability”, it creates a potentially invidious doctrine of difference, which holds that cultural distinctions must be preserved among an enduring plurality of groups and provides, thereby, a discriminatory rationale for practices of inclusion and exclusion.

Holmes argues that this is a crucial facet of the discourse of today’s European integralisms and it is clearly so in the case of *CasaPound*. Apart from its activities in Italy, *CasaPound* is also known for its “international solidarity” engagement, operated through the *Solidarité Identités* network (a volunteer association “in solidarity with peoples fighting for their survival and the defence of their culture and identity” ([www.solid-onlus.org](http://www.solid-onlus.org) 2018)). Through the Sol.Id network, *CasaPound* activists have engaged in projects in Burma, Crimea, Kosovo, Palestine, and Syria. According to Magnificat (2017), 10% of *CasaPound*’s income is dedicated to the efforts of Sol.Id. During our visit, we were also introduced to the movement’s coordinator for “international solidarity”, on his way back from Burma, and were also given an account of the group’s engagement in Syria, in support of the Assad government’s “struggle to defend its people” (Magnificat, 2017). The *CasaPound* activists we



spoke to saw no contradiction, in fact, between supporting the Syrian people in their homeland and being opposed to granting asylum to Syrians fleeing to Europe (Magnificat, 2017).

The final concept/idea that Holmes draws our attention to in Berlin's analysis is that of alienation. Unlike Marxist interpretations, Berlin stresses the power of cultural estrangement which "cuts men off from the "living center" – from the texture to which they naturally belong". Crucially, Holmes adds, such exile and estrangement "can also be figurative: it can be instilled by the "emptiness of cosmopolitanism" without entailing any physical dislocation" (Berlin, 1976: 197–199, cited in Holmes, 2000: 7). *CasaPound* draws strongly on such imaginaries of dispossession and dislocation, both in its strategies of re-claiming the immediate neighborhood around its headquarters, but also in its claims to re-constituting an Italian polity more broadly, as we describe in the next section. It is important to locate the politics of *CasaPound* within this much longer standing intellectual genealogy: first of all, because *CasaPound* ideologues and spokespeople appeal directly to many of these tenets (and figures) in their discourse and symbology and so properly historicizing their claims is a first step to re-locating them from a seemingly revolutionary present. Secondly, it also allows us as scholars to discern how while it may be groups like *CasaPound* that most explicitly (and often violently) "focalize" the imaginations of an "estranged" society, such imaginations are taken up by other, more prominent forces: in the Italian context, most clearly the *Lega*.

A final important point regards the "new" politics that "integralists" profess and that renders them so appealing in electoral contests today. One of the key claims of *CasaPound* is that they represent a politics that is "neither right nor left". Our choice to adopt the term "integralism" answers precisely this quandary:

to view them as either "right" or "left" wing is not simply misleading, but wrong. Drawing on populism, expressionism, and pluralism they create political orientations that defy easy placement along a single axis. . . . "integralism" creates a space in which an entangled politics arises that is both right and left. Indeed, it is precisely the unsettling potential of this kind of politics to join, fuse, merge and synthesize what might appear to be incompatible elements that is at the heart of its distinctive power. (Holmes, 2000: 13)

We commented on this point in the previous section but would like to add here that to understand how movements like *CasaPound* succeed in merging seemingly incompatible elements, the narratological notion of focalization may, again, prove particularly useful (Bal, 2004; Culler, 1997). The question of agency is central in narratological analyses: for an individual or a collective to express agency, there needs to be a yielding, even catalyzing structure – a field which allows for a certain freedom to be apprehended. This applies to the freedom to focalize just as much as it applies to the subsequent freedom to speak, act and perform based on this focalization. When applied to mediatized political events and movements, focalization can be conceptualized as a tool of power; regimes of focalization can be seen as a way to account for structures of power, control and ownership. We would therefore argue that *CasaPound's* relevance does not come from any particularly impactful political actions or electoral numbers: it comes from their powerful re-focalization of migration, precarization, and globalization that mobilizes longer standing (and thus easily recognizable) visual symbols and discursive tools, but that also, through their "new" metapolitical approach, is able to reach a range of new audiences. The spectacularized media attention granted to the movement serves to both further potentiate their reach and, at the same time, occlude them from view, as their discourse becomes part of a wider political debate.

The question of migration is a highly pertinent example here. In her article on the re-focalization of irregular migrants, Peeren argues that the “global mobility regime” is “a type of gaze that allows for profiling to function as a mode of spatial containment and to uphold the spatial selectivity of borders” (2015: 176). The re-focalization of migration enacted through the lens of *CasaPound* does not have to do with the “zones of apprehension” (Peeren, 2015: 176) at the borderlands of the Mediterranean, however. Rather, *CasaPound* seeks to position itself in Italian cities and on Italian squares; the entering of the migrant into what they consider to be exclusively Italian spaces is to be pre-emptively countered with metapolitical spectacles of community and public-ness. *CasaPound* activists operate, indeed, on a logic of “re-seizing”: taking back what is or had been supposedly indivisible, and more precisely indivisibly Italian. What De Genova has termed the “visual grammar that upholds and enhances the iconicity of particular fetishized figures of ‘illegal immigration’” (2013: 2), is repurposed by *CasaPound* to make those visible who “have fallen out of focus”: not the migrants, but rather the working middle class, strictly Italian. In the following two sections, we draw on the lens of integralist politics outlined above in order to shed light on a number of *CasaPound*'s most over-visualized elements and interventions.

### **Faux marble and myths in the Esquilino: Claiming urban space**

A significant proportion of *CasaPound*'s militant rhetoric and actions has been centered around the very material issue of housing, with its Roman headquarters serving as a key site of re-focalization. Formerly an office building in the Roman district of Esquilino, southwest of the main train station Termini, the current headquarters were occupied at the end of 2003, an occupation tolerated over the years by municipal councils on both the right as well as center-left. The building is situated on Via Napoleone III, a large street housing banks, hotels, and Chinese shops. The entrance door is under video surveillance 24/7, and according to neighbors, *CasaPound* members and residents hardly ever interact with their surroundings (Palladino and Tornago, 2018). The façade spots a large faux-marble sign, reading “CASAPOVND”, in a neo-classicist 1920s style that according to Magnificat (2017), as noted previously, “is a way to tell everyone: we were there before and we will always be there.”

Having adopted the left-autonomous practice of squatting houses already in years past, the Fascist militants were well versed in the tactics needed to infiltrate an abandoned house. The story of the seizure of the building is now part of an origin myth, recounted by activists on many occasions; on our tour of the building, Magnificat told us about the flyers they preemptively distributed in the neighborhood back in late 2003, simulating the search for a cat named “Ezra”, which facilitated their unsuspected entry in the building days later. To *Guardian* journalist Tobias Jones (2018), the activists recounted a similar story about a cat named “Pound”. While the details may differ, the repetition of this narrative very usefully serves the purpose of myth-making, affirming both presence and permanence. Multiplied by the attention of Italian and international media, *CasaPound* has been able to frame a Fascist archetype, creating an at once folkloric and banal construction of “the new-Fascist”.

While with the squatted house in Esquilino and its origin myth, *CasaPound* appeals to a past ideology, it also relates it directly to the current housing crisis. While housing shortage is a very real issue in Italy and particularly in Rome where evictions abound (see Mudu, 2014), it is not necessarily a new phenomenon linked to a present crisis (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2013: 247). In *CasaPound*'s re-telling, however, the logic of crisis is constructed through a racial focalization: their squat is for Italians only (“We have rooms here for

families in need. They have to be Italian”, Magnificat, 2017: 02:15), since it is irregular migration that led to the precarization of Italians. As argued by Castelli Gattinara et al. (2013: 247), and especially true in early 2018, *CasaPound* has presented itself as “being forced” to take political action to provide an answer to the social needs of Italian society, abandoned by an ineffective state. This rhetorical tactic resonates directly with the imaginary of estrangement identified by Holmes as key part of integralist politics (2000: 89). The “real human values”, from which *CasaPound* sees Italy fully alienated, are expressed and construed through a racially exclusionary, moralized claim on social housing. Leading up to the 2018 elections, the movement indeed recalibrated their discursive and material focalization of the housing issue in more directly xenophobic terms, with the slogan “Italians should come first and then, maybe, foreigners” (“*Prima gli Italiani e dopo, forse, gli stranieri*”) – almost identical to the even more unequivocal mantra since adopted by *Lega* leader (and now Minister of the Interior), Matteo Salvini, “*Prima gli italiani*” (“Italians first”).<sup>15</sup>

The issue of migration is further mobilized by *CasaPound* in their discursive framing of their headquarters as a territorial defense of the Italian polity, an architectural form of resistance to Italians’ “deracination”. In interviews with international and national news outlets, the founder of *CasaPound* Iannone has dubbed *CasaPound*’s building “the Italian embassy” (Jones, 2018), as too did Magnificat in introducing us to the building. By taking up the term, mainstream Italian newspapers such as the *Corriere della Sera* have helped bolster *CasaPound*’s characterization of the surrounding Esquilino neighbourhood as a “dangerous area”: both due to its immigrant population of about 30%, and its abandonment by the municipal government. *CasaPound* activists have in fact frequently taken to the streets demanding an end to the “degradation” of the area, drawing upon rhetoric that “point[s] to a conflation of immigration with dilapidation” (Mudu, 2014: 173). Through such actions, *CasaPound* has succeeded in establishing a political space in which they claim to not only represent their movement’s ideals, but the entirety of Italy and its imaginary homogenous body of citizens. In his discussion of the Stazione Termini and the Esquilino as a heterotopia, Simone Brioni argues that in popular Italian media the area is “represented as a threshold where different cultures and moral codes of behaviour meet” (2017: 445). These depictions are not value-free: indeed, Brioni argues that on many occasions the space has been made to “represent Italy’s anxieties regarding different kinds of alterities in terms of gender, race, and class” (2017: 445). While this confluence of alterities in the district of Esquilino has also been regarded as conducive to a space of innovation, dynamism and coexistence (Attili, 2008: 140) and even of Antifascism (Brioni, 2017: 453), *CasaPound* decidedly juxtaposes its presence here to the incursions of a threatening mass of Others.

One of the strategies deployed in this quest is the expressionist repurposing of non-Italian historical and cultural figures, obstinately unifying them into a Fascist, militant context. The heavy entrance door of the building turned *CasaPound* headquarters leads into an entrance hall whose walls are covered with large, colorful letters that spell out the names of famous writers and politicians, philosophers, and mythological figures. When queried about the liberal and cosmopolitan ideas propagated by some of the figures whose names adorn the walls, Magnificat swiftly replied to us: “we took them back, they are now ours” (2017). In his *Guardian* exposé of *CasaPound*, Jones (2018) discounted many of the names chosen to adorn their walls as “bizarre and wishful”. Among outspoken Nazi supporters and war criminals like Hamsun, Degrelle, and Mussolini, there are indeed some unexpected characters: Jack Kerouac is featured, as well as Ray Bradbury, and so too Amad Shah Massoud, the Afghan military commander. “Wishful” because these characters – some more than others – are more frequently seen as representing liberal and progressive values, and

“bizarre” because *CasaPound* mobilizes the “Other” as (also) representative of Fascist thought.”<sup>16</sup>

By claiming such disparate figures within this walled Fascist space, *CasaPound* attempts to displace and redefine not only the foreign characters it literally writes on its sleeve but also its own identity: one of freedom, revolutionary thought, and resistance. *CasaPound* thus re-focalizes a distinct imaginary of the Italy it desires: reactionary, militant, and fighting for the values connoted by the mention of also liberal and progressive thinkers of the left. The meshing of Fascist and Nazi names with those of leftist figures normalizes and embeds Fascist thinking into a cultural, metapolitical bastion. Moreover, it exemplifies how “expressionism”, as discussed by Holmes and previously by Berlin, is mobilized by *CasaPound* as an overtly political tool. The self-presentation and articulation of new-Fascists through the names of international and liberal thinkers inscribed in big colorful letters on their entrance hall materialize the defiant act of forcefully claiming a repurposed intellectual and cosmopolitan tradition.<sup>17</sup>

### Urban and rural spectacles of community engagement

Beyond the confines of their headquarters, *CasaPound* appropriates space and gains visibility through a variety of other urban – but also rural – welfare initiatives, all highly spectacularized. Counteracting what “they believe to be the symptoms and the agents of globalization”, and echoing other integralist movements described by Holmes (2000: 114), *CasaPound* activists claim space to speak in defence of a distinctive vision of social justice and popular welfare. Rather than through the language and institutions of conventional politics, *CasaPound* engages in spectacular direct-action interventions that aim at a “social extremism”, and that which Castelli Gattinara et al. (2013: 236) refer to as “a socio-political project of state building beyond Western liberalism”. Re-focalizing the state’s retreat from social welfare provision through the two bogeymen of unrestrained globalization and irregular migration, “integralist fears and aspirations are translated into the vernacular of the urban landscape” (Holmes, 2000: 122). The city and its “abandoned” and “degraded”<sup>18</sup> spaces become both symptoms of the political elite’s failures to counter these forces – and the sites of (direct) action.

Such re-telling and re-purposing of social justice agendas for nationalist ends have been dubbed “welfare chauvinism” or “welfare populism” and are certainly not unique to *CasaPound*<sup>19</sup>: the re-fashioning of the former *Lega Nord* into the *Lega* in the lead-up to the 2018 elections proceeded precisely through an extension of its welfare-populist appeals that allowed it to capture votes outside of its previous Northern Italian strongholds. As with the other examples previously discussed, *CasaPound* simply enacts a highly visible (if not spectacularized) version of it, eagerly picked up and made viral by media outlets. For beyond its focus on public housing as a key site of struggle (enacted both through direct provision of accommodation but also through actions aimed at halting evictions), *CasaPound* has put into place a number of other strategies aimed at re-focalizing an Italian working (and middle) class in need. Best known are their food drives that have taken places over the past several years not just in Rome but also in other Italian cities such as Lucca, collecting shopping bags full of groceries in front of large supermarkets (Rosati, 2018). The initiative became a blatant campaigning tool in the local council election of November 2017 in Nuova Ostia, a littoral municipality of Rome riddled by the violence and crippling corruption of local Mafia clans in which *CasaPound* made its largest political impact to date, gaining 9% of the vote (Tizian and Vergine, 2017).

In Nuova Ostia as well as elsewhere, *CasaPound* has used such food drives to lay claim to the provision of popular welfare as well as in order to point to the absence of the Italian state “that should take care of its own before it takes care of others” (Magnificat, 2017). Through such actions – and through their multiplication by mass media outlets – *CasaPound* spectacularizes Italy’s social precarity, while less-than-obliquely hinting at a logic of crisis induced by the non-Italian Other. But there is another important aspect to the food drives: as Magnificat explained to us, Italians “have a different approach to poverty – they are not claiming it” (2017). Italian families, he noted, “are ashamed to go ask for assistance publicly”, unlike the migrants, who are happy to go “complaining on TV” (Magnificat, 2017). The food drives thus serve also to re-focalize a distinct moral geography and a distinct form of territorial solidarity that cannot be that of state-dispensed welfare that exacts submission and public humiliation. And, once more, while the material impact of the food drives themselves is marginal, the re-focalization they consent supports a much wider set of narratives of Italy and Italians in crisis: made use of, among others, by the *Lega*.

The re-focalization of Italian integrity<sup>20</sup> in the face of crisis within urban spaces has also been complemented, most recently, by the movement’s engagement beyond Italian city-scapes. Over the past several years, *CasaPound* has extended the focus of its spectacularizing actions also to the Italian countryside, extending rhetorics regarding the protection of Italian landscapes from “degradation” from the urban to the rural. In such actions, the “organic approach to life” described by Holmes in his discussion of integralist politics becomes increasingly material and undeniably territorial. While the inclusion of non-Fascist figures and themes into a new-Fascist narrative may be one of *CasaPound*’s reactionary tools, as Castelli Gattinara and Froio (2014: 168) argue, most of the militants’ “aesthetic and symbolic choices seem to be oriented towards the reconstruction of an emotional link with the Fascist past”. Indeed, recent rural actions directly bring together a romantic geographical imaginary of a pre-urban, idealized Fascist past with material Fascist symbols and its esthetic history.<sup>21</sup>

Drawing upon both contemporary discourses of the re-making of territorial community and solidarity as well as the historical permanence of Fascist environments, the reforestation of the “*Pineta DUX*” in the Apennine Mountains at the border between the Lazio and Abruzzo regions was one such action in early 2018. *Pineta DUX* is the moniker of a pine tree formation on the Western hillside of Monte Giano, located in the Lazio province of Rieti, that spells out the letters “DVX”. The arboretum of 20,000 pines was commissioned in 1939 as a homage to Benito Mussolini. Planted by military cadets of the *Milizia Forestale*, part of the Fascist state’s voluntary militia, for almost 80 years now the arboreal writing has stood as a monument of Mussolini’s regime. Over the years, the municipality of Antrodoto, under whose administration the area falls, has fought a number of legal battles to eradicate the Fascist symbol. In the summer of 2017, an invasive wildfire destroyed large parts of it. Just days after, *CasaPound* president Iannone issued a statement regarding the Monte Giano fire, pronouncing that “history will not be erased”. Calling upon the help of their militants, *CasaPound* prepared an extensive campaign to replant the approximately 1000 damaged pines that constituted the writing. As part of their social media efforts, in February 2018 *CasaPound* released a video documenting the reforestation of *Pineta DUX*, with the alleged participation of 200 people. Carrying the movement’s flags, and flanked by the Fascist environmental organization “*La Foresta Che Avanza*” (“The Encroaching Forest”), Iannone’s depiction of the action invoked a “marching army” whose task it was “not [to] let history be burnt”.<sup>22</sup>

The affirmation of a virile and militarized masculinity through the re-claiming of territory – here, through the re-claiming of a historically signified natural landscape – speaks to a

long tradition of Fascist imaginaries of the value of the rural and natural worlds that offered the necessary challenge for man's innate need for risk, struggle, and sacrifice. As Bellasai (2005: 319) and others have argued, the modern city with its "technology and comforts [...] jeopardized virility because [it] denied man the benefits of a life in contact with nature, took his mind off the healthy, eternal struggle against obstacles and material and moral challenges". The Monte Giano action thus certainly drew upon such longer standing imaginaries of a necessary re-connection with the natural world, to a "bucolic image of naturalism which is not fully new to radical right organizations" (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2013: 248). It also demonstrates a quite literal manifestation of the resistance to "deracination", discussed by Holmes in alluding to Herder's concept of alienation. Through the re-establishment of a Fascist landscape, *CasaPound* conjures the impression of "a texture to which they naturally belong" (Holmes, 2000: 7).

Nevertheless, here too the impact of the action was greatly magnified by *CasaPound's* media-savvy visibilization, weaving together the valiant re-claiming of both rural and urban territory into a single narrative of protection of an embattled, dis-integrating space. As argued by Castelli Gattinara and Froio (2014: 164), "*CasaPound's* initiatives are almost always accompanied by showcase visual campaigns, aimed at increasing the visibility of its political action". In the case of the *Pineta DUX*, the entanglement (and mutual potentiation) of material and discursive spaces becomes particularly striking. Social media content immortalized and digitally transposed a space of visibility created through the mobilization of militants. The performances of community welfare – whether through housing provision or the food drives orchestrated in Nuova Ostia and other Italian cities – may not resemble the spectacle of "Pineta DUX" in form, but they enact a very similar sort of re-focalization. Invoking the permanence of Fascist ideals, whether of rural idyll or urban order, *CasaPound's* activism inscribes a distinct set of moral geographies delimiting who and what belongs in Italian spaces.

## Perilous proximities

In the closing sentences of his essay on "Ur-Fascism" published on the *New York Review of Books* in 1995,<sup>23</sup> Umberto Eco warned that "it would be much easier for us if there appeared on the world scene somebody saying: 'I want to re-open Auschwitz, I want the Black Shirts to parade again in the Italian squares. Life is not that simple'". The spectre of a new-Fascism currently haunting Italy – and Europe – is not to be found in its most visible manifestations, in the black-shirted urban and rural spectacles of the likes of *CasaPound*. Rather, as Eco presciently noted in his essay, its true peril lies in "a way of thinking and feeling, [in] a group of cultural habits". It is therefore crucial – both conceptually as well as politically – to avoid being drawn into the spectacle and, rather, to locate the politics of *CasaPound* as part of a broader, burgeoning "integralism". It is only thus that we can properly "explore the precarious proximity of the ideas that infuse these cultural agendas to conventional political values, and hence reveal their true danger and our abiding vulnerability to them", as Holmes argued already almost two decades ago (2000: 14).

The passage of integralist ideas into "conventional", "respectable" politics is precisely the point that we would like to raise in closing. As we noted in the opening paragraphs, the highly publicized events that drew media attention in the months preceding the 2018 elections were, in all cases, the actions of tiny groups: whether the incursion into the Como branch of Catholic-charity Caritas by four members of a local Fascist group (who forced the assembled volunteers to read a "manifesto" for liberating Italy of the foreign presence, while one of the four stood filming the scene with his phone), or the "attack" on the offices of

center-left daily *La Repubblica* by a handful of activists with smoke bombs and banners. They were hardly a “black wave” of new-Fascism, as presaged by Italian and foreign newspapers. Nevertheless, such highly mediatized “spectacles of Fascism”, whether enacted by *CasaPound* or other (even more minor) groups were highly effective in shaping popular perceptions: a poll by Demos, the leading Italian public opinion agency, in November 2017 revealed that almost 60% of Italians were “very worried about the rise of fascism” (Biorcio, 2017).<sup>24</sup>

The “worry” leading up to the 2018 elections should have been another, however: it was the spectre of a coalition government made up of the increasingly racist *Lega* and the anti-establishment *M5S*, more than the spectre of black-shirted *CasaPound*-ers that should have drawn concern. The perilous flirtations of the *Lega* with what can be considered decidedly “fascist cultural habits” (to borrow Eco’s expression once more) have been documented by numerous commentators, both in the lead-up to these most recent elections as well as over the preceding years (Renzi, 2015; Rosati, 2018; Ruzza and Fella, 2009). Writing about the increasingly pronounced “culturalization” of recent Italian politics, Antonsich (2016) has highlighted how the *Lega* has long engaged the very same geographical imaginaries of a disintegrating Italy embattled by the forces of unfettered globalization and unregulated migration associated with the new-Fascist right. What is especially striking are the territorialized and racialized moral geographies of rights that the *Lega* was propounding already quite some time ago: imagined geographies that come straight out of the *CasaPound* play-book. Particularly illustrative is Antonsich’s interview with Massimiliano Fedriga, previously *Lega* MP and, as of the 2018 elections, the governor of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region:

We don’t believe that a family father who only has one soup dish and gives it to his son is a racist, whereas other political forces wish instead to keep the son hungry and give the soup to the neighbor. For us, this would be a degenerate father, not a democratic father. A father who does not think first of his children is a degenerate father and the state, we believe, should act like a good family father. (Fedriga, 2014 cited in Antonsich, 2016: 496–497)

We re-quote Fedriga’s words here to draw attention both to how such “moral” appeals to a familial solidarity and sovereignty echo directly the language of *CasaPound* but also because his plans for restructuring the region’s migrant reception provided a blueprint for the *Lega*’s policy-making once in national government. Fedriga’s appeal to a familial ethic of care for “Italians first” was coupled, indeed, with calls for the re-institution of closed detention and deportation centers and the abandonment of the “diffuse” reception facilities that provided temporary as well as longer term hospitality for irregular migrants: a recipe that was made law in December 2018 by the *Lega/M5S* government, as part of the so-called “Security Decree” (*Decreto Sicurezza*, also known as the “Salvini Decree”). It is a decree with sweeping powers, among other things abolishing with one legislative act the right to “humanitarian protection” for migrants not eligible for refugee status but who cannot be returned to the country of origin. The decree will not only strip thousands of people of the legal right to remain, however, but also of housing, medical care, and other basic rights. It will expel, literally overnight, thousands of vulnerable individuals and families into the streets (Tondo and Giuffrida, 2018).

The mayors of several large cities – Milano, Bologna, but also Torino, governed by the *Lega*’s coalition partner, *M5S* – reacted immediately, saying that they would not implement the terms of the decree for it risked creating a “social bomb”. Caritas has estimated that it will “expose over 140,000 individuals to the risk of extreme poverty, marginality and

deviance” and has termed it a “pathogenic law” (Caritas, 2018). For the “Salvini Decree” will not only create illegality, it will also make migrants much more visible in the physical spaces of Italian cities, with people now thrust into abject conditions forced to survive on the streets. The desperate migrant Other as *CasaPound*'s imagined fount of Italy's urban crises has now, through the actions of the *Lega*, been turned into a reality.

As prophesied by Eco, Europe's emergent integralisms cannot be discerned only through their most conspicuous manifestations. The spectacularized metapolitical tactics of movements like *CasaPound* are just part of the picture: in acting to re-focalize degraded urban spaces and a native population at risk, they act to normalize and legitimize a series of wider discourses, subsequently put into practice by more “respectable” policy-makers. Thus, while it is important to distinguish between spectacularized performance and factual implementation, we must, nevertheless, always be fully cognizant of their precarious interplay and the perilous proximity that binds different actors in the wider politics of the right.

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### Notes

1. We use the term “new-Fascist” to call them by their true name (and ideological provenance), rather than the generic term “far-right”.
2. On the part of the *M5S*'s representative Luigi di Maio, subsequently retracted.
3. The cover of *The Economist* (2018b) featured a tri-color “Italian” ice-cream cone as a ticking bomb and the headline “Handle with care”.



4. The notion of a broader “far-right galaxy” bringing together what are often disconnected groups, parties, and movements has been used by numerous journalists to map a political “universe” that extends from registered political parties to after-school clubs (see Palladino et al., 2017).
5. Traini’s violent actions are the starting point of a best-selling book on the shifting discourse of race in today’s Italy published by Ezio Mauro (2018) in the months following the elections, under the title *L’Uomo Bianco* (“The White Man”).
6. The candidate for Prime Minister put forward by the Lega/M5S coalition, law professor Giuseppe Conte, was hailed as the “*avvocato del popolo italiano*” (the “lawyer of the Italian people”).
7. For different overviews, see Brubaker (2017), Kalb and Halmi (2011), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), Muller (2016), as well as Wodak et al. (2013).
8. For a broader transnational perspective, see also Feldman (2008), Gingrich and Banks (2006), Griffin et al. (2006), Shoshan (2016), and Shekhovtsov (2018).
9. The MSI morphed into the “post”-Fascist *Alleanza Nazionale* created in 1994 and bringing together MSI politicians together with other right wing forces. The *Alleanza Nazionale* was dissolved in 2009 to form part of a wider political grouping led by Silvio Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* party. After the AN’s implosion due to various scandals, one fraction formed the *Fratelli d’Italia* that first presented itself in the 2013 elections – and that in the 2018 contest ran as part of the right-wing coalition together with the *Lega* and *Forza Italia* parties. For an overview of the recent histories of the Italian right, see Caldiron (2009), Cento Bull (2007), Collotti (2000), and Ignazi (1994).
10. The reference is to long-time MSI leader’s Giorgio Almirante’s “*politica del doppiopetto*” (“double-breasted suit politics”) that attempted to reconcile – in form at least – the MSI’s fascist legacy with parliamentary politics. Just days following the formation of the Lega/M5S government, Rome City Council voted to name a road in the capital in the Fascist politician’s name (Cappelli, 2018).
11. Led by Roberto Fiore who in 2008 was elected a European MEP and is the president of the European National Front, bringing together far-right and new-Fascist movements from across Europe. For an overview of the various new-Fascist organizations emergent in this period, see Fasanello and Grippo (2009).
12. “Casa” in Italian means “house” – on the influence of Pound see Castelli Gattinara et al. (2013). More broadly on Pound’s Fascist sympathies, see Feldman (2013).
13. As yet another play with the ambiguity of the “neither-right-nor-left” positioning (Santoro, 2018).
14. The historic left-wing Italian publishing house Feltrinelli co-produced a 2007 documentary on the topic entitled “*NaziRock: Il Contagio Fascista Tra i Giovani Italiani*” (“NaziRock: Fascist Contagion Among Young Italians”), re-issued in 2018 and prominently displayed in Feltrinelli bookshops across Italy in the months preceding the spring 2018 elections. The prominence given to this documentary is another marker of the problematic over-visibility of what is, in actual numerical terms and impact, a marginal phenomenon.
15. Salvini’s ties to *CasaPound* go back to 2015 with the launch of a common “Sovereignist” alliance (see Rosati, 2018: 86 on what the author terms as the emergence of a “fascio-leghismo”). The *Lega* leader has most recently (February 2019) intervened in person to halt the order of the Rome Municipality to evict *CasaPound* from their building (still officially owned by the state), with the justification that “the premises are in good order and not dangerous” (Vitale, 2019).
16. Such “syncretism” is a marker of “true” Fascism according to Umberto Eco (1995): “the very fact that the Italian right, in order to show its open-mindedness, recently broadened its syllabus to include works by De Maistre, Guenon and Gramsci, is a blatant proof of syncretism”.
17. On July 25, 2019, as this article was going into production, Rome Mayor Virginia Raggi sent formal notice to *CasaPound* leaders stating that they had “10 days to remove the sign from the façade of the occupied building” and that the municipality would shortly initiate procedures for evicting the inhabitants of the self-proclaimed ‘headquarters’, while levying a fee of 4.6 million euro for “damages to state property (De GhantuzCubbe, 2019). *CasaPound* activists removed the marble sign in the days following the notice, placing in its lieu a banner reading: “This is Rome’s problem?”. The rhetorical question now adorning the front of the building (again) helped to ably re-focus the terms of the debate: as *CasaPound* vice-president Andrea Antonini noted to

- reporters, “in a city reduced to a latrine [. . .] this is clearly not Rome’s main problem” (D’Albergo, 2019) [n.b. Mayor Raggi had come under fierce criticism in preceding months for her administration’s inability to counter Rome’s growing waste emergency that was becoming a public health hazard]. As Antonini surmised: “they wanted to come here with the police and provoke our reaction, frame us as a menace to public order. We don’t fall for that. We took off the sign ourselves, and we will put it back on once Raggi is no longer Mayor. Or perhaps even sooner” (cited in D’Albergo, 2019).
18. Terms that were used repeatedly by Magnificat (2017) during our field visit.
  19. See also the review in *The Economist* (2018a:22) on “The Battle of the Benefits”, noting how parties ranging from France’s National Front, to Germany’s AfD and Poland’s PiS all “use welfare chauvinist arguments to attack immigration, not the welfare state”.
  20. Intended both as indivisibility – but also in the term’s high-moral meaning.
  21. For a discussion of the anti-modern and anti-urban imaginaries of Fascism, see Bellassai (2005); on the broader geographical imaginations of the Fascist state, see Atkinson (2013).
  22. “La storia non brucia”. *CasaPound Italia*. Facebook, February 2018. [www.facebook.com/casapounditalia/videos/10155468428952842](http://www.facebook.com/casapounditalia/videos/10155468428952842), see also Rosati (2018).
  23. The essay was newly re-published in Italian as a self-standing volume in January 2018, going through five printings in the space of a month, with a striking black and white cover in “Fascist” neo-classical font and the title *Il Fascismo Eterno* (Eco, 2018).
  24. This concern was particularly pronounced among voters of the left and center-left while, interestingly, voters on the right did not believe that there was growing support for the extreme- and Fascist right (Biorcio, 2017).

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