



Housing as a battlefield

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Since October 2023, we have witnessed the human and material devastation brought about by the horrific mediated genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, itself preceded by a long history of ‘urbicide’—an intentional form of urban destruction characterised by siege and denied rehabilitation (Chiodelli 2022). In his research on modern warfare and ‘domicide’ in Syria (2022), Amar Azzouz has spoken eloquently about ‘...the millions of ordinary people caught up in today’s wars—wars which have transformed streets, towns and neighbourhoods into battlefields.’ With people’s homes at the centre of these battlefields, we are witnessing the socio-spatial ruination of possible futures through rapid mass displacement and violent, deadly dispossession of land and life.

In this Editorial we draw attention to housing as a *battlefield*—an intentionally aggressive metaphor—because of the violent way people’s homes and livelihoods are being drawn into the discourse and logic of wars and conflicts all over the world in contemporary late capitalism. Such violent forms of housing dispossession occur not only under armed conflicts, but also through institutional forms of housing violations such as recurrent and forced eviction. This is not disconnected from the wider material production of housing injustice, dispossession and homelessness that the RHJ, alongside other critical journals and

networks, has sought to historicise, humanise and visibilise with a view towards liberation from, and a transformation of, these processes.

These concerns are again featured in many of the articles in this issue, such as the Long Reads by **Andrea Guida** and **Toni Adscheid**, the Conversation with **Imani Henry** or the Book Review by **Katherine Wiley**. They reflect what appears to be an unending trend towards such practices across cities and localities in the Global North and South, from Côte d'Ivoire, Canada and England to Mexico, South Africa and Argentina. The struggles of resistance that ensue between the powerful and those negatively impacted by the violence of housing dispossession are often framed as spaces of contentious, war-like conflict rather than struggles for justice. It is important to note that many of us have come to learn about these aggressions in English, a language that itself has a colonial and violent history, as pointed out by poet, essayist and novelist Ocean Vuong whose work is borne out of the intergenerational trauma and fragmentation induced by the Vietnam war and its forced displacements (see Vuong, 2019). As a journal that publishes mostly in English and is concerned with questions of translation and lexicons of struggle, we want to acknowledge how language can serve to destroy, silence and exclude, at the same time that it can 'build an architecture for our souls' (Kisner and Vuong, 2020).

The war on the Palestinian people highlights the imperative to strengthen our solidarity as an architecture of coalitional 'doing' (Olufemi, 2020), or a collective project hinged on '...a shared commitment to fighting against imperial oppression, both at home and abroad' (Salem, 2019). Words, as Vuong reminds us, are a critical part of this struggle. In setting out to feature the work of activists and radical scholars, RHJ wants to ensure that the practices, forms and variable manifestations of collective resistance and housing justice work is not only amplified but that, in and through their differences, they help underscore the connectivity across diverse settings struggling against oppression and injustice.

Along conflict, dispossession, exploitation and its housing-related implications, this issue features articles exploring the importance of international solidarity and networks in the crafting of decolonial housing futures centered on the social production of home. Such crafting requires both abstract imaginaries that challenge and resist commodified housing markets, as well as concrete conditions and strategies to promote community control over institutions and resources. Some pieces also examine, and at times challenge, previous understandings around housing frameworks, struggles and histories aiming to inform the practices and activism of today.

Structural analysis for the critique of market housing and housing liberation

Drawing attention to the role housing plays in the reproduction of labour power and capital accumulation, **Stefan Kipfer** and **Luisa Sotomayor**'s Long Read titled 'Housing beyond land rent? A critique of market housing solutionism', highlights the inability of market housing production to meet a range of social needs by underscoring the weaknesses of the housing supply argument (e.g., superficial critique of zoning and proposed alternatives). Reflecting on the recent municipal by-election in Toronto, the paper also

considers what it would take to shift course towards decommodified and decolonial housing futures.

In the Long Read ‘A structural view on housing movements: Strategic lessons from a field of contention approach’ **Ioana Florea**, **Agnes Gagyi** and **Kerstin Jacobsson** present insights gained from using a ‘structural field of contention’ method in studying housing conflicts in Hungary and Romania since 1989. Rather than emphasising specifics, the goal is to demonstrate the advantages of going beyond singular progressive movements, focusing instead on grasping the intricate ideological and structural aspects of housing disputes. Through this lens, the article aims to offer strategic insights into the politicisation of structural processes, benefiting both the understanding of housing conflicts and informing engaged research in this field.

In ‘Dismantling rentier logic: Tenants struggles in Argentina,’ RHJ editorial collective member **Ana Vilenica** coordinated a Conversation with **Moisés Quiroz** to discuss the historical and current challenges facing tenants in Argentina with **Gervasio Muñoz** from *Inquilinos Agrupados*, including the impact of dollarisation, deregulation, and its effects on renters. Muñoz highlights the crucial role of tenant organisations in advocating for housing rights amidst a looming social crisis, underlined by over twenty years of housing crisis and its imminent escalation with the recent election of Javier Milei and his proposed economic policies against tenants.

The Long Read, ‘In defense of ‘Landlord’’ looks at the semantic, practical and strategic tensions generated by landlords and landlord lobby organisations in the Anglo-American context, pushing recently to ‘rebrand’ landlords in legislation and in the media, and replace the term with others such as ‘housing provider’, ‘lessor’ or ‘property owner’. Those in favor of a rebranding argue that the term ‘landlord’ is outdated because of its feudal origins, preferring to equate the landlord-tenant relationship today to that of any ‘rational’ transactional relation between two parties buying and selling a service or good. Through a key document analysis of a variety of published sources, the author **Danielle Kerrigan** demonstrates to the contrary that this move seeks to weaken tenant power and struggles by obfuscating the antagonistic and unequal power dynamics at play and downplaying the need for legislative regulation. She argues that it is precisely this feudal connotation that makes retaining ‘landlord’ so essential, as years of successful tenant organising and campaigns continue to highlight the exploitative relationship at the core of landlord-tenant relations to this day.

In the Conversation titled ‘Tracing a long history of the Habitat International Coalition and the social production of habitat,’ **Enrique Ortiz** and **Maria Silvia Emanuelli** of the **Habitat International Coalition (HIC)** offer an in-depth look at the radical origins and development of the HIC in Latin America and their pivotal role in advocating for the right to the social production of habitat throughout the region. Their discussion highlights the possibilities for powerful housing coalitions and mutual support by architects and activists working and organizing since the sixties and seventies, and that continue today at multiple scales. Based in Mexico, they talk about the challenges related to the social production of

housing in Mexico and the need for major change that transcends isolated action for the right to home.

The advancement of community-led housing initiatives requires enabling institutional and financial conditions. In a Conversation led by RHJ editorial collective members **Camila Cociña** and **Mara Ferreri** with **Csaba Jelineka** and **Zsuzsanna Pósfai**, two members of the **MOBA collective** network discuss pioneering housing cooperatives in Central and South-Eastern Europe, we explore the social demand and financing challenges of affordable rental and cooperative housing in the region. The conversation reflects on a recent large-scale study developed by MOBA looking at how catalytic capital investment can enable the provision of affordable rental and cooperative housing in this particular region. The conversation explores the need and desire to broaden alternative housing models, the financial products that may enable an emerging affordable rental and cooperative housing sector, the history and future plans of MOBA and the importance of international solidarity and networks.

Bernadett Sebály's review of Mary N. Taylor and Noah Brehmer's book *The Commonist Horizon: Futures Beyond Capitalist Urbanization* reflects on the book's central concept of commoning as a means of community control over institutions and resources, challenging the market-based approach to housing and home. It addresses the book's five chapters, in which the authors from various countries including Serbia, the U.K., Hungary, the U.S. and Lithuania, explore crucial factors like local history, autonomy, scalability and inclusiveness in commoning, urging readers to envision a different housing economy and a transformed world.

Organising to break processes of displacement, carcerality and struggle

The Conversation 'Not one neighbour less: Temporalities of tenants organising in Mexico City' delves into the challenges faced by tenants in Mexico City, particularly in terms of displacement. It explores the development and tactics of the **06000 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio del Centro Histórico** in fighting evictions, with a special focus on the well-known Edificio Trevi, and an examination of the types of action and temporalities of organising.

Toni Adscheid's Long Read, 'The need to escape: Carceral entrapments and fugitive maneuvers amidst London's vicious housing circle' extends the work of carceral geographers and Black fugitive thinking to the realm of temporary homes through an ethnographic exploration of London's Focus E15 campaign. Shedding new theoretical light into scholarship on temporariness, displacement and homelessness, and on previous research on Focus E15, Adscheid carefully illustrates how cyclical patterns of carcerality are experienced and enacted daily within England's housing system. Three 'spaces of fugivity' enacted by Victoria Street residents and the Focus E15 campaign are then explored as the resistance to conditions of carcerality; as spatialised practices infused with collective care and mutuality that represent the possibility of refusal and fugivity within and against entrapment. A key argument is that while Blackness is reproduced and reconstructed as placeless through the

continuous, legalised maneuvers of permanent forced mobility (a process that is both racialised and gendered), it is place-*making* practices (that are often delocalised) that ‘open the possibility of life beyond prison-like housing.’

In ‘Organising enclaves under Black and Brown leadership in New York City,’ the Conversation with **Imani Henry** from **Equality for Flatbush (E4F)** sheds light on the group's grassroots activism in Brooklyn, particularly its anti-gentrification and anti-police violence efforts since its founding in 2013. The discussion highlights E4F's response to evictions of Black families, its involvement in cop-watching inspired by the Black Panther Party, and broader initiatives like pandemic-related food distribution, all underlining the critical role of race in housing and the significance of community-led resistance and leadership.

‘Dialogical devices and political possibilities of art: Occupy, inhabit, resist’ is a Conversation with Mexico-based interdisciplinary artist **Sandra Calvo**, whose work is situated at the intersection of art and struggles for home and territory. Sandra Calvo talks about how she uses art to accompany communities in struggle in Colombia and Mexico, and the importance of listening and dialogue in rejecting extractivist and dispossession projects and of defending the right to inhabit a house or a territory.

Retrospection, introspection, lived experiences: Getting deeper into housing

Struggles against housing rights violations take different shapes, and in some cases require rethinking what is often considered radical. In his article titled ‘What is radical? Silent and noisy intersections in Abidjan’s struggles against housing precarity’, **Andrea Guida** explores the different forms that ‘radical’ housing resistance might take, particularly for residents of informal settlements facing threats of eviction. Focusing on concrete experiences of contemporary eviction programmes in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, the article offers an invitation to develop a more nuanced reading of the concept of radicality, looking at the perception and subjectivities of those involved in the housing struggle against oppressive actions.

Similarly, while Nordic countries are often held up as housing and environmental utopias, the Conversation by the Danish and Swedish researcher-activist collective **Aktion Arkiv** tells a different story in the Conversation ‘You can simply say no’. Using the contemporary history methodology called ‘witness seminars’, the authors (**Sara Brolund de Carvalho, Maryam Fanni, Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, Jennifer Mack, Helena Mattsson, Svava Riesto and Meike Schalk**) share the narratives of residents responding to, fighting against and reimagining current housing policies in Copenhagen and Stockholm. The narratives offer insights into the ‘affects and effects’ of recent housing policies, which—echoing processes we see globally—ultimately lead to the expulsion of racialised and low income long-term residents in the name of urban renewal. Residents’ stories also show how people navigate highly precarious housing situations, form new alliances, ways of working together and processes of urban care, and push professionals like architects and planners in terms of how they collaborate with—or resist—new policies.

Two of the journal editorial collective members, **Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia** and **Mara Ferreri**, were lucky enough to speak with Professor Emeritus (UCLA) **Allan Heskin** as a Conversation piece in this issue. In addition to his important legacy within the sphere of urban planning scholarship, Allan's life has been characterised by an ongoing commitment to housing organising and community advocacy. Thus, his knowledge about the development of housing cooperatives in Los Angeles is something we wanted to capture as an oral history of sorts. His vivid stories talk to the lessons learned from working collectively as 'a fellow traveler of organizers' in a deeply multicultural Los Angeles setting. Allan's praxis is also a vibrant example of the academic-activist nexus this journal was designed to feature and amplify. Conversations like this one seek to critically document and preserve the varied histories of housing justice organising as they are taking place now, and in the past.

Samuel Begum's review of the book titled *From Sylhet to Spitalfields*, penned by Shaban Begum, describes it as an activist archiving of Bengali squatters in the 1970s who drew on their own history as part of their direct action and vigilantism, negotiating the hostility and violence of East End London. It further notes how the book addresses silences in urban and radical histories, acting as a community archival source for ongoing actions and as a powerful tool for unsettling and reshaping urban spaces.

Katherine Wiley's review of Zachary Levenson's book *Delivery as dispossession: Land occupation and eviction in the postapartheid city* (2022) shows how a Gramscian approach to evictions in two of Cape Town's informal settlements, Siqualo and Kapteinsklip, considers '...a more relational framework of the co-constructed perceptions, organizational formations, and actions taken by the occupations and the state.' This co-relational perspective challenges prior understandings of the underlying motivations driving evictions and shows how in a distributive democracy, like South Africa's, new logics of post-apartheid dispossession were generated. Wiley argues that Levenson's lens of co-relationality can inform our understanding of other global cases, including how the right to housing gets weaponised in places like the United States.

Conclusions

As a *radical* housing journal and collective of authors, activists and practitioners from around the globe, we are reminded by the contributions to this issue of the urgent necessity to remain critical of dominant practices and concepts, even within our activist and organising spaces. This is perhaps even more salient around scholarly and methodological conversations. Housing struggles around the globe are multiple and varied. They are exacerbated by war, conflict, global crises and the current stage of imperial and neoliberal exploitation. Yet, the solidarity and networks that arise from struggle give us hope that alternate housing imaginaries are possible. It is also our hope that, while limited, our efforts to elevate and provide a platform for such acts of resistance can contribute to the materialisation of more just housing futures.

In synthesising these diverse perspectives and case studies from Mexico City, Buenos Aires, London, New York City and beyond, this collection of conversations and analyses

offers a rich tapestry of resistance, community activism and creative strategies against displacement, carcerality and housing crises. Each example underscores the importance of localised, community-driven responses to these global challenges. At the same time, through the introduction of these struggles, the reader is sometimes left perplexed given how even when the right to housing is achieved, this same right becomes a tool for confining and trapping working-class residents in a perpetual state of temporariness.

From Kipfer and Sotomayor's incisive critique of market solutionism to Florea, Gagyí, and Jacobsson's structural field of contention method, each piece contributes significantly to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of housing issues. Critically, in this issue, some of the pieces highlight the importance of diverse methodologies in dissecting these issues, providing strategic insights and fostering engaged scholarship and activism in pursuit of equitable and sustainable housing solutions.

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