



Housing justice, mobilization, and financialization. A Conversation from the Antipode Institute for Geographies of Justice

Sonja Coquelin | Living Rent, Scotland's Tenants' Union

Joanna Kusiak | University of Cambridge

Jaime Palomera | U. Autònoma de Barcelona & La Hidra

Samuel Stein | Community Service Society of New York

in conversation with

Rae Baker | University of Cincinnati

Emanuele Belotti | Politecnico di Milano

Aysegul Can | Istanbul Medeniyet University

Elsa Noterman | Queen Mary University of London

Abstract

All authors of this Conversation participated in the 8th annual International Geographies of Justice Summer Institute (IGJ), *Housing Justice in Unequal Cities*, in Barcelona, coming from different academic and activists spaces: **Sonja Coquelin**, Living Rent, Scotland's Tenants' Union; **Joanna Kusiak**, University of Cambridge, UK; **Jaime Palomer**, U. Autònoma de Barcelona & La Hidra; **Samuel Stein**, Community Service Society of New York; **Rae Baker**, University of Cincinnati; **Emanuele Belotti**, Politecnico di Milano; **Aysegul Can**, Istanbul Medeniyet University; and **Elsa Noterman**, Queen Mary University of London. **Contact:**
baker3rl@ucmail.uc.edu
e.noterman@qmul.ac.uk
aysegul.can87@gmail.com

In June 2022, a group of activists, students, and scholars gathered in Barcelona for the 8th annual International Geographies of Justice Summer Institute (IGJ), *Housing Justice in Unequal Cities*, co-sponsored by Antipode and the UCLA Institute on Inequality and Democracy. IGJ attendees included people from within movement and activist spaces, academics, and non-profit organizations who share the common vision of working toward housing justice. This article features a collective conversation that took place with IGJ attendees who participated in a public panel discussion attended by activists, community members, and people interested in hearing from local and international panelists about the state and direction of the housing justice movements in Glasgow, Berlin, New York, and Barcelona respectively. Thematically, the conversation held among IGJ attendees to produce the following manuscript focused on the broad and interconnected pillars of housing injustice that repeatedly arose in conversation throughout our time together in Barcelona, including financialization, activism and organizing, and housing justice movements broadly speaking.

Keywords

Expropriation, housing justice, financialization

The gathering of 2022 International Geographies of Justice Summer Institute (IGJ) attendees was hosted by La Hidra Research Institute and the Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability. The goal of the IGJ is always to bring together early career scholars and graduate students to explore how our academic lives within radical practices of geography meet the current moments of struggle, uprising, and social change beyond the academy. When IGJ organizers made the decision to postpone the gathering in 2020 due to international flight restrictions and public health guidelines, the two years that preceded our eventual gathering were comprised of policies, struggles and organizing within a pandemic that required shelter-in-place protocols, mass vaccine distribution, encampment defenses (After Echo Park Lake Research Collective, 2022; Johnson, 2022), an international uprising against anti-Black racism and police brutality (Jean, 2020), windfall income losses due to business closures and layoffs, and a robust international wave of tenant organizing and mutual aid (Black et. al, 2020) and tenant organizing yet to be seen in our lifetimes. As attendees of the IGJ, the authors and interviewees of this article took part in workshops, tours of Barcelona's social centers and activist spaces, eviction defenses, and a public panel discussion. They had the invaluable privilege to learn from housing justice movements in Catalunya and to contextualize these movements within the recent and immediate moment of global financialization and activism. The IGJ brought together activists and scholars asking important questions about the roles of racism, expropriation, and movement building in relation to the politics of property and housing. By revealing how housing justice is enacted upon differently through the experiences of IGJ attendees' own activism and research and our shared time on the ground in Barcelona, the Institute presented important questions of how we may imagine and construct international solidarities, and how scholars and scholar-activists can be in alignment and service to the evolving movement for housing justice in our varied locales.

This article features a collective interview that took place with IGJ attendees who participated in a public panel discussion held in Barcelona attended by activists, community members, and people interested in hearing from local and international panelists about the state and direction of the housing justice movements in Glasgow, Berlin, New York, and Barcelona respectively. Thematically, the conversation held among IGJ attendees to produce the following manuscript focused on the broad and interconnected pillars of housing injustice that repeatedly arose in conversation throughout our time together in Barcelona, including financialization, activism and organizing, and housing justice movements broadly speaking.

Financialization

Before going into the interviews, we briefly discuss what we mean by global financialization of housing and how this term was used by the respondents/panelists as well. The takeover of the housing sector by finance opened up a new frontier for capital accumulation. Supported by mortgage securitization and the political force of homeownership ideology (Ronald, 2008), which is deeply ingrained in some societies and recently adopted in others, middle- and low-income consumers have been increasingly

included in financial circuits (Rossi, 2013); and transformed into indebted real-estate investors (Garcia-Lamarca and Kaika, 2016). Whether backed by nation states or required by international financial institutions, this push for homeownership was based on creating a bigger and stronger housing-focused financial market (Aalbers, 2008). Especially after the outbreak of the financial crisis of the late 2000s, the never-ending search for new investment spaces in real estate has also led to the gradual penetration of finance into the rental housing sectors (Fields and Uffer, 2016), including large acquisitions of formerly de-commodified rental housing stocks (Wijburg & Aalbers, 2017), and increasing equity investments in so-called ‘affordable’ rental housing production by global financialized landlords (Beswick et al., 2016; August, 2020). Since the 1990s, financialization of housing increased significantly in the Global North, and the rise of the real estate sector became the main factor of urbanization in the Global South through massive urban redevelopment/regeneration projects that can exceed the neighborhood scale, expanding spaces of gentrification and gentrification-led displacement (Lees et al., 2015).

Consequently, access to adequate housing has been significantly impacted by this commodification and financialization of housing and the rising use of home as an investment asset in the global financial market (Forrest, 2008). The concept of housing as a public good that should be distributed equally as a resource has been overshadowed by belief among policymakers that the market can regulate the allocation of housing in a rational and fair manner (Rolnik, 2013; 2019). In that regard, housing as a pathway to financial security and wealth creation has taken the central role in recent urban political economy.

Organizing Housing Justice

While struggles for affordable, good quality housing are not new, the global financialization of housing has increasingly led even the ‘average citizen’ to get organized against housing injustice. This trend has been underlined during the global pandemic as many deprived households around the world have paid the price of decades of deregulation and financialization of housing through their inability to pay constantly rising rents, being evicted or at risk of eviction during the exceedingly vulnerable time of the COVID-19 pandemic, and losing their ability to ‘shelter in place’ (RHJ Editorial Collective, 2020).

During the IGJ week in Barcelona, there were many discussions around organizing housing justice movements. One recurring concern from the scholars and activists involved was how to create a more global and transnational network for housing justice movements. Local level housing justice activism usually holds the danger of not being able to garner enough momentum to affect the political dynamics at the macro level in a meaningful way. Barcelona’s Platform for Mortgage Affected People and Berlin’s DWE- Deutsche Wohnen Enteignen! (Deutsche Wohnen *Expropriate!*) shared their experience on how to turn the initial anger and discontent of the politically alienated and marginalized groups of people into hope and political mobilization. The inspiration these discussions can give to housing justice movements has motivated us to convey some of their salient aspects to a wider audience. Although expressing personal ideas that do not necessarily reflect their groups’ political

positions, responses from IGJ participants expressed in the following conversation have the value to embody a privileged viewpoint halfway between academia and activism.

Brief introductions of interviewees: biographical information

The scholars and activists featured in the following interview were attendees of the Institute for Geographies of Justice, and took part in a well-attended public panel during the IGJ week in Barcelona titled *Habitatge: Regular o Expropiar? Berlin, New York, Glasgow, Barcelona Respond*, a live recording of which can be viewed on the Antipode Foundation YouTube webpage. Samuel Stein lives in New York City, is the author of *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* (2019), and works at the Community Service Society of New York. Joanna Kusiak is a sociologist at the University of Cambridge and a Humboldt visiting fellow at Georg-Simmer-Center for Metropolitan Studies in Berlin. She is also an activist with *Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen*. Jaime Palomera lives in Barcelona and is a spokesperson and co-founder of the Barcelona Tenants Union, and as an economic anthropologist he is a senior researcher and coordinator of the Housing Department at *La Hidra - Urban Research Institute*. Sonja Coquelin of Glasgow is a member and organizer with Living Rent, Scotland's Tenants' Union that focuses on mass-membership organization of low- and middle-income renters, fighting together to win concrete improvements to the daily lives of renters.

* * *

During and after the 2008 mortgage crisis, we have seen how this agenda to increase homeownership as a way to secure one's financial future and well-being has had deleterious consequences. Given that this push for homeownership is still present, what do you think is the reason behind pushing forward such a policy?

Joanna: I think it's definitely a myth that homeownership automatically increases wealth. I think if anything, it might at least temporarily increase the subjective feeling of security of a group of people who become homeowners. However, on the systemic level, it becomes much more inflexible because it freezes wealth level in a very fixed way. So, with demographic changes it becomes much harder to distribute housing resources. Around the same time, also associated with globalization, we see increased mobility within countries and internationally, we see changes in family and household models: single parents and co-living and so on. Obviously, these new models need some kind of flexibility that homeownership does not have.

Jaime: I think the reality changes depending on the country. We can affirm that in several countries, at least two generations and a vast majority of those generations accessed housing through homeownership. So, what we are seeing is that part of the last generation got into debt and lost their homes. Homeownership as a model has winners and losers and, in that sense, it is one of the keys of the neoliberal game. However, still a lot of people managed to become homeowners. I think that those two generations felt that homeownership empowered them in one way or another. It has allowed a lot of people to amass, not just ensure their right to housing, but also to have an asset that allows you to get loans and so on. But I think that right now, there is a new generation, who for the

first time, is experiencing a generalized incapacity to fulfill the homeownership dream. And I think that what we will see in the coming years is not so much a renters' generation, but something new. We are going to have people that inherit homes and maybe assets of their parents and other people that will be completely marginalized from that wealth and from that homeownership asset system.

Joanna: Speaking from the Polish experience, I can say that after the neoliberal shock therapy some cities became the cities of capital and some cities were dispossessed and deindustrialized. If you put privatization on top of it, it fixes such regional differences. It makes so much difference if your parents own an apartment in Warsaw or exactly the same apartment in a small town that just lost all of its industry. Paradoxically, neoliberalism brings centralization, it means all the best jobs will tend to be in capital cities where all the young labour would need to migrate. So even if they inherit housing in a small town, this would never get them in a place where housing is needed. As a last thing, I think that the whole homeownership system creates a much bigger hurdle. What I mean is that it is much harder to get one flat or house when you have zero than to get 20 or 40 flats when you have already 15. So, really, the whole system promotes accumulation of wealth and structurally disempowers those who do not have an asset to begin with.

Sonja: In the UK, it has been very much a homeowners' nation which started with Thatcher's 'right to buy' policy. It was like you are living in a council estate (social housing in the UK) and now you can buy your property for nothing. Then you buy into this logic that this is an asset. However what happens now is that when you go into a block of housing, there are private tenants, social tenants and homeowners. They say there are no working-class homeowners, but it is not true because these people have nothing else. The problem is that now our generation has no access. Now you need to be wealthy or you need to inherit money to put a deposit on a house, and everyone has the mindset that we need to buy and that is the only way to get security. There is still a lot of hype about 'the property ladder' in British society. And the point we are trying to make as a movement is that homeownership should not be the only way. Why can rent not be seen as security?

Samuel: From a US perspective, we are seeing the rise of a new asset-based class structure, where the rate of profitability in productive industries is falling as the rate of profitability in capital gains (or just the money you make off of owning a thing) is rising. There are a number of people who depend on homeownership to create and keep their wealth. And that bubble is getting bigger, which creates even more disparity between those who own and those who do not. There is this asset class that can do more and more by mortgaging and leveraging the assets that they own. The thing is that this is always deeply unequal and in the US context, often racially unequal. So you end up getting what Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor calls predatory inclusion, where the state encourages the move into homeownership, but then treats the poor and Black homeowners extremely differently from relatively wealthy and white ones. These homeowners are then exposed to a great amount of vulnerability to eviction and foreclosure; however, at the same time, middle-

or upper-class white people can access this and see a tremendous boom in their property values.

Since the 2000s, a burgeoning scholarship has drawn attention to rental housing as a new frontier for finance. This shift towards so-called ‘affordable rental housing’ reflects the increasing pervasiveness of finance into the housing systems, but might also be the result of decreasing profit margins in other real estate investment spaces. Based on your experience, what is your perception of this?

Samuel: The capitalists know that not every place will be equally profitable at all times. If you invest globally, both in terms of sector and in terms of geography, you are hedging your investment positions. In New York City, during the pandemic, we saw some of the biggest developers buying into what is called Project-Based Section 8, which is government subsidized housing where the tenants pay 30 per cent of the rent, and the government pays the difference between that and the typical market rate. The firm Related, which, just a few years ago, built Hudson Yards – which they claim is the largest private real-estate project in the world – is now investing in Project-Based Section 8 housing, because the profit margins in other sectors are going down. Related started to act that way in the 1970s, another time of precarity for residential investors, and has maintained ownership of affordable housing as a backstop since then, so that, whenever the private market is rough, the affordable market always pays. The same developer that is building the most expensive private housing is also the private backer of government housing, and this is a way of managing risk over a very long period. But this is also a form of monopolization, which can put the people who live in any of those areas under a great degree of threat, and a hugely uneven power between that investor, and people who live there.

Joanna: Similar things are happening in Germany. Some of these big financialized companies are buying housing that, on the surface, looks not attractive, like prefab housing in Halle, which has become refugee housing because the government subsidizes the rents. So, it is also a way they catch government money, which is a very stable and steady income. We can observe this kind of capital creativity in many different ways, squeezing profits even in places that appear to have no money. So, in some sense, whenever the costs are rising, you can expect more brutality in seeking income, not less.

Given the increasing financialization of housing as a global phenomenon and the growing role of international investors in housing markets, what models of international organizing for housing justice have you used, or can you imagine?

Joanna: I think we need to build a common discourse to differentiate between financialized speculative property and user-based property – or anything that is [owned or] co-owned by people who are actually living there. I think the dominant discourse of property [ownership] versus rental fractures our movement and plays into the big actors who,

whenever there's some organizing happening, can conveniently scare a significant portion of the middle-class that someone is going to take away their apartment. At the same time, financial players are expropriating the public in many different ways. I think in all the localities we see the same thing, that under the motto of investors bringing in money, the investors are taking money away. And that's exactly what financialized rent is. If I think about Berlin, the point is that our money, the money from our salaries that we pay into rent, is not even circulating in Berlin's economy, it's going directly to tax havens or to New York or London. Then the subsidies that the government is putting [towards] rents of refugees or poor people are also leaving the local economy through financialized rents. So, it's draining of individual people, but it's also draining of whole economies for a very small bunch of big global corporations that profit from it.

I think this is the type of discourse where we can mobilize across different social classes—it is more like 99 per cent against one per cent, because within this 99 per cent there's a spectrum of small homeowners, renters, homeowners, unhoused people, but also across political spectrum. You don't even need to be anti-capitalist to see that it damages your own local economy. You can see this problem in housing, but also you can see it on the level of small businesses. The small cafes or traditional restaurants are disappearing and being replaced by Starbucks. So, I see a big potential of mobilization, especially if we get unstuck from the old discourse and see the new game is really between speculative property and users' property. And I think especially this notion of users is something that across generations people can relate to, and it could become a tool of new mobilization and of reclaiming.

Jaime: Here in Barcelona there's a Catalan tenants' union with 15 chapters. We say we can organize at the Catalan level, but Spanish law has a huge effect on our bargaining power. I think we have to organize locally, and inter-locally at all levels. Recently, we were at the EU Parliament with other collectives. Airbnb, Blackstone, the big corporate landlords, they dedicate a part of their time to have lobbyists in Brussels. I'm not saying that we should dedicate part of our energies to lobbying, but at least having a foot there. Our adversaries, rentier capitalists, use some of their time to get together and do their own form of activism. Here in Spain they're very active. When we managed to pass rent control in Catalonia, which is a form of rent control that not only limits but forces prices to go down, they got crazy and said, we cannot let this happen at the Spanish level. So, they started creating associations. They can see very clearly that it's strategic to have people at the National Congress and EU level, and they use much less resources for putting pressure on municipal governments or regional governments because they know that at the end of the day, in Spain, it's the constitutional courts that really decide. But when I say organizing on a European scale, or European-US scale, it's about [being] pragmatic. Sometimes, because we know the importance of community building at the local level, it's hard for us to do the other thing that sounds boring, but it's so strategic. I think that changing things at the EU level, in terms of the directives, etc., can give us a lot of power on the local level and can give us more tools to achieve things.

Finally, there's another way I think of organizing, which is much more modest, and perhaps links better to the kinds of practices that we're already involved in—it's organizing around specific conflicts. A few years ago, Blackstone tried to mass-evict a whole community in Barcelona. They had bought a building and wanted to evict all the tenants. And so, the neighborhood union organized an amazing resistance. The tenants' union allied with them. One of the things we did was to get in touch with tenant unions and other housing organizations across Europe, and we asked them to go to Blackstone's headquarters in their city. In some cases, it was just five people [that turned up], in other cases 25. But imagine the effect: Blackstone's headquarters in Europe are in London, and the London office called the Blackstone office in Spain to say, just get rid of that building, sell it to the City Hall, we want this madness to stop, because it's giving us a very bad image! It's a way of building a community, empowering yourself with others, but also having an impact on an international level.

For people who are not homeowners, some renters will intentionally rent a two bedroom apartment for the purpose of renting out the second room to completely cover the cost of the rent and also to generate a second form of income, as well. Some people will become homeowners in order to leverage their property toward new financial relationships, like car ownership or starting a new business. People in both these situations are using their relationship to housing to leverage other financial possibilities for individual gain, but they're not landlords. How can housing justice movements grow our base and also bring people in who may be in these positions of leveraging their housing to increase their individual stability?

Joanna: I think the housing movement's aim is to not allow ourselves to be divided. This is a moment to be as broad a coalition as possible, because we are speaking about the enemy that is more powerful than many states at the moment, namely global corporations. You look [at] who voted in our expropriation referendum in Berlin, these were people from across the political spectrum, including people that I would personally not back politically, but I appreciate their support because we wouldn't have won without them. We had people from the FDP (a neoliberal party) voting along with us. Housing is not about political identities, it's about material conditions of living, and in Berlin over 80 per cent of people are tenants. The material position of being a tenant is shared by many different identities.

Jaime: Very often, people who organize in movements and organizations tend to think that fighting for a change in a law or a public policy is going to be detrimental to the growth of the movement. That's very common in many places, Barcelona is not an exception. Barcelona has a long anarchist, autonomist, and post-*operaista* tradition. We've had to fight a lot internally to convince people that it made sense to change laws and to draft new policy from within the movement. Many people have always had doubts about that strategy. But the truth is, that every time we've changed the law, the union has grown. Because when you manage to change a law, or, enact a new public policy, that's the crystallization of many struggles. How did we get this rent control law for a year and a

half? Well, through four years of civil disobedience. We had 2000 households disobeying the Spanish rental law, staying home when they were being told to leave, facing the courts, etc. Those laws do not demobilize people. On the contrary, all of a sudden, you have a tool, you have more rights. [L]aws help you organize because you have a judicial court system that is not interested in enforcing those laws. We have a problem not just with the legislature, at the state level, but also with the whole state, the police, the court system, etc. and organizing to enforce those laws.

Joanna: The law still demands politics; it is not a technical thing you want to change. However, a good law is always a win. The law we have been using that enabled the referendum in Berlin was legislated as part of the German Constitution that was written in 1949. We were the first ones to use it for popular mobilization. Of course, the legislators who fought for Art. 15 in 1949 never experienced the fruit of their labor. Paradoxically, because law has such a conservative character and changes super slowly, it can become weirdly progressive in the context of rampant neoliberalism. The neoliberal shift is so quick that the law from 1949, which never changed, protects a certain vision of [the] social state that we do not have anymore. All of a sudden, the conservative character of the law becomes progressive in this current context. From the perspective of Berlin, the fact that we could leverage the German constitution definitely gave us popular legitimacy, which will be very hard to build around such a radical cause.

Sonja: We talk about accumulating power, but sometimes people need to realize their own power. Yes, it is good that there are some people drafting these laws, and I do agree that we need to be able to do that. But those small victories that keep people involved also matter, like the local campaigns, maybe [fixing] the broken window, or the streetlights. It is silly, but the streetlights have been broken for 10 years. Everybody knows that. But when we organize, we take action, we fight, and we get there, then, we are like: ‘Okay, so now what next?’

Samuel: Nothing builds a movement like showing that you can win something. Part of the work of organizers and organizations is to continue raising expectations, and to show victories as proof of concept, proof that if we organize, we can win and think about what else we want. So that’s the approach that I think can work.

What role does expropriation outside of the state have? What degree of energy or imagination do we have around exercising expropriation outside of the state?

Samuel: We can certainly think about expropriation without the state being the actor expropriating, which would be squatting, or maintaining long-term or Indigenous land, etc. But we probably still have to be thinking about the state as an actor—either the one that’s going to send the police at our door, or the one we’re going to have to defend against in court.

Jaime: In Spain, the housing movement uses the word ‘recover’ to say ‘expropriate.’ I think it explains better what we are doing, because the homes we recover belong to us. They

were given to banks, and big corporate landlords, but they should have been given to the people, because a lot of public money was used to bail all those that finally end up owning all those properties. In Spain, we have actually enacted expropriation by the people many times, recovering many buildings over the last 10 years. And the conclusion has been that we have to keep doing that, because it is a way of giving a solution to those of us that need housing now. That's a way of expropriating without the state. But, at the same time, the movement has been very smart about the fact that you also need the state to actually institutionalize these forms of expropriation. Why? Because we have not been able to build cooperative or autonomous systems outside the state capable of not only expropriating but also keeping that property within those autonomous communities, because we do not have a police system.

Joanna: We have been expropriated of the state itself, by the financial capital. So the point is that we need to own the state again. We should own what has supposedly always been ours.

Concluding thoughts

To conclude, we offer a few reflections on the themes that emerged throughout the interview and on our time in Barcelona. First, after decades of having the policy of homeownership pushed onto middle- and working-class people as the safest way to create financial security (Lowe, 2011), now we see the emergence of a new asset-based class structure (Adkins et al., 2021) and how this policy has created many more problems of housing affordability than it solved (Arundel & Ronald, 2021). Increasing land speculation in major cities and the emerging issue of inheritance are widening the gap between the 'haves and have nots' (Forrest, 2008). In parallel, finance is also threatening the ability of social and public rental housing policy to mitigate housing inequality. Since the 2000s, global financialized landlords have shown a predatory ability to extract rent even from state-subsidized rental housing for low-income tenants, thus turning what scholars have always conceived as a key driver for housing de-commodification (i.e. a redistributive mechanism for housing justice; Kemeny, 1995) into a sort of Indirect state aid for finance in times of financial crisis (Belotti, 2021).

An imperative for housing activists and scholars moving forward will be to continue to differentiate between financialized speculative property and use-based property, and the potential of doing so for building collective discourse to mobilize across political/economic divides. Not to be overlooked are the important policy and legal gains won by social movements that can become tools for deeper organizing. In addition, more individualized and material wins such as preventing an eviction or successfully withholding rents are important morale-generating moments that encourage tenants to look for more and bigger struggles to engage with. After all, tangible and felt wins within housing justice movements help retain organizers and supporters and attract more people toward these spaces of critical action. An important question to turn back toward, particularly since the resurgence of tenant organizing spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, is what can housing justice movements

accomplish with the tool of property expropriation, be it based in policy or direct action? Housing activists and scholars cannot ignore the role the state can play in seizing property; however, it is also possible that expropriation can be practiced and even accomplished without the use of state power through more radical and direct means, whatever movements may deem necessary in demands for racial justice, decolonization, and to bring the right to housing into fruition.

Second, a recurrent theme from the IGJ in Barcelona and in our conversation with Samuel, Joanna, Sonja, and Jaime is the importance of not only learning from other housing movements, but also building relationships at the inter-local, national, and international levels. These relations are built through recognition of common threats, shared tactics, and enacted solidarity. These relations help sustain our movements in the face of perpetual crises in the cultivation of shared discourse, such as differentiating between speculative property and use-based property. Further, these relations support mobilizing across political and economic divides. How we organize and research across multiple scales—including national and international—given the increasingly global nature of housing markets/investments is what will make (or break) all the difference in the trajectory of the financialization of housing and movements for housing justice.

Finally, a common emphasis on the need for pragmatism emerged from this conversation—and especially from the housing movement in Barcelona and the referendum campaign for introducing rent control in Berlin, which are the only European cases in which social mobilization has led to tangible yet contrasted acquisitions. The pragmatism of the housing struggle concerns two key aspects. The first one, echoing Gramsci's concept of social bloc, refers to the necessity of expanding the alliances among disparate social segments that equally experience the effects of predatory financial practices. While access to homeownership has historically been a lever for expanding the middle-class and securing social conservative stability (Harvey, 1976), the expansion of those who could access credit due to mortgage financialization has subjected disparate social segments to similar forms of dispossession. Tenants are thus no longer the sole component of housing movements' constituencies, which could now include evicted households and homeless people, but also poor homeowners forced to immobility, indebted dwellers with both middle-class and working-class backgrounds, and even local small shopkeepers choked by debts or rents.

The second aspect concerns housing movements' tactical need to force the states' legislative action to crystalize situated victories as a means for scaling up and increasing their political power. The interviewees invite us not to ignore the persisting role played by state power in shaping societies and the question of whether and how housing movements can affect and leverage it. At the same time, while there may be pragmatic or strategic reasons to utilize state power and legal tools in the pursuit of housing justice, we are also left with the open question of how to do so without legitimizing or reifying property and carceral systems that have been used to marginalize, oppress, and differentiate people according to race and class. After all, policies and laws are not universally applied, experienced, or beneficial to everyone, and points of differentiation in these areas often reflect supremacy culture, the

financial flows of racial capitalism, and modes of spatial exclusion and criminalization. How housing movements, research, and scholarship work to overturn these structural powers through autonomous direct action or subverting them from within, critically using all available methods to actualize housing justice remains a continuously moving endpoint against which our tactics need to be carefully and creatively measured.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the activists, students, and scholars in Barcelona who made IGJ attendees feel welcome, and allowed us all to gain perspective in how housing justice movements operate, struggle, and win in Catalunya. Thank you to the IGJ public panel participants for taking part in this interview. We extend our appreciation to the Antipode Foundation, the Institute for Inequality and Democracy, and the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Network as well as the organizational roles played by Ananya Roy, Maria Kaika, Nik Heynen and Andy Kent who made the 8th annual Institute for Geographies of Justice possible.

About the participants

Sonja Coquelin is a member and organizer with Living Rent, Scotland's Tenants' Union who focuses on mass-membership organization of low- and middle-income renters, fighting to win concrete improvements to the daily lives of renters.

Joanna Kusiak is a sociologist at the University of Cambridge and a Humboldt visiting fellow at Georg-Simmer-Center for Metropolitan Studies in Berlin. She is also an activist with Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen.

Jaime Palomera is a spokesperson and co-founder of the Barcelona Tenants Union, and a senior researcher and coordinator of the Housing Department at La Hidra - Urban Research Institute.

Samuel Stein is the author of *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State* (2019), and works at the Community Service Society of New York.

Rae Baker is assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of Cincinnati, in the Education and Community Action Research doctoral program.

Emanuele Belotti is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano (Milan, Italy).

Aysegul Can is a lecturer at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Istanbul Medeniyet University.

Elsa Noterman is a lecturer in the School of Geography and a fellow at the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at Queen Mary University of London.

References

- Aalbers, M. B. (2008) The financialisation of home and the mortgage market crisis, *Competition & Change*, 12, pp. 148–166.
- Adkins, L., Cooper, M., & Konings, M. (2021) Class in the 21st century: Asset inflation and the new logic of inequality. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 53(3), pp. 548-572.
- After Echo Park Lake Research Collective (2022) Continuum of carcerality: how liberal urbanism governs homelessness. *Radical Housing Journal*, 4(1), pp. 71-94.
- Arundel, R., & Ronald, R. (2021) The false promise of homeownership: Homeowner societies in an era of declining access and rising inequality. *Urban Studies*, 58(6), pp. 1120-1140.
- August, M. (2020) The financialization of Canadian multi-family rental housing: From trailer to tower. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 42(7), pp. 975-997.
- Belotti, E. (2021) The invisible hand of the shareholding state: the financialization of Italian real-estate investment funds for social housing. *Housing Studies*, pp. 1-24.
- Beswick, J., Alexandri, G., Byrne, M., Vives-Miro, S., Fields, D., Hodkinson, S. & Janoschka, M. (2016) Speculating on London's housing future: The rise of global corporate landlords in 'post-crisis' urban landscapes, *City*, 20, pp. 321–341.
- Black, J., Chattopadhyay, S., & Chisholm R. (2020) Solidarity in times of social distancing: migrants, mutual aid, and COVID-19. *Interface*, May 2020.
- Fields, D. & Uffer, S. (2016) The financialisation of rental housing: A comparative analysis of New York City and Berlin, *Urban Studies*, 53, pp. 1486–1502.
- Forrest, R. (2008) Globalization and the housing asset rich: geographies, demographics and policy convoys. *Global Social Policy*, 8(2), pp. 167-187.
- García-Lamarca, M., & Kaika, M. (2016) 'Mortgaged lives': the biopolitics of debt and housing financialisation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41(3), pp. 313–327.
- Harvey, D. (1976) Labor, capital, and class struggle around the built environment in advanced capitalist societies. *Politics & Society*, 6(3), pp. 265-295.
- Jean, Tyra. (2020) Black Lives Matter: Police Brutality in the Era of COVID-19. *Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion: Population Health Research Brief Series*, 34. Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/lerner/34>
- Johnson, S. (2022) Marronage and Philadelphia's Housing Justice Fight. *Radical Housing Journal*, 4(1), pp. 159-XX.
- Kemeny, J. (1995) *From Public Housing to the Social Market: Rental Policy Strategies in Comparative Perspective* (London: Routledge).
- Lees, L., H. B. Shin, Lopes-Morales, E. (eds) (2015) *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement* (Bristol: Policy Press).
- Lowe, S. (2011) *The housing debate* (Bristol: Policy Press).
- RHJ Editorial Collective (2020). Covid-19 and housing struggles: The (re)making of austerity, disaster capitalism, and the no return to normal. *Radical Housing Journal* 2(1), 9–28.
- Rolnik, R. (2019) *Urban Warfare: Housing Under the Empire of Finance* (London: Verso).
- Rolnik, R. (2013) Late Neoliberalism: The Financialization of Homeownership and Housing Rights. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(3), pp. 1058–1066.
- Ronald, R. (2008) *The ideology of home ownership* (Palgrave-Macmillan, Basingstoke).
- Rossi, U. (2013) On life as a fictitious commodity: cities and the biopolitics of late neoliberalism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(3), pp. 1067–74.
- Wijburg, G., & Aalbers, M. B. (2017) The alternative financialization of the German housing market. *Housing Studies*, 32(7), pp. 968–989.