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INTRODUCTION

This is not a housing crisis: introduction to the special issue

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Recontextualising the call

When we began the work of this Special Issue, we wrote the following in a call for papers:

> Nearly two billion people globally are inadequately housed (UN-Habitat, 2021) with housing precarity and marginalisation both deepening and expanding. Policy settings have intensified housing precarity, catalysing the emergence of generation rent (Hearne, 2020), and accelerated new forms of homelessness, incarceration and landlessness.

Looking back on these words, it is evident that we were appealing to a widespread, 'common-sense' understanding of the global 'housing crisis' to elicit contributions in other contexts reckoning with this fundamental question of dwelling. Our observations in the paragraph above capture the harsh conditions of contemporary housing stress and insecurity experienced around the world, as well as the accompanying and deeply felt sense of urgency these conditions produce.

There is something specific, something sticky about home, and both this intangible quality and the distress of feeling that this protected place is under threat circulates (Easthope, 2004). As Massey (1999, 2004) has identified, geographically distant dwelling contexts are shaped by local capital formations and governance structures and connected by global systems of finance, regulation and rights, as well as actors and forces working across scales. The relational construction of dwelling places and the acceleration of our capacities for borderless communication through digital infrastructure have permitted a broader appreciation of resonances between far flung imaginaries of home, as well as of the impacts of home's absence or violation. Such communication has also facilitated the development of critical international solidarities and shared analyses of structural housing precarity—including the identification of shared enemies. Further, experiences of housing stress are relentlessly narrated in political and

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public discourse, such that 'housing crisis' has become firmly embedded across policy, research and activist lexicons worldwide as the 'new normal' (see Lancione, 2020, p. 274). A pervasive atmosphere of precarity scaffolds the legitimation of band-aid interventions *because* of such widespread housing emergency. This condition primes resolution of the crisis *via* the hegemonic virtue of capital, the state and the non-profit industrial complex (see INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, 2017), continually sidestepping attention to the conditions from which the crisis emerged.

In addition to a rigorous, contextualised engagement with the empirical concerns of housing precarity, therefore, we were also interested in contributions that grappled conceptually with the notion of 'housing crisis' itself. This interest has stemmed from our own attempts to come to terms with the conditions producing entrenched and differentiated housing precarity in so-called Australia. Attending to the ways that ongoing colonial occupation, systemic racism and carceral border regimes intersect with highly financialised and privatised housing systems in our work has raised a series of key questions. How and why is this crisis differentially experienced? How are different housing precarities related to each other? What forces mobilise in the moment of crisis? And fundamentally, what does it mean to declare a 'housing crisis' as such?

The crisis framing

Adopting a crisis framing does a certain type of work in the world. It signals an imminent threat, a collapse on the horizon, demanding immediate and urgent solutions. Berlant (2011, p. 10) writes about the relationship between trauma and crisis, identifying the 'fundamentally ahistoricising logic' of trauma that bleeds into how we craft 'stories about navigating what's overwhelming'. The magnitude and immediacy of violence that entrenched housing precarity entails compels many of us seeking transformation of this status quo to reach for language that foregrounds the scale of the 'problem' at hand. This is a particular issue for social researchers keen to ensure that our intellectual labour is aligned with the pursuit of liberatory futures, tangled as we are in a mess of funding and institutional obligations, political and ethical commitments, and competing priorities and accountabilities across our work and personal lives. Attempting to distil these concerns into coherent research or advocacy agendas has meant that often, for the sake of expediency (towards positive change, we always hope), temporal frames are compressed and attention to complexity (and complicity) is jettisoned in attempts to zero in on the true kernel at the heart of the housing question. This can tempt foregoing regular reassessments of theories of change when responding to experiences of extreme housing stress (see Tuck, 2018)—an effect, as it were, of theorising from the back of the ambulance.

By problematising crisis terminology, we do not, of course, intend to diminish the real and manifest harm that housing systems do especially

to those who are often already fielding other attacks on their agency, autonomy, safety, and bodily integrity. However, taking this step back affords an opportunity to reflect more systematically on the work 'crisis' does as a diagnosis in order to identify lines of inquiry that could have actual prospects for a political reconfiguration of dwelling capacities and the spaces needed to produce them. Problematising crisis and asking what it does in the world enables a re-evaluation of the ways that housing is represented as a problem in local, national and global policy discourses, and the solutions that accompany these representations. It aids at least the prospect of a reckoning with the domicidal violences we risk sustaining and reproducing when we are constrained, rather than sensitised, by urgency. It allows us to question the agreed-upon tipping point where an issue becomes a crisis, and to trouble the frequent arbitrariness of such points. As Barzani (2020), reflecting on a 2016 squatting campaign waged by grassroots housing activists in Melbourne, put it:

> Soon after its inception, the protest drew the attention of the Wurundjeri and Kulin Nation community who helped us expose the myth of the contemporary housing crisis. For them, housing deprivation and homelessness began with European invasion in 1788.

From where we write, 'housing crisis' is on the lips of every politician, and in the media headlines on virtually a daily basis. The saturation of economic, social and political discourse with 'housing crisis' has successfully corralled attention to technical resolutions and financial-governance innovations. Supply narratives abound, supported by calls for 'affordable' housing that enable new opportunities for capital and state to resolve a crisis defined on its own terms: what tenant organisers in Los Angeles refer to as 'negotiating the terms of our surrender' (Rosenthal & Vilchis, 2024). Resolutions offered by the beneficiaries of dwelling precarity work to mystify the reality that a fear of imminent catastrophe is redundant for those living under conditions of already-existing crisis—the current declaration of crisis is not for them. Such discourses lead us to misdiagnose crisis as a bug rather than a feature of the housing system. Exceptionalising the housing crisis as such detaches it from local sustaining conditions of colonial racial capitalism and its theft-generated property regime (see Nichols, 2020), as well as from broader circuits of speculative accumulation and ideologies that demand conformity to ideal dwelling dispositions (see Barker, 2018).

Resolutions to the crisis

Mired in the terms of the crisis declaration, other relationalities (and therefore other dwelling formations) become hidden from view. The result is a disavowal of the complex contexts of housing struggles and the imagination-otherwise of an intellectual discourse that exceeds the boundaries of the declared 'housing crisis'. The framing of 'housing crisis' invites

solutions that are exceptionally good at appearing innovative. The result is often limp reproductions of the abundance-scarcity dichotomy that characterises our current global housing systems that beckon calls for, as the CEO of Victoria's State Housing Agency Homes Victoria recently put it, 'delivering more and better homes for Australians who deserve them' (S. Newport, LinkedIn profile page). Within the declared crisis, a politics of resolution is animated towards building more, to address what Lancione (2023) identifies as the hegemonic 'lessness' that is inevitably caught in and constitutive of the home/less dynamic. More is at stake here than even the challenging politics of dealing with the emergence of liberal reformist movements—such as the loud, opinionated and entitled YIMBYs—or practicing harm minimisation by wielding structures of overt harm. Crisis framing seems able to at once obscure the extensive relations that contest critical contradictions at the heart of what has been declared a crisis, while also securing and reproducing the very conditions that primed a declaration of crisis in the first place.

The 'more' agenda (supply and build) works within a redistributive frame, whereby more resources are dedicated to the project of resolution. Yet what occurs empirically is the renewal of a 'crisis' that runs cover for the reconfiguration of material dwelling relations within the rubric of 'providing more and better homes for those who deserve them'. From that reality stems, at least in Australia, nostalgia for the halcyon, romanticised existence of a fully-functioning welfare state. This is a historicisation of housing crisis that holds onto a fictionalised past when the state 'did housing right', omitting the concurrent and widespread dwelling crises produced by that state in its collusion with capital. Yet any clear-eyed reading would reveal that following invasion, housing in settler colonies has been integral to securing land and in organising the terms of struggles over space within the bind of colonial power. The density of land titles creating property rights over every inch of territory and the accepted consensus of private ownership as the 'highest and best' form of housing tenure are just two registers of relevance.

We have been grappling with this tension in our own scholarly-solidarity practices that seemed to constantly invite calling for 'more housing'. In an earlier essay published in this journal, we (Porter & Kelly, 2023) were concerned that even comparatively progressive housing movements in Australia remained attached to a redistributive aspiration unmoored from (and obscuring) the colonial land relation on which this claim was being made and relying on (and thus reinscribing) the assumed authority and legitimacy of the state as final arbiter. Asking about relationships of attachment has come much more closely into view as we develop our work on housing crisis here in Narrm/Melbourne.

Across the course of preparing this Special Issue we have observed the rapid proliferation of housing 'solutions' in all manner of state-market institutions, new financial tools and policy contortions. Australia has implemented Home Guarantee Schemes, Help to Buy programs, incentivisation

for the newest flavour on the market 'build-to-rent' and bond aggregators for the burgeoning community housing sector. Each reveals attachments to an understanding of land as a surface on and through which a property logic of possession is mythologised, implemented and sustained. The myth-making work of property and capital's possessory logic affectively saturates everyday life just as much as it undergirds policy infrastructures that govern dwelling on land, with material consequences for settler colonialism's 'vanishing endpoint' (Strakosch & Macoun, 2012). Attachment to this understanding of land is held tightly in the settler colony because it plays such a significant role in the work of refusing, obscuring and denying its own inherent violence and the Indigenous other that only has to survive and stay put to be 'in the way' (Wolfe, 1994).

Our concern is also resonant with Lancione's (2023) conceptualisation of how home/less as the dichotomy through which home is consensually understood both thickens the attachment to shelter provisioning as a mechanism to solve any lessness and at the same time obscures the harm into which this duality binds us all. It re-establishes, as Moreton-Robinson observes, the nation as a white possession (2015), where race and property organise the occupation and order of land relations founded in extraction and exclusion.

Towards dwelling

The widening reach of housing precarity has hit a nerve in this settler colony where we live, where the conditions that support colonial occupation and settler futurity appear to be straining, becoming less certain. If the crisis response doesn't really attend to those experiencing housing precarity, we argue that thinking about housing policy in this moment requires a fuller examination of the attachments our analyses rely on in order to advance interventions that we know are incapable to address the crisis conditions *because* they depend on the reproduction of those same attachments. This requires moving towards a more accurate accounting of this conjuncture that challenges the narrative of 'housing supply' and provisioning to consider the housing context as an ontologically disorientating and violent relation to being-in-the-world: to dwelling.

The necessity of attending to dwelling has been amply justified in housing and cognate urban literatures. McFarlane's work (2011) on dwelling considers housing as a doing, a processual, constantly in-motion emergence shifting the focus from inhabitation as an outcome towards the process and practices of inhabiting as a verb. His analysis goes further towards 'home-making' in the material sense of the labour and craft involved in continuously making home. The focus is thus on the materiality of 'the house' with its roof and walls fixed in a particular location albeit fluid and in a constant state of becoming. In his important work on dwelling as radical difference, Lancione (2020, 2023) also conceives of dwelling as being and becoming, constantly in flux and motion and deeply

processual. Lancione, following McFarlane and others, develops a more politically attuned sense of dwelling as difference and contestation – not only, as Heidegger would suggest, of an idealised and habitual mode of place-making. To find this, Lancione turns to the everyday experience of precariously living on and struggling within the violence of 'housing' in order to get 'closer to the action' (2020, p.279) of thinking dwelling as difference.

We draw from and are informed by these and many other vital perspectives and hope that this contribution builds further upon them, particularly heeding the 'need to recenter our analytical tools' (Lancione, 2020, p.274) in questions of housing precarity and injustice. But we arrived at the notion of dwelling as a generative way of framing the housing question from a different place. Or rather, from this place where we write from. Thinking more expansively about what counts as being homed and unhomed in our larger project, Precarious Dwelling: Encounters with Housing Crisis, has required reckoning intellectually and politically with the fact that the very terrain on which we live and work is unceded Indigenous land, Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung/Bunurong Country. It has demanded that we attend to the relationships we are already in as settler colonisers with Indigenous sovereign politics as a fundamental part of our analysis of housing and dwelling in this place (Porter & Kelly, 2023). This has meant grappling with the problem of claims for housing justice that remain bound into redistributive mechanisms that reaffirm colonial occupation. It has meant developing ways to consider how policy works here to shore up the impression that the colonial state is a legitimate authority. And it has meant becoming more analytically aware of the multitude of intersecting mechanisms that together constitute ways of knowing and doing 'housing' that continuously deny and obscure underlying racialised colonial land relations.

To do so, we turned to the thinkers and philosophers from here to locate a more specific terrain, a firmer ground, from which to think through the housing question. The notion of dwelling, while not a term used by these thinkers directly and of course still a term derived from a colonising language, felt closer to the interconnectedness of life forces, inherent relationality, and ethics of care and stewardship that seem central to ways of knowing, being and doing here. As part of this and with the assistance of funding from this journal, we organised the Forum for Dwelling Justice[1] in 2022 which aimed to bring these relations of struggle, dissent and policy inquiry into firmer view. As conversations at the Forum revealed (see Kelly & Porter, 2023), dwelling can invite attention to a broader suite of norms, governance structures and policies that attempt to impose normative dwelling forms on populations across diverse territories and drive local manifestations of the 'housing crisis'.

It is from these threads that this Special Issue has come together, providing the conceptual underpinning of this collection of papers. In this Special Issue we are interested in what dwelling offers as a more expansive

set of practices that spatially, ethically and socially exceed a site called 'home'. Indeed, thinking with Indigenous philosophers from here means that what can be understood as 'home' has to be radically rethought. Understanding that the housing crisis began in 1788 here on this continent (Watson, 2005) is not simply recognising that houses and places of living were destroyed (which they were), but demands an understanding that the creation and sustaining of being at home (dwelling) is more expansive than a fixed spatial site, a structure that shelters when one rests one's head. Dwelling offers a way of seeing the practices and affordances that exceed places, structures and tenures and one that seems closer to an understanding of what it means to belong that is derived from here, from where we write.

Introducing this collection

In this collection we are intentionally focused on unpacking how conventionally thought 'housing policy' intersects with the mechanics of larger systems including coloniality, carcerality, global finance, militarism, extraction and urban revanchism. Our aim is to prod at the manner through which housing research conventionally partitions analyses of, for example, the mechanics of colonial violence or the political control of borders as not housing questions. To put it crudely, the policy fields that shape, indeed haunt (Lea, 2020), the experience of dwelling under conditions of precarity probably do not look like housing policy and thus the 'crisis' is probably not in the location of its common-sense diagnosis. Land and territory are therefore our point of entry, contextualised in ways that seek out the underlying rationalisations and mechanics that enable and sustain expulsion, theft and the proximity of death for populations deemed surplus to colonial property regimes. Yet the state is not a monolith and the incoherence of housing policies and their concrete manifestations present opportunities for complex negotiations by individuals and communities seeking to dwell otherwise, as the papers in this collection show.

Oviedo et al. (2024) explore the suburban expansion of the city of Quito, Ecuador, as a process of 'predatory transformation' of land use and governance that is complexly contested by comunas caught at the fringes of its spread. The authors situate their analysis of suburbanisation in Lumbisí within a broader trajectory of ongoing colonial dispossession in Ecuador. Identifying the imposition of individual property relations onto communally held territories *via* what they describe as Quito's 'de-facto' land and housing policies, the authors attend to how the comuna of Lumbisí simultaneously resists and is shaped by interrelated ontological and physical modes of occupation. Despite the formal plurinationalism of Ecuador's constitution and its recognition of communal land holdings in the form of ancestral Indigenous territorial relations or those granted through prior land reform concessions, Oviedo, Stevens and d'Auria identify the material complexities faced by comunas in fully

enacting territorial sovereignty. The authors focus on how this partial political recognition is challenged by the extension of suburban growth corridors into Quito's north-eastern valleys, where the projection of terra nullius imaginaries is fuelling luxury property development. This paper demonstrates how keeping the processual, incomplete character of settler colonialism in view reveals the inadequacy of neoliberal urbanisation, gentrification and capital accumulation in fully explaining the political dynamics of contested dwelling formations in plurinational Ecuador.

Delving into materials stored in Kalaallit Nunaat's national archives, Nunatta Allagaateqarfia, Huse's (2024) contribution to this special issue examines the attempted temporal displacement and spatial management of Indigenous Inuit under Danish colonial policies of modernisation across the second half of the twentieth century. By engaging with the temporal politics of state housing development, Huse identifies that the Danish colonial imposition of standardised public housing was aimed not only at forcibly sedentarising and concentrating the Inuit population but hinged on a temporal displacement that situated Kalaallit modes of dwelling and land relation as anachronistic. In a nuanced exploration of these ontological violences, Huse's archival research traces three temporal displacements: the eviction of Kalaallit lifeways through a normative frame of linear modernity and progress; biopolitical materialisations of Danish spatiotemporal ordering *via* the physical confines of state-provided housing architecture on Kalaallit cultural and familial practices; and Kalaallit women's resistance against colonial architecture through the APK's collective, rigorous critique. Through an analysis of the colonial intent and material effects of chronopolitical norming that situate Kalaallit as out-of-time, Huse draws our attention to the consistent claiming of a temporal otherwise, 'a Kalaallit-premised modernity'.

Reflecting collectively on their experiences as organisers, and through their work on the Housing Justice in Unjust Cities Project [Brisbane, Australia, 2021], Carlson et al. (2024) employ a critical co-constructed autoethnography to analyse their involvement in housing struggles as settlers on unceded Aboriginal land. Their collective work seeks to foreground the implications of ongoing Aboriginal sovereignty in housing justice efforts while challenging the colonial assumptions embedded in settler-led housing activism. It offers a contextual background on recent housing justice organising in Brisbane, marked by the emergence of more radical approaches that reject reformist tactics in favour of direct action. The paper critically examines how housing justice movements may unintentionally reinforce settler colonialism through tactics of occupation, and it reflects on solidarity-building efforts that reject housing justice based solely on redistributing stolen land. The authors argue for an expansive, anti-colonial approach to housing justice, which addresses the root causes of injustice while fostering coalitions across various sites of struggle. This paper's contribution is the way it directs exploration of how settlers can

ethically engage in housing activism while respecting Indigenous sovereignty and resisting complicity in ongoing colonisation.

Papatzani's (2024) paper explores the impacts of Greece's asylum reception and accommodation system on refugees' daily experiences and their spatial and social interactions since 2015. It draws on the concept of displaceability as an ongoing, non-linear process that disrupts connections between people and places, closely interlinked with housing precarity and the illegalisation of refugees. The author examines how displaceability manifests across various groups: those entitled to asylum accommodation, individuals in the process of asylum claims, and those left outside the official reception system. Through research conducted in Athens, the paper reveals how accommodation policies and practices perpetuate displacement and marginalisation, even for those previously deemed deserving of protection. It underscores the relationship between accommodation policies and illegality, illustrating how these systems foster housing precarity. A critical contribution of the paper is its multi-scalar analysis of displaceability, from local to transnational, emphasising the connection to broader exclusionary and racialised processes in Europe. This paper contributes an understanding of how refugees contest and resist displaceability through informal acts and relationships, which holds vital significance for their future settlement prospects.

Our own paper (Porter et al., 2024) attempts to craft a methodology and analytical framework for more closely attending to the housing and land question in a settler-colonial context. Through the story of one public housing estate, called Walker Street, located on stolen Wurundjeri land in Melbourne's inner north, we asked how that site had come to be, what forces were at work in producing the possibility and then impossibility of dwelling on it for the residents who were recently expulsed in the latest round of displacing the poor through 'urban renewal' that is underway in Melbourne. The paper analyses the structure and affective power of title documents at Walker Street to reveal a 'possessory stratigraphy' at work in settler-colonial urbanism. Land titles both register and enact the recursive nature of dispossession, producing the affective and material states so vital to the sustenance of settler occupation on Indigenous lands. This focus helps reveal how current manifestations of displacement are entangled with colonial relations to and meanings of land and belonging that are continuously reworked in order to sustain their force. This paper's contribution is its attention to the banality of title documents and the offer of a methodology to analytically register the constitution and organisation of land relations to build a more nuanced politics about housing injustice in the colony.

Overall, this collection of papers reveals a little more about relationships and formations of always uneven state power, the work of borders of different kinds but especially in property relations, and the work that differing temporalities do in explaining precarity, mobility and stuckness in contemporary urban life.

Notes

1. https://cur.org.au/forum-for-dwelling-justice/.

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