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Life-affirmative struggles for home across borders

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Abstract

Issue 5.1 of the Radical Housing Journal (RHJ) examines the current state of struggles for housing and home amidst capital-accumulation-induced urban restructuring worldwide. The authors discuss the enduring impact of settler colonialism on land and housing rights, particularly for Indigenous peoples. Feminist, queer, and trans perspectives are brought to the forefront, emphasizing the leadership roles played by marginalized communities in housing justice struggles. The issue showcases the important contributions of Black women, women of color, and queer activists in fighting for housing justice and challenging oppressive power structures. Additionally, this issue presents alternatives to the current dangerous status quo, urging us to envision radical futures where humanity respects ecological limits, ensures universal access to resources, and grants autonomy in their utilization. It envisions a world where housing is available to all, allowing individuals to choose their desired living arrangements. The 'Pursuing Tenant International: Learning from the Struggles in Abya Yala' conversation series further amplifies the voices of tenants, organizers, activists, artists, and thinkers engaged in cross-border struggles. These conversations shed light on the challenges faced by communities fighting for their right to home and dignified living conditions in Los Angeles and Mexico City.

Introduction

What does it mean to create, build, and find home? This question has always been complex: home holds many different meanings, and those meanings change across individuals, communities, and geographies. As a site of material and imagined spatialities, home can be a place of safety, security, and privacy, but it can also be a place of violence, fear, and surveillance (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Not every house is a home and not all homes are houses–home can also be a relationship to land, to a neighborhood, and to people (Christensen & Andrew, 2016). Sometimes, home is not a place, but a feeling. Experiences of home are always racialized, classed, and gendered (hooks, 1991). Yet, bell hooks (1991) has long argued that home can be a site of care and of resistance, especially for Black women and people of colour. Of necessary consideration are the possibilities of home as both a site of resistance and as a lens through which to continue to confront the violence of power structures that undergird so many of our experiences of housing. This is something which continues to feel urgent as we navigate the relations and politics of housing in this contemporary context.

We publish this issue at a time of large-scale urban (re)structuring across the globe. From the advent of major disruptive events - such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, war in Sudan, and new laws enforcing border regimes - to the immense planning-through-dispossession taking place in cities such as Cairo, Jakarta, Abija, Belgrade, Mexico City, Vancouver, Buenos Aires, and others, *housing* is increasingly the material and cultural politics through which local and national administrations manage populations and capital flows. This is nothing new: but the scale of displacements, renewed calls to urban 'modernity' and 'safety' across locales seems to configure a renewed 'spatial fix' for financial racial capital across geographies (Harvey 1985). The capacity to reproduce *investment* (i.e., vested private interest) has found a new moment of stability vis-à-vis the reconstitutive 'crisis' of 2008 and COVID-19 (Rolnik, 2019; RHJ Editorial Collective, 2020). This is a moment in which the violent grammars of the homely-cis-patriarchy, heteronormativity, anthropocentrism, and racialisation are reproduced through large-scale urban plans where housing becomes the hinge through which expulsive and extractive sense of directions, and modus operandi, are carried through(out) (Massey, 1994). If there is, to paraphrase Sylvia Wynter (2003), a 'descriptive statement' of being at home today in the world, of *inhabiting* its grounds, it has to do with acceleration and intensification of such un-homely (un-caring, in its radical sense) politics.

Confronted with this, from the standpoint of our limited viewpoints and capacities, we continue our insistence on providing a free platform to examine histories, connect processes, and foresee uncanny alliances. For if scholarship has its own violences and colonies, then the collective study proposition emerging from the pages of our RHJ are about eliciting lateral, yet grounded and therefore meaningful for those involved, conversations. Here 'study' is not channeled through an index of academic performance, but through the painful messy effort of making space for a form of reviewed knowledge, open to be (re)possessed beyond proprietorship. The assemblage of housing and home - including ecological dimensions - are ever more dense and ramified. So, in this issue we publish a number of nodes that can be

taken up to expand on contextual histories and dimensions, while also beginning to re-canvass an internationalist conversation of what it means to fight for just housing globally. Perhaps expectedly, there is no conclusion to this. Instead, we offer re-affirmation of a will to know and to investigate, and renewed thanks to the joyful (i.e. literally, full of life) effort brought to the fore by a number of new editors to the RHJ, and in specific to this issue, with thanks from the entire collective, Judith Keller, Derick Anderson, Samantha Thompson, Aysegul Can and Melora Koepke.

Given these broader contexts, in this issue we spend time with this complex notion of home as another crucial, and often parallel, layer to the struggles for just housing. This issue focuses on life-affirming struggles for home, including: housing struggles in and against settler colonial regimes, Indigenous peoples' struggles, housing justice struggles through feminist, queer, and trans perspectives, life-affirmative proposals and prefigurative practices for housing futures, and internationalism as a horizon and a method in housing struggles. For as Hazel Easthope (2004, p. 35-6) has said, 'Home is, first and foremost, a special kind of place.'

Indigeneity and coloniality

Perspectives on settler colonialism are a necessary tool to map how control over land and housing has been practiced to counter the struggle for land and home. Land and housing lie at the heart of settler colonialism. According to Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, settler colonialism revolves around the acquisition of land and the establishment of permanent settlements that mirror the social, political, economic, legal, and cultural structures of the settlers' homelands in the newly colonized territories (2011, p. 107). Indigenous peoples have not only experienced the dispossession of their land and homes for the benefit of settler occupation and resource extraction, but the commodification of land has also posed significant obstacles to their ongoing struggles for achieving housing justice. Following the longstanding work of Indigenous scholars and organizers, how we envision housing justice on stolen land is an important question that urgently needs to come into focus in housing discussions. People under settler colonial regimes have been organizing worldwide, challenging structural and everyday coloniality, and building grassroots expertise. The voices of people affected by settler colonialism and those that resist them are crucial to visions of housing futures. We are therefore excited to bring to your attention several pieces that center on struggles against settler colonialism and Indigenous people's struggles.

In the long read titled, 'Encroachers on their Own Land: India's transition from Military-Imperialism to Settler Colonialism in Kashmir,' Maansi Shah traces the disputed territory of Kashmir state in India from the 1989 conflict to recent occupations and land grabs. Shah discusses how the actions of the Indian government in the last decade should change our understanding of what is colonial, postcolonial, and settler-colonial as they argue that India has shifted into settler-colonialism in regard to Kashmir. This piece documents the staggering number of disappearances, dispossessions, and deaths occurring in Kashmir

and challenges us to ask who is an 'outsider' and who is a 'citizen' in society and how so-called postcolonial societies engage in internal settler-colonialism today.

In the conversation titled, 'Indigenous Organizing for Housing Justice: Lessons and Challenges,' the focus is on issues faced in the struggle for housing justice in Cancún, Mexico. In January 2023, anthropologist Bianet Castellanos conducted an interview with Magda (a pseudonym), a prominent Maya activist and leader in the housing justice movement in Colonia Mario Villanueva, Cancún. Castellanos wrote extensively about Mayan struggles in her book 'Indigenous Dispossession: Housing and Maya Indebtedness in Mexico' (Stanford University Press, 2021). This conversation served as an opportunity for Magda to provide an update on the progress of their struggles for formal land titles and to share the valuable lessons learned during the decade-long struggle.

The conversation, "This house belongs to everyone': Otomí community occupation of the National Indigenous Peoples' Institute (INPI) in Mexico City as a struggle for dignified housing and the right to the city' sheds light on the ongoing occupation of the offices of the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) in Mexico City by representatives of the Otomí community. The occupation of the INPI premises serves as a platform for the community to voice their demands, not only for improved living conditions for the Otomí people in the capital but also for Indigenous communities across Mexico, while opposing harmful mega projects and the war against the EZLIN. During the conversation, held on the fourth floor of the occupied building, the compañeras shared insights into the struggles of Indigenous communities, their decision to occupy the INPI building, their organizing approach inspired by the Zapatistas, and the challenges and dynamics of everyday life in their new residence.

Feminist and Queer Housing Justice Struggles

The need to approach housing justice struggles through feminist, queer, and trans perspectives has long been central in movement spaces, though historically less reflected in housing literature. We know that women, queer, and trans folks have long been targeted by the white cis-heteropatriarchal violence of private property–particularly those subjected to colonial and racist matrices of power (Harris, 1993; Hong, 2012; Mignolo, 2011; Roy, 2021). However, less has been written about the ways women of color, migrant feminists, and queer tenants are often leaders in housing justice struggles, (For important work on this topic see: Perry, 2013; Ramírez, 2020; Stanley, 2021; Summers and Fields, 2022; Vişan, 2019). We were therefore excited to receive several texts that pay close attention to housing justice organizing led by Black women in São Carlos, Brazil, women migrants in Antofagasta, Chile, queer commune activists in Mexico City, Mexico, and women scholar-activists engaged in grassroots housing movements in the UK. These pieces align with other RHJ publications on transnational feminist housing justice organizing that we have published over the years (Bathla and Garg 2020; Caetano, 2021; Forte, 2022; Greyeyes and Vipond, 2022; Lawanson et al., 2021).

In 'The Role of Black Women in Urban Housing Struggles in Brazil: From Land Occupations to the Institutional Policy,' Vichiato Breda charts how activist groups led by Black women have mobilized land occupation as a tactic for housing justice. Based upon ethnographic research and social media analysis of two movement leaders in São Carlos, Brazil, Breda looks at how leadership positions are fostered within the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST). Breda identifies how 'identity agendas' have been strengthened within the struggle, leading to greater visibility, despite the fact that much research ignores the central role that Black women play in organizing for housing justice.

Also embracing an intersectional and feminist approach, but from Chilean's port city of Antofagasta, the politics of gender and migration come together in the conversation, 'Exercising Rights From Below: Housing, Gender, Migration and the Right to the City from Antofagasta, Chile.' Published in Spanish and also translated into English, the RHJ's Camila Cociña is in dialogue with Ana Sugranyes and Elizabeth Andrade Huaringa. Their conversation details the fiercely combative long-term occupation by almost 2,000 families, led by Huaringa: a woman, migrant, activist, and housing organizer of the informal settlement of Los Arenales (or *macro-campamento)*. Huaringa was recently awarded Chile's National Human Rights Award for her work on social rights, women's rights, migrants' rights, and above all, on the right to housing and to the city. Conversations such as this one point to the necessity of intersectional approaches to housing justice struggles.

Meanwhile, in the conversation titled, 'Lesbian, Trans and Feminist Commune: Weaving a Queer Space of Refuge, Resistance and Autonomy in Mexico City,' a *compañera* from La Comune Lencha-Trans, a queer and trans space in Mexico City, converses with the RHJ's Ana Vilenica. They contextualize the queer commune and its history and connection to various feminist, trans, and anti-capitalist political movements. They explain that the commune exists as a safe space and shelter, particularly for queer and trans folks fleeing discrimination and violence. We also learn about the challenges faced by members of the commune, including economic constraints and the need for collective support. Amatista addresses issues of transphobia and racism within feminist movements, highlighting the importance of creating spaces that challenge oppressive dynamics.

Lastly, the long read, 'Being Women Scholar-Activists: Tensions Between the Neoliberal University and Grassroots Housing Movements' explores the complex experiences of women scholar-activists engaged in grassroots housing movements in the UK. It highlights the need to address the intersectionality of experiences within activist communities, by specifically focusing on the gendered dynamics of labor within housing movements and the challenges faced by scholar-activists. The authors, Meg Bishop and Abi O'Connor, highlight the existence of women activists' housework despite the discourse of equality within leftist organizations. They call for transparency, introspection, and the recognition of power imbalances in left-wing organizations.

Proposals for Futures

With the myriad interconnected crises we are facing globally, the themes included in this issue offer us alternatives to the dangerous status quo we are all living in. These conversations ask us to imagine radical futures where humanity lives with its ecological limits, one where all of us have access to the resources we need, and the autonomy to decide how resources are used: Futures where we all have the ability to be housed where and how we want. Whether these ideas come from examples of past efforts, current movements, or future-oriented thinking, each of these alternatives asks us to question how we view housing and how we make housing an accessible human right for all of us.

In the Long Read titled, 'The homing of newcomers in Brussels at the intersection of bordering and urban speculation: from survival strategies to infrastructures for civic imagination and urban inclusion,' authors Nagi and colleagues offer a nuanced examination of the intersections between gentrification, urban speculation, bordering, and securitisation in the context of newcomers' processes of homing in Brussels, Belgium. Homing describes accessing housing and urban amenities to increase possibilities for security, familiarity, and home-making–both through housing and in the city more broadly. Drawing on participatory action research with and for Globe Aroma, the authors find that newcomers build new coalitions and share space as a tool for survival, which results in diverse solidarities and alternative visions of urban citizenship that broaden imaginaries of what an inclusive city can look like, in the face of multiple, intersectional structures of exclusion.

Engaging with intersecting housing and ecological crises, Aeve Ribbon's article 'Learning from Barcelona's grassroots housing struggles: towards a transformational Degrowth agenda' addresses the explicit and implicit 'degrowth' politics in housing justice mobilisations. Ecological and intersectional ideas become significant in connecting small case mobilisations, such as through occupations of vacant properties, to wider, transnational horizons for mobilizing against neverending urban growth.

Moving from this to the politics of another makeshift dwelling situation, Layla Zibar offers a perceptive review of the book *From Shelters To Dwelling: The Zaatari Refugee Camp* (2022) by Ayham Dalal. As outlined by Zibar, the book offers a rare architectural anthropology of dwelling as lived experience and a material manifestation of refugees' life in Jordan. Dalal extends a suggestion to bring in a more scrutinized gaze on the Jordanian context in relation to forced displacement: The historical presence of urbanized camps, the power of humanitarian actors, and social and geopolitical tensions.

Chiara Cacciotti's contribution explores the emergence of a 'housing otherness' in the Italian, and more specifically Roman context from the 1920s onward. Social, economical and political processes of othering Italian and migrant squatters are investigated to trace the emergence of a moral and racialised framework around which 'housing' has been constructed—culturally and materially—as an exclusive 'prize' for the few. The author also introduces the grassroots Roman housing rights movements and highlights their efforts to challenge the notion that residency and settling should be seen as something that is earned or deserved rather than as basic human rights.

In his paper, Simone Tulumello investigates the reasons why housing has not been at the center of the Italian public policy agenda and related conversations in the past years. To substantiate his argument, Simone looks at the different cases of Turin and Naples through the analytics of 'framing, coalitions and scale.' By putting these cases in conversation through a generative, relational and multi-scalar lens, the paper discusses how housing is problematised in Italy, providing a reflection on the conditions, preconditions and efforts for scaling up the housing struggle.

The contentious matter of 'housing responsibility' is at the core of this insightful contribution by Hanna Hilbrandt, Ifigeneia Dimitrakou and Luca Pattaroni. The authors contend that a critical re-approachment to the notion of responsibility, spurred from a liberal forefronting of liabilities for past damages, dominate moral claims around housing, which can provide for a renewed domain for critique, everyday engagement and legal political struggle against housing injustice. Drawing from feminist, legal, sociological and philosophical scholarship, their paper develops an alternative and propositional account of a radical housing responsibility, deriving relational commitments from co-being rather than from individualized subjectivities. The argument is grounded in housing struggles in Berlin (Germany), Athens (Greece), and Geneva (Switzerland).

Pursuing Tenant International

This issue also features a conversation series titled, 'Pursuing Tenant International: Learning from struggles for home in Abya-Yala,' edited by Ana Vilenica, which explores the idea that conversation can be used as a tool for building Tenant International, a grassroots International of those who have no control of their housing conditions. The housing landscape today is marked by complex challenges, with organized dispossession and abandonment affecting communities worldwide. Against this backdrop, conversations can be tools for fostering connections and knowledge exchange among tenants, organizers, activists, artists, and thinkers engaged in cross-border struggles. Spanning several issues of our journal, this conversation series uses the RHJ as a nod to Tenant International to facilitate encounters and exchanges with base leaders, organizers, and intellectuals who are actively involved in local housing struggles across the Americas, also known as Abya-Yala by some Indigenous communities. These conversations delve into diverse perspectives concerning territories and lands, encompassing various aspects such as domestic, communal, Indigenous, Black, and internationalist perspectives and contexts. In this issue of the RHJ, 'Pursuing Tenant International' comprises eight conversations with Indigenous and migrant base leaders and grassroots organizers fighting for their right to home and a dignified life in both Los Angeles and Mexico City, of which the conversations with the Otomí community occupation of the National Indigenous Peoples' Institute (INPI) and La Comune Lencha-Trans in Mexico City were already mentioned.

The conversation with Inés and Teresa, base leaders from the Flower Drive Tenant Association (La asociación de inquilinos de Flower Drive), in 'Here to Stay: Building a Tenant Association Against Displacement,' centers around the inspiring story of the community of

tenants united against displacement and fight to preserve their rented apartments in the face of a massive development project in South Central Los Angeles. By transforming their block into a space of tenant organizing and popular education, they have not only supported each other through various challenges in their struggle against violent landlords but also became a '*semillero*' – a seedbed of tenant organizing across South Central Los Angeles.

In the conversation titled, 'From Quiet Life to Political Activism: Struggling Against Eviction in Mexico City's Historic Center' Rufina Galindo, a base leader in the Network of Evicted in Mexico City (Red de Desalojados de la CDMX) addresses the challenges brought by the devastating earthquakes, after-effects of gentrification, the pervasive fraud and corruption exacerbating housing struggles and the essential role of organizing against eviction violence through networking and coalition building. As a member of the Urban Popular Movement (Movimiento Urbano Popular), the Red de Desalojados stands united with other groups in their ongoing fight for housing justice and dignified living conditions in Mexico City.

The conversation titled, 'Against Whitening by Dispossession: A History and the Present of Tenants Rebellion in Mexico' explores the historical and current dimensions of tenants' struggles in Mexico. It focuses on the Sindicato Revolucionario de Inquilinos, a tenants' union led by sex workers in Veracruz that organized a significant rent strike a hundred years ago. The conversation also delves into the contemporary struggles of various groups, including the 06600 Juárez Neighborhood Platform and Observatory (06600 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio de la Colonia Juarez). Pablo Gaytan Santiago, known as Hombre de Humo (the Man of Smoke), an urban sociologist, activist, and filmmaker, sheds light on the challenges faced by contemporary tenant organizing, particularly in relation to the concept of 'whitening by dispossession,' an alternative term coined by the residents of a Juarez neighborhood to describe what is commonly known as gentrification in academia. Furthermore, the conversation explores Pablo's work as a documentary filmmaker and the use of film as a tool in Indigenous peoples' struggles and urban movements.

The conversation with Martha Escudero from Reclaim our Homes, 'Fighting time and dreaming time: Struggle for right to remain in LA' sheds light on the ongoing struggle for the right to remain in Los Angeles. Martha, a resident facing extreme housing precarity, shares her personal experiences and knowledge of effective tactics such as home occupations, eviction resistance, and the establishment of a community land trust. The discussion also emphasizes the importance of drawing inspiration from Indigenous movements across borders and their potential to inform and shape local organizing efforts. Martha's dedication to housing justice, along with her daughters' involvement in a community-focused online radio show, exemplified the power of grassroots activism in addressing housing challenges in LA.

In a conversation with Teresa Roman, a Latina organizer and member of Accion Comunitaria and Los Angeles Tenant Union, the topic of food distribution as a tool for building tenant power in Los Angeles Tenants Union is discussed. Teresa explains how she became involved in tenant organizing through the Union after facing housing issues herself. She emphasizes the importance of self-empowerment and community support in defending

tenants' rights. The conversation also highlights the challenges faced in organizing food distribution and unionizing tenants, and the need for community education. Teresa discusses the importance of not relying on the police and instead advocating for self-organization to ensure community safety.

The conversation titled, 'From Politics of What's Possible to Politics of What We Want' centers around the challenges faced by Union de Vecinos in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Tenants Union. Kenia Alcocer and Leonardo Vilchis discuss the current situation in LA, including a recent protest at City Hall against racism within the council and the decision to end pandemic eviction protections in the city. They highlight the importance of addressing intersectional struggles and approaching housing as a multifaceted issue. Emphasizing the need for strong community relationships and a grassroots approach, they critique the traditional negotiation tactics employed by nonprofits and advocate for prioritizing the genuine desires and needs of the community. They also touch upon the Union's expansion within Los Angeles and nationwide through the Autonomous Tenants Union Network, as well as its involvement in various initiatives and organizations across the Americas and worldwide.

Conclusion

In this issue the contributors once again draw our attention to the complex issues of the global housing crisis, displacement, consequences of rapid urbanization and the immense suffering of many individuals and communities world-wide. In this sea of increasing challenges, we hope to emphasize the importance of comprehensive action and collaboration at local, national, and international levels through this platform.

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