Article

Housing as a Battlefield Between Self-Organization and Resistance: The Case of Reclaim the City

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Abstract
Cities are a place of transformation, since cities are being challenged through various processes, among them gentrification. Likewise, cities are a space for innovation and new solutions, as many changes start locally. Reclaim the City is one such local movement: It is a response to weak statehood which results in a limited ability to solve the housing crisis and the continuation of spatial segregation in Cape Town. Gentrification deepens the housing crisis and has an impact on the most vulnerable groups, black and colored people, who are affected by eviction. Based on a qualitative study, this article first unpacks the weakness of the city authorities regarding housing and then analyzes the relationship between Reclaim the City and the city. This relationship is not to be understood as a binary, conflictual liaison; rather, the relationship is complex, involving resistance but also complementarity, because in the self-organized occupation Reclaim the City offers what the city is not able to provide. The response of the authorities is ambivalent: They welcome self-organization and yet try to control and delegitimize the occupation by criminalizing the occupants. The relationship between Reclaim the City and the city thus shows that self-organization does not necessarily lead to new interfaces between the state and social movements, as often discussed in the context of new municipalism, but rather housing becomes a field of social contestation in that the city and Reclaim the City negotiate for mutual acceptance and legitimation, at times with an open end.

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1. Introduction

Cities are increasingly a field of contestation. On the one hand, the debate on the neoliberalization of the city highlights the shadow of urbanization, which unfolds in urban planning oriented toward market-oriented solutions rather than social justice (Harvey, 2013; Portaliou, 2007). Even though the neoliberal turn since the 1970s is not limited to the city, cities are the focal point of transformation because they host the centers of production (Mayer, 2013). As a result, we are witnessing increasing spatial and social inequality in cities, which is manifested in processes of gentrification and touristification, as well as in loss of relationships with the local space or with nature, and the dominance of neoliberal values such as individualism, which is opposed to the percep-

tion of the city as a shared responsibility or commons. Thus, the so-called neoliberal city polarizes people socio-economically (Harvey, 2013). As a response, numerous social movements emerge, criticizing austerity politics and claiming the "right to the city." With the notion of "right to the city," activists seek to gain collective power over the processes of urbanization (Harvey, 2013, p. 4) and to change the understanding of the city, by highlighting the creative potential of citizens, and, borrowing a term from Lefebvre (1968/2016), to "inhabit" the space. Accordingly, Sareen and Waagsaether (2022) perceive cities as laboratories for change with the ability to address urban crises. Agustin (2020, p. 63) argues along the same lines, emphasizing that many changes derive from the local and thus from the city. In this respect, the debate on "new municipalism" highlights that civic

engagement is a response to the neoliberal city, and citizens have the ability to influence political structures by creating new forms of interaction between citizens and the city. Accordingly, new municipalism can be understood as a form of progressive change, which enhances the relationship between citizens and the city (Agustin, 2020; Thompson, 2021).

The housing movement Reclaim the City (RTC) can be classified under the notion of the right to the city. RTC emerged in 2017 with the slogan "Land for People, not Profit" for the purpose of overcoming the housing crisis in Cape Town, and is in line with other social movements that struggle against the neoliberal city. RTC shows the creative potential of citizens to shape the city and their agency to create solutions for urgent problems. RTC, for example, offers shelter to those in need in the housing crisis and thus creates solutions that the city is not able to provide. Nevertheless, in the case of RTC, one cannot speak of a new form of municipalism emerging from citizens' engagement. My case study of RTC shows that the relationship between RTC and the city is far from being resolved and that RTC's struggle is not leading to the establishment of new formal participatory structures as discussed in the debate on new municipalism. Rather, the relationship between RTC and the city can be characterized as a continuous battlefield in which each party seeks to legitimize its own position and standing. This makes cooperation possible because both fear losing their legitimacy. The relationship between the city and RTC is based on both complementarity and confrontation. My case study of RTC shows that, despite the creative potential of citizens, opportunities for participation in political decision-making are sometimes granted but remain predominantly limited and are a field of contestation. Thus, the case study complements the debate on new municipalism and shows the limits of the engagement of social movements, especially in the context of weak statehood in which the governance ability is limited but in which the city has also power and a need to legitimize itself as a responsible actor. Therefore, in this article, I analyze the complex relationship between RTC and the city by addressing the strategy and activism of the housing movement.

This article is part of a broader study of different civil society actors in South Africa entitled "Towards a sociology of lived utopias: How the future becomes present in imaginaries and aspirations of lived utopias in South Africa." For this empirical study carried out between 2016 and 2018, I conducted more than 80 biographical and semi-structured interviews and used ethnographic methods such as participant observation. For this article, I will particularly consider 14 biographical interviews with RTC activists, two guided interviews with civil society actors, and observation memos of my participation in protests, meetings, and activities connected with the occupation. In addition, I made a newspaper media review in order to observe the public perception of RTC and the state's responses to RTC activism. All data have been analyzed in accordance with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

In Section 2, I will refer to social movement studies, particularly the relationship between social movements and the state, as well as municipalism. Then, in Section 3, I will introduce the South African political context in order to embed the case study of RTC in a broader understanding of weak statehood in South Africa, and of the housing crisis in Cape Town. Then I will analyze the activism of RTC and its emerging relationship with the city (Section 4.1), as well as their mutual perceptions and expectations (Section 4.2). In the conclusion, I will summarize the findings and argue that this relationship does not lead to a new form of municipalism but remains a field of contestation in which RTC and the city struggle for self-legitimation and delegitimation of the respective other.

2. Social Movements Under Conditions of Weak Statehood

Social movement studies have analyzed the relationship between the state and social movements from different perspectives. Early analyses adopted a structuralist perspective to examine how the political regime, whether democratic or authoritarian, shapes social movement activism (Meyer, 2004; Tarrow, 1996), but Della Porta (2013, p. 958) criticizes this approach for its deterministic vision of the state-movement relationship, which fails to take into account the importance of the social construction of opportunities. Consequently, recent studies have looked at the complex and manifold interactions between social movements and the state (Daniel, 2019; McAdam et al., 2001; Rucht, 1996). Thus, scholars have also examined the role of allies, such as the political elite or political parties, because the opportunities for action by social movements and their influence on political decisions increase the more diversified the support in the political system is (Giugni, 2009; Meyer & Lupo, 2009). In such studies, social movements and the state are not automatically perceived as opponents, but the relationship between them is analyzed with an open mind, with a consideration of the complex dynamics involved in the activism of social movements and their relation to the state. This approach takes into account the particular historical, cultural, economic, and political context in which social movements operate (Baumgarten et al., 2014). Part of these context-sensitive studies, which present a differentiated picture of the relationship between citizens or social movements and the city, is the above-mentioned debate on new municipalism. This debate unfolded primarily against the background of the Spanish protests against austerity policies between 2008 and 2015 (Sareen & Waagsaether, 2022). These social movements address the neoliberal city and aim to change policies, decision-making, and particularly political participation "towards more participatory interaction" (Feenstra & Tormey, 2023, p. 81; see

also Agustin, 2020; Thompson, 2021). New municipalism describes how civil society collaborates with the city in order to reconfigure the relationship beyond party politics and to find alternatives to capitalism (Thompson, 2021, pp. 319, 322). To characterize the relationship between social movements and the state, Thompson (2021, pp. 326–330) develops a typology, distinguishing between *platform*, *autonomist*, and *managed municipalism*. Platform municipalism challenges the categorization of the state and aims at establishing new platforms for interaction, whether digital or by assembly. Autonomist municipalism seeks self-governance outside the state, moving away from engaging with the state toward building alternatives. Managed municipalism creates a new structure of the municipality from the inside through new mechanisms of the economy.

While these new academic debates on municipalism attempt to grasp the complexity of the relationship between the city and social movements, they fall short regarding RTC. The RTC example shows that the relationship with the city depends on which forms of activism social movements use. This example shows that the relationship is far from clear and that each of the parties concerned seeks to legitimize itself and delegitimize the other. The interaction is thus highly dynamic, has not become structurally solidified and is still being negotiated. Thus, RTC does not correspond to those social movements that are discussed under the term new municipalism. To understand RTC and its relationship to the city, it is first necessary to look at its strategies and forms of activism in order to uncover the complexity of the interactions. The term activism refers to everything social movements do in order to achieve their aims (Saunders, 2013). Raschke (1985, pp. 277–282) proposed a division into intermediary, demonstrative, and direct activism. With intermediary activism, social movements aim at influencing political decisions and the public through working in committees, writing petitions, collecting signatures, distributing leaflets, or lobbying. Intermediary activism aims at realizing goals within the framework of the existing political context. As a rule, ignoring the demands would incur costs for the political elite and/or would question its legitimacy. Direct activism is much more radical and takes the form of strikes, boycotts, sabotage, or occupations. Actors using direct protests consciously position themselves outside or against the government. Demonstrative activism is in between and ranges from demonstrations, marches, rallies, and campaigns to vigils. This kind of activism does not include an element of political confrontation but aims at initiating a process of reflection. Kriesi (2004, p. 91) argues that some tactics are more exclusive (repressive, confrontational, polarizing), while others are more inclusive (facilitative, cooperative and assimilative). Social movements tend to combine different forms of activism. Analyzing the activism of social movements, more particularly of RTC, will unpack the multiplicity and complexity of relationships between the social move-

ment and the city. In the case of RTC, the context of weak statehood also needs to be considered.

Unlike failed states (Schlichte, 2006), weak states are not threatened in their existence; they are able to offer a number of services but face functional, temporal, or territorial limits (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 11; Risse, 2011). The weak state is functional and stable in itself but has a low capacity and authority to realize its goals. The weak state is characterized by governance gaps. Against this background, the question arises of how social movements interact with the weak state. While some scholars argue that non-state actors undermine the legitimacy of the state, others emphasize that not all non-state actors aspire to political power (Meagher, 2012; Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, pp. 15–16). Lauth (2000) underlines that the comparability, strength, and legitimacy of informal rules and institutions need to be considered in order to understand whether non-state actors, here social movements, undermine or complement the state. Pfeilschifter et al. (2020, p. 4) argue the weaker the statehood the more important is self-organization, for instance in social movements. Thus, in order to understand the relationship between RTC and the city, we need to explore the activism of RTC and the context of weak statehood.

3. Weak Statehood in South Africa and the Challenge of Housing

South Africa's democracy has been challenged in recent years by economic, social, and political problems under the presidency (since 2018) of the African National Congress leader Cyril Ramaphosa. Economic stagnation since the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009, growing inequality, corruption, and increasing social problems are intertwined, leading to the highest Gini coefficient in the world (World Population Review, 2023). While the state is inherently stable and not threatened in its existence, it is nevertheless limited in its ability to solve the interlocking problems, creating a regulatory and power gap (Schlichte, 2006). Southall (2018, pp. 246, 252–253) highlights the ambiguous legacies of the regime, which is both democratic and authoritarian. Accordingly, political loyalties around ethnicity, tribalism, and a political system favor the dominance of the ruling party, weaken the opposition, and challenge democracy. In addition, corruption has progressively emerged in recent years (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022, pp. 7–9). Due to these governance gaps, statehood can be characterized as weak. Where the regulatory gap of the state and thus its weakness becomes particularly apparent is in the area of housing. We are witnessing the weakness on two levels. First, the state cannot overcome the spatial segregation of apartheid and create sufficient housing, either at the national or the city level. During apartheid, the territory of the city was divided along ethnic lines between so-called white, black, and colored residents (black, white, and colored are used here as socially and politically constructed categories of discrimination

and racism; see Vally & Motala, 2018). The Group Areas Act of 1952 evicted all non-white citizens from the inner circle of cities, hence also from Cape Town. Groups were transferred to ethnically homogeneous townships at the periphery of the city. To date, this segregation has only been resolved to a limited extent. Non-whites still live mainly on the outskirts of the city, which makes access to politically and economically central institutions, jobs, health, and education in the city more difficult for them (Ndifuna Ukwazi, 2015, 2017). In order to overcome apartheid's segregation, the established constitution of post-apartheid South Africa guarantees the right to housing with the Social Housing Act of 1997. Implementing this act would require ensuring affordable housing, rent control, and a reorganization of cities in order to overcome spatial segregation.

However, the post-apartheid governments have failed to implement the promise of housing and the waiting lists for social housing are long. Many people have been on a waiting list for more than 20 years (Thompson, 2014). The government is aware of the lack of social housing and tried to overcome the legacy of apartheid by building more than 700,000 housing units for poor and marginalized residents between 1994 and 1997 (Dwyer & Zeilig, 2012, p. 115). However, these are not enough and the waiting lists for social housing units are growing: "You find a government realizing that they are not able to give everybody a free house….There is not sufficient money to provide free house" (interview, September 4, 2018). In 2020, the number of housing units needed in Western Cape was 365,000 (Hendricks & Hadebe, 2020). There are manifold reasons for the state's inability to provide housing, among them weak statehood, but also the neoliberal policy which prevents legislation on an ideological level (Goodman & Hatch, 2022). The latter in particular is the cause of a deepening of spatial segregation through processes of gentrification.

Second, 20 years after the end of apartheid, many Capetonian citizens are being confronted with a new wave of gentrification which is deepening the housing crisis. Particularly the area of Woodstock, which is close to the city center (where the economic and political midpoint is located), is challenged by gentrification caused by increasing investment in residential houses (Carls, 2016; Garside, 1993; Visser, 2002). For working-class and poor residents, who are mostly colored, the rising cost of living in Woodstock means they cannot afford to stay and have to move. The city, which allows private investment, is responsible for this development. A profound change was triggered in 2007 when the Cape Town Council designated the area as a priority development zone for urban upgrading, thus contributing to gentrification (Raymond, 2014). One RTC activist explains the causes and effects of gentrification, which values economic goals rather than social needs: "Profit is being put before humanity. It is very sad" (interview, September 10, 2018). RTC activists perceive the consequences of gentrification as being similar to apartheid segregation,

in that poor and working-class people, who are predominantly black or colored, have to move to disadvantaged areas. For this reason, some people call gentrification a new form of apartheid: "This negative apartheid which had an impact on generations. It is coming back into play, this apartheid. But it is now a financial apartheid" (interview, September 10, 2018). Due to gentrification, residents are forced to move to relocation camps, such as Wolverivier. Most relocation camps are located on the outskirts of the city and have poor infrastructure. Thus, evictees are afraid that they will lose their jobs if they move to relocation camps, because of the distance to be traveled, and that they will be excluded from political and economic life (Ndifuna Ukwazi, 2015, 2017). Consequently, many evictees refuse to move to the relocation camps and instead find shelter with their families, move into townships, or decide to live on the streets.

Thus, it is clear that the South African state in general, and the city of Cape Town in particular, is unable to solve the housing crisis, and that the crisis is exacerbated by neoliberal policies which encourage private investment. Against this background, it can be observed that citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with the state and more generally with democracy. According to the data of the Afrobarometer (2022), in the period 2016 to 2018, 30.6% of South Africans were not at all satisfied and 26.0% were not very satisfied with democracy. This discontentment is complemented by the opinion that the country is heading in the wrong direction, as a survey released in 2021 shows (von Soest, 2022, p. 4).

The housing crisis is based on two factors: on the one hand, the failure of the state to provide sufficient housing and to overcome spatial segregation, and, on the other hand, a neoliberal urban policy that increases the crisis. This has resulted in widespread mistrust of the state and its problem-solving competence, and resentment of the lack of participatory politics in the field of housing.

Citizens are increasingly organizing themselves as a result of their feeling of discontentment. RTC is a response to the growing housing crisis, aiming to "undo the legacy of a segregated and unequal apartheid city" (RTC, 2018, p. 8), and a reaction to evictions resulting from gentrification. RTC is in line with other social movements that are organized in order to draw attention to limited statehood (Alexander, 2010; Ballard, 2005). In South Africa, protesting and holding the government accountable is a legitimate, publicly visible, and usual way of initiating changes that ideally should be implemented by the state. Because there are protests practically every day, South Africa has been described as a "social movement society" (Rucht & Neidhardt, 2002). The political scientist Friedman (2018) has written in a newspaper: "If you want…change in South Africa, create a crisis—then stand by to negotiate a way out of it." Social movements arise due to the felt discontentment but also because South Africa lacks adequate participatory opportunities for citizens beyond political parties. Although it has established many formal structures for

political participation, in the form of ward committees and council or public-participation meetings such as community policy forums, they do not work effectively and do not take citizens' demands into consideration sufficiently. Plessing (2017, p. 74) comments that the participatory mechanism tends to reproduce marginalization and create distance between the citizens and the state. There is also a lack of participatory opportunities in Cape Town regarding housing. Housing activists and evictees complain that they have hardly any established platforms to interact with the city. Rather, they have to fight for the city's attention (interview, September 4, 2018). Against this background, the question arises as to which strategies RTC uses to draw attention to the housing crisis and what is the relationship between RTC and the city.

4. Reclaim the City: Activism in Relation to the City

Since 2017, RTC has addressed the housing crisis in Cape Town through various forms of activism and with the support of the non-governmental organization Ndifuna Ukwazi. Ndifuna Ukwazi is an essential partner for the development of strategy and the implementation of political action (see Section 4.1). While RTC mobilizes and integrates those affected by the housing crisis, Ndifuna Ukwazi provides the expertise, financial resources, and technical support. RTC and Ndifuna Ukwazi cooperate with each other in a complementary way (Daniel, in press). In the next sections, I analyze, on the one hand, the activism and strategic intentions of RTC vis-à-vis the city, and, on the other hand, the way RTC and the city perceive each other, in order to gain a better understanding of their relationship.

4.1. Reclaim the City Activism Between Confrontation and Complementing the City

RTC uses intermediary, demonstrative, and direct forms of protest to address the housing problem. Its aim is to put pressure on the city in as many ways as possible and show the urgency of the crisis. Its *intermediary activism* is aimed at raising awareness of the problem through lobbying in order to hold the city accountable. For instance, RTC creates awareness of the housing situation and ongoing evictions due to gentrification by regularly reporting on the fate of evictees in social media (e.g., RTC, 2019), but also in newspaper reports (e.g., Herold et al., 2020). The aim is to arouse compassion and solidarity by portraying structurally inherent injustices experienced by evictees. RTC also provides "advisory units" for residents affected by unlawful evictions. The advisory meetings provide knowledge of housing rights and legal procedures in case of eviction. RTC (predominantly through Ndifuna Ukwazi) offers emergency advice to evictees who do not have lawyers, helping to explain documents and showing how to argue in court. Not least, RTC documents unlawful evictions (together with Ndifuna Ukwazi). In such a situation, RTC records the living and working situation of the citizens and offers legal advice. Because the city has no official statistics on the number of evictions, the data collected by RTC gives an important overview of housing needs. With these forms of intermediary activism, RTC strives to transfer knowledge and support the agency of the affected residents. In some ways, this activism can be perceived as complementary to the city because RTC invokes and promotes the constitutional right to social housing. However, it also unpacks the weakness of the state and raises awareness of the housing crisis. With this framing, RTC creates understanding for the affected citizens. RTC creates a counter-narrative and disarms the dominating discourses of the city on housing and upgrading through gentrification. However, this intermediary activism is not confrontational but tries to hold the government accountable. One result is increasing critical reflection on the city, with RTC establishing itself as an actor that is close to the citizens, understanding them and thus gaining support.

While in intermediary protests the pressure is exerted indirectly and does not take place through direct interaction with the city, RTC also uses the strategy *of demonstrative activism*. Demonstrative activism has the aim of directly persuading the city to create solutions to the housing problem. For instance, RTC (together with Ndifuna Ukwazi's lawyers) intervenes in the sale of land in order to ensure social housing. One of the most prominent interventions was the Tafelberg Campaign. Ndifuna Ukwazi's lawyers brought a review application to the Western Cape High Court, arguing that both the province and the city had failed in their constitutional obligations to address spatial apartheid. RTC finally ensured that social housing units were part of the sale contract. RTC also uses demonstrations in order to perform their resistance to housing policies. All these forms of demonstrative activism reveal the failure of the state to a broader public and exert pressure for change. Although demonstrative activism is more confrontative, the atmosphere between the opponents is predominantly cooperative, and sometimes appreciative, expressing recognition that RTC is demanding a constitutional right.

While these actions point out the weaknesses (but also the unwillingness) of the city, and call on it to act, they are not necessarily perceived as confrontational by the city. In fact, as shown above, in some cases they are welcomed. This is in contrast to the city's attitude toward *direct activism* in the form of illegal occupation. RTC has occupied three vacant buildings. The largest is the Woodstock Hospital. The occupation as an act of peaceful civil disobedience symbolizes resistance, the "right to the city," and the expansion of legal spaces to generate publicity and political pressure (Hayes & Ollitrault, 2019). Not least, the occupation offers shelter to people who have been evicted from their homes and is itself the solution to the need for housing which the city is not able to provide. Thus, the occupation is an expression of a lack of trust in the institutions of the weak state and its ability to solve problems.

Occupation is publicly effective, but, in the case of the Woodstock occupation, it requires internal self-governance in combination with self-organization to regulate everyday life for more than 800 people. Self-organization is an informal action that regulates itself beyond formal political institutions (Lauth, 2014, p. 20) through norms, values, and collective practices with the aim of routinizing and legitimizing them (Neubert, 2021). RTC's self-organization and self-governance are based on a self-given constitution (RTC, 2019) which is in line with the law, and with widespread moral and social norms (Daniel, 2022). Based on formal rules, the constitution regulates political activism and the structure of RTC. Informal rules are used to organize daily life in the occupation. They address the duties of the occupiers, social interactions, and the care of the building, and guarantee security by preventing criminal behavior such as drug abuse, theft, vandalism, fraud, or sexual harassment. Violations can result in exclusion from the occupation. However, in the field of security, RTC complements the executive power of the city: RTC is responsible for safety in matters that are not covered by formal legislation, but the police are called in cases of violation of the legal order. In addition, the city exerts its executive power and retains control over the occupation by guarding the entrance to it (Jones, 2019). Thus, RTC and the city complement each other: While the city controls access and the number of occupiers, RTC provides security within the building through house rules (Daniel, 2022, in press). Consequently, RTC enforces the law and creates a social order that regulates everyday life. Even if it does not always succeed in preventing vandalism, theft, and drug abuse, RTC creates informal rules as "islands of order" (Neubert, 2009, p. 54).

Two aspects are important for understanding the occupation and its relation to the state. On the one hand, the occupation contradicts the phenomenon of autonomous municipalism, because RTC is not independent of the city but cooperates with it in the field of security. Second, in the need to create security through a combination of self-organization and police and government guards, the specific context of South Africa becomes apparent, in which security is dependent on self-organization, due to the omnipresence of criminality and the culture of violence (Duncan, 2016). Not least, the culture of violence is another dimension of the weak state, namely the restricted ability to provide security in public spaces.

This analysis of RTC's activism shows the complexity of the relationship between RTC and the city. On the one hand, the occupation is a radical act of resistance. On the other hand, it is a place of self-organization, which is complementary to the city as it provides shelter for the needy and cooperates with it in the field of security. However, a fundamental tension remains because occupation is a form of civil disobedience and an act of refusal to recognize authority (Hayes & Ollitrault, 2019). Moreover, RTC has not been able to create permanent structures of political participation, unlike the social movements frequently discussed under the notion of new municipalism. Rather, its strategy is to use intermediary, demonstrative, and direct forms of activism in order to provoke recognition of the problem and put pressure on the authorities, as well as to claim spaces for political participation that are not sufficiently available in South Africa.

4.2. Relationship Between Reclaim the City and the City: Mutual Perception

As shown above, RTC uses different kinds of activism to address the housing crisis. It stresses the right to social housing as a constitutional right through political education and lobbying (intermediary activism) and puts pressure on the city through lawsuits and marches (demonstrative activism). Not least, RTC contests the city symbolically by practicing occupation as an act of civil disobedience (direct activism) and contributes significantly to the self-organization of people affected by eviction, offering solutions that the city is not able to provide, and creating its own order within the occupation. So how do RTC and the city perceive each other?

Among RTC activists, the dominant opinion is that the city is acting too slowly and not taking the problem seriously enough. RTC activists underline that "the city of Cape Town is not addressing the housing crisis with enough urgency…only one out of 11 planned affordable-housing projects announced five years ago is complete" (Human, 2022). The fact that a rent-control policy was rejected by the ruling Democratic Alliance party is interpreted as unwillingness to end the housing crisis and thus gentrification (Hendricks & Hadebe, 2020). RTC thus holds the city accountable, and, in addition, creates spaces of interaction with the city, since, as described above, there are spaces for dialogue. The activists emphasize positively that RTC has forced dialogue with the city: "For the first time now we have direct interaction between the city and the evictees" (interview A, September 5, 2018). They perceive that RTC is increasingly recognized by the city. Thus, RTC has created a positive political resonance. This positive response is also evident in the fact that the city has not put an end to the occupation. Rather, the city has decided to control it by not allowing new admissions, providing security, and supplying electricity and water (at the city's expense). In addition, RTC has shown its problem-solving capacity by providing shelter for evictees and those who are in need. Many occupiers share the experience of eviction and the feeling of being abandoned by the city. For instance, an evicted mother of three children, argues that she trusts RTC more than the city, because RTC, and not the city, was able to solve her problems (interview C, September 5, 2018). Thus, the occupation is not only a tactic to put pressure on the city but also a way of enacting the desire for a home and a contribution to relieving the housing crisis. In public, RTC is perceived as preserving people's dignity because they do not have

to move to relocation camps or townships (Hendricks & Hadebe, 2020). Moreover, political parties have scrambled to profit from RTC's success: Some scholars argue that the governing party, Democratic Alliance, accepts the occupation only because it tries to recruit voters among the poor and the working class (Wingfield, 2019, p. 43). This leads one RTC activist to say: "A lot of political parties, they never thought that these things will work that we are doing….But now they take us seriously" (interview A, September 5, 2018). This shows that RTC has established itself as a credible actor in the political arena of housing.

The city's attitude toward RTC is ambivalent. On the one hand, the city recognizes that RTC is providing a welfare service. However, this legitimizes RTC and contributes to delegitimizing the city. On the other hand, RTC's legitimacy is repeatedly questioned because it cannot entirely prevent cases of drug abuse or other forms of criminality among the occupiers (cf. Bowers Du Toit, 2014; Daniels & Adams, 2010). The city uses a strategy of criminalization to discredit RTC. In a newspaper article, Councillor Malusi Booi, Mayoral Committee Member for Human Settlements, states that "the unlawful Reclaim the City occupation campaign is one of the biggest obstacles to the building of social housing" and is a "destructive and desperate attempt to unlawfully appoint themselves as gatekeeper and arbiter of these properties" (Booi, 2020). In other words, the city's opinion is that the occupation "cannot be equated with activism, and cannot be condoned" (City of Cape Town, 2021). Booi also accuses RTC of violence and criminality and of delaying the construction of social housing (Booi, 2020). In line with the city's hostile attitude, there have been increasing police raids and attempts to prosecute occupiers. One raid was carried out in February 2022 with more than 500 police officers. The police confiscated 38 stolen revolvers, 672 mandrax tablets, and 114 g of cocaine (Damons, 2021). Recently the city passed a regulation to punish civil disobedience and facilitate eviction (for instance of the RTC occupiers; see City of Cape Town, 2021). In order to counter RTC and its commitment, the city emphasizes its efforts to provide social housing units, as well as repeatedly pointing out that social housing is complex and therefore takes time (City of Cape Town, 2021). This shows that the city follows a strategy of checks and balances: Since eviction would contribute significantly to the delegitimization of the city and deepen the housing problem, they control the occupation and criminalize it in order to gain legitimacy and to be able to evict the occupiers in the future without delegitimizing itself.

RTC defends itself against this criminalization and emphasizes that the activists are not more criminal than other citizens. The activists argue that in poor communities there is a fundamental drug and security problem, which is not sufficiently addressed by the city. RTC tries to restore the image of the occupation by pointing out that the occupiers are victims of the city's policies on gentrification (Hendricks & Hadebe, 2020).

The ways in which RTC and the city perceive each other show that there are indeed levels of complementarity in action, but that each actor struggles for recognition by trying to delegitimize the other. The city is keen to demonstrate that its weakness does not exist *per se*, although it is aware of its regulatory gaps regarding housing. The exploration of the relationship between RTC and the city, which is a struggle for legitimacy and recognition, shows that RTC has to continuously fight for spaces of interaction with the city. This points to the specific context of South Africa, where the lack of channels for political participation makes protest an everyday phenomenon. Due to the latter, South Africa is being called the "protest capital of the world" (Runciman, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The above analysis of the relationship between RTC and the state has shown that the South African state is not weak at all levels, but clearly weak in the housing sector and the provision of security in urban areas. The lack of opportunities for participation and the related low representation of the housing issue in formal political arenas can also be interpreted as a regulatory gap. The government's neoliberal policies lead to gentrification and reinforce the housing problem. The weakness of the state is the reason for self-organization as a social movement and creates spaces in which RTC can establish itself as a legitimate civil society actor.

As a result of RTC's different forms of activism—direct, demonstrative, and intermediary—and its persistence for more than five years, it has become recognized as a credible civil society actor that is able to complement the city by providing shelter for the needy. RTC is not about questioning the city in principle, but about uncovering gaps in the provision of services, with the expectation that the city will fill these gaps. In the Woodstock occupation, RTC has established formal and informal rules which are in line with the laws. Here, the activities of the city and RTC are complementary. The relationship between RTC and the city depends on the strategic orientation of the activism and the area to be regulated. Above all, the city tolerates activism in those regulatory areas in which it recognizes its own weakness. However, this does not mean that the actors in the public and political sphere do not act as opponents. On the contrary: RTC and the city gain legitimacy by delegitimizing the respective other. RTC also tries to build alliances and struggles for participatory spaces, which are very rare. The city tolerates, controls, and tries to delegitimize RTC. The city uses a strategy of checks and balances through which the occupation is recognized and controlled, knowing that eviction would involve greater costs than benefits, and would affect the city's reputation among the local population. Whether the RTC occupiers will eventually be evicted is an open question: their eviction would prove the authority of the city, but it could also unite and solidarize angry citizens who are victims of gentrification

and insufficient housing policies. In this respect, the relationship between RTC and the city is constantly being re-examined: Where possible, space is given to RTC to articulate its demands and to behave cooperatively, without delegitimizing the city; at the same time, action is taken against RTC in order to demonstrate the city's authority, prevent further illegal occupations, and save face in the housing crisis. In other words, the relationship between RTC and the city is not static, but dynamic.

In order to understand the relationship between the social movement and the weak state, the complex and processual nature of this interaction must be considered. RTC does not constitute itself as classic activism as discussed in the context of the new municipalism debate. Rather, the interaction between RTC and the city has not yet been consolidated and no new forms of political interaction have emerged. Thus, the relationship between the state and the social movement is not necessarily emancipatory, as suggested with regard to new municipalism (Agustin, 2020). In addition, the RTC occupation cannot be seen as autonomist municipalism either, because RTC has no alternative regulatory structures. When analyzing the relationship between the city and social movements, the specific context must be taken into account. In the case of South Africa, this means the weakness of the state and its regulatory gaps (housing but also security), the lack of opportunities for political participation, and the need to consider security as an element of self-organization. A stable relationship that includes RTC and state actors at the local level can certainly be understood as a convincing liaison in the context of weak statehood, whereby the stability is not only based on complementary functional achievements but also on a dynamic balancing of their tensions.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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