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RADICALHOUSINGJOURNAL

# Editorial:
# The renewed 'crisis':
## Housing struggle before and after the pandemic

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The *Issue 2.1* Editorial Collective has been hit by surprise by the Covid-19 pandemic in many complex ways. Handling our everyday lives in new circumstances has temporarily limited our capacities to deal with this issue of the RHJ, as the emergency demanded a new intensity in practising care and mutual aid. For some of us, the quarantine work-from-home arrangements intersected with disruptions in established childcare and school arrangements or new care arrangements for family members, neighbours and friends, and for others, with urgent solidarity work within our activist collectives. After taking time to acknowledge the rupture, we decided to go forward with the issue as a way of joining the urgent discussion about the present and future of housing that has recently come into focus in an unprecedented way. With this issue, we want to bring past experiences of struggle into the present as a basis for rethinking the housing doomsday machine that we got stuck with while trying to handle the pandemic and disastrous national quarantine management.

Together with the articles reflecting on the past experiences of housing struggles that we had already been working on with authors over the past year, we opened this issue up for urgent collective discussions about the present and the post-pandemic futures of housing and home. The latter took the form of specific *Conversations* and *Updates* (see the interview with Raquel Rolnik and the communiqué from Los Angeles, among others), but crucially also of the first paper by the RHJ Editorial Collective itself, titled 'Covid-19 and housing struggles: The (re)makings of austerity, disaster capitalism, and the no return to normal'. In this timely issue, these contributions compiled together speak to the need to grasp the

present moment and create new forms of interconnected critique and local and international solidarity. All the pieces acknowledge inequality as the grounds for this crisis and underline the importance of old and new housing movements in the struggle for a just society in which everyone is able to go home and feel safe.

## The content of this issue

*Issue 2.1* can be thematically organized around four main axes, cutting across several geographies and histories: *responses to the pandemic, asylum and shelter*, *emergent fronts for housing struggle*, and *spaces of possibility*. In what follows we present them, before concluding with a short summary of what is next for the RHJ.

### Responses to the pandemic

As said, we open this issue with the first collectively written article by the RHJ Editors. In it, the Editorial Collective reflects on the question of what it means to talk of 'radical housing' in the current context, as well as on the duplicitous nature of quarantine politics and its significance for (re)newed austerity. The article tries to identify new changes for housing campaigners and explores how mutual aid and solidarity, long practiced by marginalized communities, has risen to renewed prominence as a source of lessons for collective survival. As an expression of a will to not return to normal, the article also reminds readers of the lessons from disaster capitalism that we have learned in the past. In writing it, the Editorial Collective is indebted to a number of conversations that have taken place in the broader RHJ Collective, as well as in the praxis of action and research that each one of us engages in, from Mexico to Australia, to the UK, Serbia, California, Spain and beyond. We see this as a first attempt at finding a collective 'RHJ voice', as well as a way to to craft a new way of thinking and writing within the remit of a non-conventional 'academic' journal. We will experiment further, and come back to this in the near future.

For the last month, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (including RHJ members Elana and Erin) has been working on a map of tenant protections and mobilizations, particularly rent strikes, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the map was initially made with a US focus, the AEMP collective has expanded it to an international scale, given the global scope of tenant protections and rent strikes in the current moment. Working in partnership with groups including the Mapping Action Collective, Bay Area Rent Strike, Tenants Together, kollektiv orangotango, and more, and with ample encouragement from the RHJ, the Tenant Solidarity Network, and Right To The City Alliance, the map crowdsources and codes data to show the relative strength and weakness of tenant protections around the world. It also crowdsources rent strike data, and allows tenants to connect with other tenants going on rent strike in their respective locales. Amid the realities of social isolation, this map, published here in *Issue 2.1*, serves to highlight solidarities, alliances, and resources for housing justice.

Of course, fights for tenant protections and the organization of rent strikes are nothing new. Tenants have been holding rent strikes for centuries across the globe in protest of unjust housing conditions, capitalist exploitation, land grabs, and more. Our own journal has published on rent strikes before the current moment. In our last issue, *Issue 1.2*, Julian Francis Park wrote about the need to 'abolish rent' as part of a broader movement of housed and unhoused tenants engaging in tactics such as rent strikes and squatting. Also in that issue, Emily Power and Bjarke Skærlund Risager narrated the 2018 rent strike enacted by a group of tenants in four high-rise apartments owned by a real estate investment trust (REIT) in East Hamilton, Ontario (the same area mapped in the current issue by Margaret Ellis-Young). For seven months, these tenants protested against steep rent increases and neglect of building maintenance. Other articles in our first two issues also narrate stories of squats, protest, and collective struggles for tenant protections, from São Paulo to Warsaw, from Metro Manila to San Juan. All of this is to say, just as housing injustice is nothing new, neither are shared struggles for housing justice.

Building upon these collective histories, in this issue we have also the pleasure and privilege of discussing housing struggles with Raquel Rolnik. Rolnik, as many of our readers know, was Secretary of Urban Programmes at the Ministry of Cities in Brazil (2003-2007) and the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Housing (2008-2014). Her latest book is titled *Urban Warfare* (Verso 2019). Raquel kindly agreed to meet with one of our editors to discuss a number of topics, including the makings of her book and the challenges (and opportunities) brought forward by the Covid-19 pandemic. Raquel touches also upon her commitment to a form of intellectual praxis that cannot be detached from direct engagement with housing struggles, which will surely be shared by many of our readers.

In another Covid-related intervention, the article *'*Towards justice*'* by Ananya Roy, Hannah Appel and Hilary Malson from the Institute on Inequality and Democracy at the University of California, Los Angeles takes as its starting point the saying, increasingly common during the pandemic, 'We are in all this together'. This *Update* challenges this pandemic refrain by informing readers about how movements are questioning the state's neglect of street-connected communities, tenants and those with household debt in LA. By looking at movements as teachers, the authors criticize the expansion of the 'stalker state' and its new surveillance and tracking practices. *'*Towards justice*'* also touches upon the role of the university in housing struggles. Roy, Appel and Malson call for the refusal of academic normalcy and point to burgeoning campus labor struggles as examples of activating the university as a space for organizing.

Also focused on California movements in the wake of Covid-19, Aimee Inglis' *Update*, *'*Tenant organizing in California', takes the perspective of tenant organizers rooted in antiracist, abolitionist, and anticolonial struggles. Inglis notes that tenant organizing is more important now than ever before, as a third of US renters can no longer pay rent, yet at the same time, today's organizing rests upon a long history of community building. New tenant protection ordinances being passed throughout California, are, after all, deeply connected to longstanding regional solidarity work against big real estate.

Finally, since the webinar has become one of the most popular and available formats for sharing knowledge during the Covid-19 lockdown, in *Issue 2.1* we have asked a group of international authors to report back from a webinar on the right to housing organized on April 16 under the title 'Stay home without a home'. The goal of the webinar was to share experience about how government-imposed measures have affected housing rights and struggles in Portugal, Lebanon, Brazil, Spain, Italy and the US. As the *Update* reveals, the discussion revolved around several topics, including deepening inequalities, insufficient government response and new forms of activist organizing during the pandemic.

### Asylum and shelter

Central to many of the articles in *Issue 2.1* is the intersection of local housing struggles and international formations of extraction, violence and displacement that structure contemporary conflicts over refugees and immigration. From its earliest moments, capitalism has been propelled by the twin forces of colonial expansion and dispossessive enclosure. This tendency remains pertinent to housing struggles as increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees from the Global South seek sanctuary outside their countries of origin and are met with exclusion and deportations. Particularly in the West, these conflicts occur in the context of decades of austerity that have dismantled social housing programs and exacerbated intersecting precarities for immigrants and refugees. The contradictions inherent in the 'North Atlantic fiction' (Trouillot, 2003) of a cooperative international community of independent nation states have become heightened, revealing in new ways long-standing global regimes of colonial expansion and capitalist profit accumulation. Authors in this issue attend to global-scale regimes of exploitation that connect to the intimate and contested space of the home. Taken together, they suggest a connection between displacement in the Global South and austerity in the Global North and emphasize the necessity of framing all housing struggles as sites of international solidarity.

Kathryn Cassidy situates her *Long Read* contribution as a continuation and deepening of the RHJ's two previous issue themes of 'post-2008' and 'interrogating rent', respectively, by attending to the effects of post-2008 austerity on asylum seekers in the UK. Cassidy presents a detailed and nuanced ethnographic study conducted in the North East of England about the role of housing in the conflict between a mainstream but insufficient 'politics of welcome' toward asylum seekers and the introduction of hostile domestic legislation that has led to their hyper-precarization. In this setting, she attends to the emergence of direct actions by the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum, a collective of asylum seekers and activists, around access to housing. She concludes that the contestation of a 'politics of welcome' arose due to a change in national and local government and made space for the emergence of different asylum seeker political subjectivities.

In an *Update* written from the Sunset Park neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, Joshua Mullenite points out that the right to housing is shared ground in struggles against immigrant deportations and gentrification. Mullenite attends to the ways in which the ability to shelter behind a locked door — one's own or one's neighbor's — is a crucial practice of

sanctuary against increasingly common ICE raids. In this *Update,* readers get a clear picture of the importance of secure, affordable housing in activist work against the US's violent immigration policies. By critiquing the long-held pro-development stance of local politicians who have only recently become vocal critics of deportations as part of the 'sanctuary cities' movement, Mullenite identifies a crucial contradiction in US liberal attitudes to immigration. In response, he calls for radical housing struggles to 'consider every home a real or potential sanctuary, consider every attempt to remove someone from that home an act of displacement, and to fight that displacement at every step.'

In the *Update* 'Reporting from Greece', Tonia Katerini from Stop Auctions Athens presents three fronts on which housing activists have been working in a time of rapidly accelerating austerity: the movement against indebted home auctions, the squatters' movement, and the movement against gentrification. Readers of this *Update* will learn about the effects of a recent cluster of legislative rollbacks of housing protection on the Greek housing crisis, and get an introduction to the work of activist coalitions fighting for housing justice. Katerini concludes the *Update* with a call to fight for the right to housing as a right for all, and emphasizes a committment to fighting xenophobic and fascist politics that threaten the life chances of refugees in Greece and across Europe.

#### Emergent fronts for housing struggles

While decades of top-down neoliberal reforms and post-2008 austerity at the level of the state have profoundly structured contemporary housing crises, struggles against displacement often have to work on multiple fronts. From the historical and contemporary role that affluent, white residents have played in enforcing systematic US racial segregation in their own neighborhoods to the symbiotic relationship between local governments and developers in the form of the 'real estate state' (Stein, 2019), the production of housing injustice occurs at many levels. Contributors to *Issue 2.1* draw attention to underrecognized challenges to organizing as well as emergent responses by activist movements around the world.

In the *Conversation* 'Housing Struggles in Romania and in Central Eastern Europe (CEE),' two of our editors, Erin McElroy and Michele Lancione, encounter a number of comrades with whom we have engaged in direct action and theorizing in Romania and beyond. The interviewees in the *Conversation* are Enikő Vincze and George Zamfir (from Cluj) and Ioana Florea and Veda Popovici (from Bucharest). In the *Conversation* the authors collectively reflect on their shared terrain of direct action and theorising, which has to do with the specific geographies and histories of Romanian and Central Eastern European struggles. The conversation touches upon the meaning of direct action and theorizing from Eastern Europe, touching upon Western economic and state power in the East, grassroots organising, and the need to decolonize the ways in which CEE is mobilised within academic (and sometimes also activist) circles.

In their *Long Read* 'Claiming the right to dignity: New organizations for housing justice in neoliberal Sweden,' authors Carina Listerborn, Irena Molina and Åse Richard focus on

emerging modes of resistance against 'renoviction' in Sweden in the aftermath of decades of neoliberal reforms. Drawing on the work of activist networks in Uppsala, Gothenburg, and Stockholm, the authors contextualize struggles against displacement as struggles for dignity in the face of long-term neglect by the state and private housing companies. Through these case studies they emphasize the importance of forming coalitions between activists and scholars in order to confront housing crises.

Examining the case of Hamilton, Ontario, Margaret Ellis-Young's *Long Read*, 'Looking "for a fight rather than a cause": (De)legitimization of resistance to gentrification in Hamilton, ON,' focuses on critical social media and journalistic backlash to confrontational direct actions against gentrification in order to trace contested discourses within differently positioned publics. The paper finds three discourses through which antagonistic relations emerge and the (de)legitimization of gentrification-related resistance occurs: violence, entrepreneurship and productivity. By attuning to the hegemonic delegitimization of resistance by members of the public unaffiliated with government or business, the findings of this paper have implications for mobilizing collective responses against the inequities of gentrification.

Manuel Mireanu's study of the rightwing group, the City Angels, in Milan, Italy analyzes extrajudicial enforcement in public spaces. This *Long Read* contribution, 'Gentrification and vigilantism in Milan's central train station,' has implications for the ethnographic scholarship on vigilantism and activist work alike. Uniformed and trained in hand-to-hand combat, the City Angels have helped instigate urban renewal of the city's *Centrale* train station by policing marginalized residents living near the station. Mireanu analyzes the City Angels' ideology as one that conflates marginalized people with threats to public safety. While these vigilantes are not part of the state, they emulate militarized police forces and work in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, state- and business-driven efforts to gentrify Milan. Mireanu concludes that anti-gentrification resistance efforts must take seriously the role that vigilantes and other extrajudicial enforcement actors play in gentrification processes.

In the *Updates* section, Rowan Tallis-Milligan contributes a review of the book *Doorways* (2019) by Bekki Perriman. *Doorways* centers on the gendered aspects of homelessness through first hand anecdotes while also drawing on the broader aspects of the housing crisis and the failures of various homelessness support systems. The book shares interviews recounting marginalization and sexual violence intertwined with more hopeful accounts of solidarity among homeless women. Throughout the review, Tallis-Milligan emphasizes the necessity of always considering the intersection of gender and housing crises, from the role that domestic violence and wage gaps play in access to housing, to the ways in which gender structures different experiences of homelessness.

### Spaces of possibility

Many of the pieces in this issue focus on the spatialization of housing crises and the possibilities contained in remaking space and place. Eleni Katrini offers a *Long Read* paper on the occupation of a vacant hotel in Athens, Greece by refugees and activists as a radical

housing practice. This work draws from her larger ethnographic project of studying the spatialization of everyday practices that create alternatives to capitalism within the present, and provides a case study of the ways in which space intersects with self-organization and sharing culture. As a squat organized by refugees and local activists, City Plaza offers a possibility of shelter different to those created by the state and by NGOs. Written in solidarity with City Plaza residents, Katrini's *Long Read* offers an ethnographic vision of the affordances contained in spaces once designated and defended as sites of dispossession and capital extraction.

A photo essay *Update* by ASLIDO, The Association of People for Homes, (*Asociace lidí pro domov*), focuses on the organization's work in the Czech Republic. ASLIDO is a collective of people who have experienced homelessness and their allies, several of whom write for this issue about their use of the Theatre of the Oppressed method as a mode of self-expression and organizing. They also describe their present and future plans to create grassroots educational spaces, such as legal clinics, so that houseless people can deepen their knowledge of activism and self-advocacy in the realm of social housing policy.

Finally, Caterina Sartori offers a film review of *Push* in this issue's *Updates* section. Directed by Fredrik Gertten and featuring UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Leilani Farha, along with scholars such as Sassen and Stiglitz, *Push* uses the genre of investigative documentary to explore growing crises of financialization. The film provides an authoritative analysis of the forces that drive access, or lack thereof, to adequate and affordable housing in contemporary times. Sartori attends to the unique contribution that visual media can make to critical housing studies, noting in particular the affective impact of the film's 'smooth drone shots [that] take us across the shining cityscapes of contemporary urban financial districts'. However, she argues that the film's interview segments fail to include contributions from social movement actors and working class residents of cities, preferring instead to consult experts from government and NGOs. The result, Sartori critiques, is a film that sees capitalism as something to be managed and reined in rather than systematically challenged.

## Moving forward with the RHJ

The *Radical Housing Journal* is at an important moment in its life. In April 2019, we launched a call to expand the number of comrades in our collective. We received an overwhelming number of responses, and selecting from them was not an easy task. In doing so, we focused on expanding our geographical reach and keeping this collective rooted in its feminist, antiracist and autonomous politics. In Summer 2019 we welcomed 10 new comrades to our Extended Collective, bringing our total number to 22. We also welcomed our comrade Ana to the core Editorial Collective, which is now made up of six of us, and is enlisted with the everyday management and future sustainability of the journal. Bringing in so many new members — considering that we cannot meet in person and are working across dozens of time-zones — has not been an easy task. We are, however, energized by their

contributions and we look forward to envisaging an even stronger and more sustainable structure in the coming months.

In November, 2019, we launched our call for three international workshops in Barcelona, Lancaster, and San Cristóbal de Las Casas under the title *Radical Housing Encounters: translocal conversations on knowledge and praxis*. The project was funded by an Antipode Foundation International Workshop Award, which was awarded to our collective in 2019 (thanks to the hard work of Mara, Mel and Meli, among others). Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, we had to cancel the workshops — a major blow to the dozens of participants who were supposed to join us in the three cities. Nonetheless, we are committed to bringing the workshop to fruition next year (thanks to the generous support of *Antipode*), as well as to bringing you some of the content that was already prepared for it in *Issue 2.2* (forthcoming in Fall 2020).

In the coming months, the RHJ will work hard to solidify its foundation and expand its remit. First, we will focus on making our content even more visible within academia and beyond by adding DOIs to our articles and finding a sustainable way of indexing them. Second, we will work on establishing the RHJ as a legal entity in order to be able to attract and manage funds with even greater independence. To this end, at some point in 2020 we will also launch a major crowdfunding campaign. Beyond the fixed costs of running this journal (domains, hosting, etc), we want to be able to pay authors and organize independent workshops and gatherings. Lastly, we are committed to expanding the RHJ toward geographies and struggles that we are not adequately covering yet. There are different ways of doing this, and surely we won't get it right on the first try, but we are committed and won't easily give up!

Thank you for your continued support. We hope you enjoy this issue and find it relevant for your own collective work, wherever you are.

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