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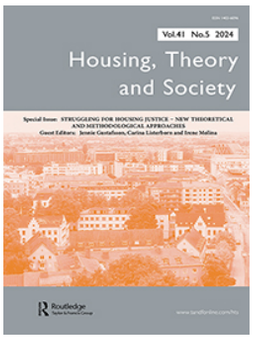

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How Can Scholarship Contribute to Housing Justice? Three Roles for Researchers

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses three ways that research, within and outside academia, can contribute to housing activism. First, we discuss the role that documentation, using non-traditional methods such as film, art, and social media, can play in expanding the visibility of struggles and in politicizing people in the process. Second, we consider how a "politics of resourcefulness" can support activism, by channelling material support from universities and other institutions, asking research questions of interest and relevance to activists, and by investigating the barriers to, and opportunities for, sustained participation in activism. Third we analyse how recent and historic scholarship has re-imagined what housing means by locating it in a wider political sphere, of (anti)racism, participatory justice, and self-determination. We argue that such works, whilst not necessarily directly engaged in on-the-ground struggles, create a conceptual "guide for action", that stretch the question of housing (in)justice beyond (re)distribution to questions of (anti)racism, (anti) colonialism and participatory justice.

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Housing theory; scholar activism; housing research; housing struggles; housing justice

1. Introduction

We are writing the revised version of this paper as the number of Palestinians killed by Israel's 2023 war on Gaza exceeds 25,000. In addition to this monstrous loss of lives, it has been reported that 70% of homes and approximately half of the buildings in the Gaza Strip have been damaged or destroyed (Malsin and Shah 2023). The indiscriminate bombing of Gaza, which some have compared to carpet bombing, is an act of domicide. Domicide, as Balakrishnan Rajagopal, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, explains, is the

> deliberate destruction of homes, the rendering of homes uninhabitable, or any other systematic denial of housing when such acts are carried out in violation of international law and committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population

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(Ali 2023; np; see also Porteous and Smith 2001; Nowicki 2014). It is taking place in Gaza "on a scale that we have not witnessed in any recent conflict including in Syria and Ukraine" (Ali 2023). Questions which we have been asking ourselves for many years – about the purpose of research in times of crisis and our roles as researchers in challenging and/or perpetuating systems of oppression – feel more relevant, and the conventional objects of academic labour more inadequate, than ever before.

Nonetheless in recent months we have witnessed researchers respond to the need for moral clarity, despite increasing levels of censorship (Egbhariah 2023). Many have used their public profiles to leverage their academic positioning, organizing spaces for activist voices challenging state violence (to name a few: Amy McQuire and Chelsea Watego, Institute for Collaborative Race Research; Nick Estes and Jennifer Marley, Red Nation Podcast; Noura Erakat, Centre for Constitutional Rights; and Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, San Francisco State University). These responses take seriously what is at stake while building academic capacities for social justice. They demonstrate how academic scholarship can and should effectively intervene in the world. Heeding their ethical leadership, this paper considers ways that we, as housing researchers, can work for housing justice.

Our argument is that housing scholars can be impactful in engaging with political struggles for housing justice. As well as "seek[ing] to learn from, and think from, the frontlines of contestation and mobilization", we argue for scholars to place themselves on the frontline, for this is where "the most significant ideas of housing justice have come, and will come" (Roy 2019, 18). This contention follows from several years of working alongside public housing tenants in Sydney, Australia, and particularly those facing eviction from and demolition of their homes. This paper focuses on campaigns against the redevelopment of the Waterloo estate, an 18 hectare, 2012-dwelling estate in inner Sydney which the New South Wales (NSW) Government slated for demolition and mixed-tenure redevelopment in December 2015.

As we have discussed in previous works, contributing as researchers to housing activism can be a challenging engagement to maintain (Chatterjee et al. 2019). We have often experienced conflict over our roles as academic researchers in activist spaces and difficulties maintaining both sides of the activist-scholar hyphen (Derickson and Routledge 2015, 391; Gilmore 2005). Whereas our previous writing has focused on these challenges, here we focus on the potential of research orientated to activist causes and challenging our previous scepticism regarding the capacity of scholarship to contribute to radical political change. Activist scholarship recognizes that research cannot be cleanly divorced from questions of politics and ethics, of what should be done in response to a social harm. That is, it recognizes that researchers do not hold an objective standpoint and that we need not remain at a detached distance from the material world that we study so that we cannot intervene. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, "the external world is real, we are of it no matter what we decide to do, its mutability and our own are not without limit, and yet what we decide to do, makes it and us, different" (Gilmore 2005, 179).

Two caveats that may or may not be required. First: direct collaboration with activists does not mean abandoning analytic rigour, nuance, and criticality. These are crucial, as we discuss, though there is a need for protocols that allow discussion and negotiation especially for disagreements that emerge from the dual position of being both researcher and collaborator; for example, conflicts over analysis, values, what researchers can promise,

and differing understandings of what makes for a rigorous and socially just study. Researchers require guidance and training to understand how to end research relationships where goals, values, and interpretations are irreconcilable (e.g. Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Second: undertaking such research requires careful ethical consideration. Much scientific and social research has been and is extractive and damaging to the people and places it is supposed to benefit (Sisson et al. 2022), with Indigenous peoples experiencing many of the worst instances (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Sharp power imbalances can mark relationships between researchers (and their institutions) and participants or subjects, with the former usually the primary beneficiaries. In such contexts, clear terms of engagement should be agreed upon regarding how a project is carried out, how burdens and harms can be minimized, and how research outputs, findings, and any benefits are communicated, shared and "owned". Attention should be placed not only on the outcomes, but also on how research is conducted (Tuhiwai Smith 2021), and *whether* research should be conducted at all – for "research may not be the intervention that is needed" (Tuck and Yang 2014, 236). An "ethics of care" (Gilligan 1995), which begins with human relationships and is sensitive to the needs of others, is a useful foundation to guide such work. For researchers this means paying attention to who we are speaking with, what people's experiences of research might be like, and discussing the ethics of a project with participants and collaborators.

The remainder of this paper discusses three broad types of scholarly contribution to struggles for housing justice, based on our experiences and reflections rather than exhaustive analysis. First, we discuss the role of non-traditional research outputs such as film, art, and social media, in documenting struggles and drawing attention to their actions and demands among wider publics. Our experiences in Waterloo led us to understand that opportunities for politicization are provided in the *processes* of documenting, as much as they are by the document itself. Second, drawing on Derickson and Routledge's (2015) notion of a "politics of resourcefulness", we outline the direct material, social and intellectual contributions that university-based researchers can make to activist causes. Time, money, access, social networks, and social capital are valuable resources, along with research methods and critical thinking. Yet to make the most of these resources, we need to act strategically and creatively in how we position ourselves and our work institutionally, and organize within universities for radical changes to their models, objectives, and practices. Third, we discuss how scholarship can help reconceptualize housing justice within a wider political sphere, extending it beyond questions of (re)distribution. We give three examples: the work of WEB Du Bois, which situates Black housing in the USA within a struggle for racial justice; more recent writing from Akira Drake Rodriguez, whose historic analysis of public housing tenants' struggles in Georgia, Atlanta, demonstrates how housing was mobilized as a participatory space by Black women tenants to serve socially "deviant" interests; and the thinking of the late Vera Lovelock, an Aboriginal social justice campaigner in Australia who, in a lecture delivered to teacher trainees, positioned issues of Aboriginal housing displacement in a wider context of land rights and self-determination. The value of scholarship, here, is to elucidate that struggles for housing justice aren't *just* struggles for housing justice but are situated in wider political terrains, including those of structural racism, of participatory (in)justice, and anti-colonial struggles.

2. Documenting and Disseminating

Documenting empirical phenomena and disseminating observations and interpretations are the basics of academic research. Yet this process of documentation and dissemination is too often concerned with identifying "problems" for policy to "solve", and thus published in media targeted at audiences of elites within the fields of electoral politics, public policy and research (Tuck 2018). While good policy matters, there is a role for researchers in an alternative mode of documentation and dissemination, one that is focused on understanding and demonstrating the possibility of change through resistance. This mode of research demands "non-traditional" outputs that engage wider publics and counter-publics (Fraser 1990): film, zine, artwork, exhibition, social media, etcetera, some institutionally recognized and others not. These and conventional scholarly works can provide important archives for future scholars and activists; equally, archival material surfaced by contemporary researchers can provide important inspiration and guidance in the present (e.g. Dalloul et al. 2020; Ferreri 2020; Tubridy 2023). This was the case during the campaign against demolition of the Waterloo estate, as we discuss in the remainder of this section.

Following the announcement of the proposal to redevelop the Waterloo estate in December 2015, and for the two to three years afterwards, a key component of anti-demolition organizing was the #WeLiveHere2017 campaign and associated documentary film, *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* (2018), directed by Clare Lewis. Each of us was involved in this project and we have written about it at greater length elsewhere (Chatterjee et al. 2021). This did not involve strictly academic research but did require extensive empirical work in interviewing residents and documenting their ties to place and efforts to resist displacement, as well as various non-research contributions. The #WeLiveHere2017 centred on the production of a large-scale community artwork that involved installing LED lights in the apartment windows of residents of the estate's two thirty-storey towers. Residents could change the colour of their light to reflect their mood, or simply switch it on to signify that "the lights are on, somebody's home" (Condie and Lewis 2017, np.). The project was a way for more people to communicate their presence and experiences publicly, collectively and positively.

The illumination of the Matavai and Turanga towers during the #WeLiveHere2017 campaign enhanced the visibility of the estate and public awareness of the proposed redevelopment, including media coverage sympathetic to residents' plight. These two otherwise controversial modernist high-rises became multicoloured beacons in the night sky, popular with amateur and professional photographers who were encouraged to post their photos to the #WeLiveHere2017 hashtag. This helped the campaign create its own archive. Accompanying this was a digital storytelling project which produced portraits and short biographies of estate residents. In addition to their "real time" impacts, these images are still "here" on social media as a readily accessible digital archive, presenting a timeline of activity between 2016 and 2018 in a place that remains threatened with demolition. Occasionally the accounts are reactivated to draw attention to an important issue that the community faces and to call for action.

The *production* of this community artwork, which involved volunteers door-knocking each tenant and offering to instal lights in their windows, performed the vital role of heightening critical consciousness of the redevelopment proposal among estate

residents, building relationships and catalysing opposition. This was at least as important as the final form of the artwork, and was the focus of *There Goes Our Neighbourhood*. The documentary aired on Australian national television via the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2018. In addition to generating further awareness of the proposed demolition of the Waterloo estate, returning the project to the headlines and pushing for some level of accountability among government officials, the film was important in making visible the labour of the people behind the campaign to the wider public. In particular, it highlighted the crucial contributions of two young single mothers living in estate who led community artwork production and, in doing so, contested the stigma that is frequently fixed upon people in such circumstances.

The case of #WeLiveHere2017 and *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* revealed the strategic communication and compromise involved in such campaigns. Some stories were left out of the documentary, either because they would perpetuate harmful stereotypes or inflame tensions within the community. Furthermore, the project team had to negotiate with both the NSW Government and the ABC to secure necessary support for the artwork and film. One outcome of these negotiations was that the documentary script was changed to dampen the narrator's criticism of the proposed redevelopment and the title was changed from *We Live Here* to the less defiant *There Goes Our Neighbourhood* (Chatterjee et al. 2021). Such strategic decisions enabled #WeLiveHere2017 to reach a wider audience but they were unanticipated and generated some controversy. They suggest the need for careful consideration of acceptable compromises in advance.

Making *politically conscious* compromises, requires careful consideration of whether the method and content of documenting undermines the wider goals of a campaign. Akin to the abolitionist strategy of non-reformist reforms, originally advanced in the writings of philosopher André Gorz (1987), such compromises enable rather than restrict the transformative goals of social movements. In the context of strategic communication, the idea of non-reformist reform provides researchers and activists with a way to evaluate costs and benefits of a given direction, by deliberating the relationship between compromise and movement objectives (Engler and Engler 2021). Decision-making can be organized around whether certain methods of communicating housing struggles contribute to the wider movement aspirations, boost the power of those at the heart of struggles, and undermine the control of institutions that drive or benefit from housing injustice. Compromise is never ruled out, but rather it is taken up strategically.

Waterloo, like other sites of contemporary housing struggle, has a long history of resistance, and the documentation of past political organizing continues to be relevant in the present. The Waterloo estate was the subject of an eponymous 1981 documentary film, directed by Tom Zubrycki. Ironically, the subject of the film was resident opposition to the contemporary estate's construction and proposed expansion. The construction of the Waterloo estate was a key part of the NSW Government's inner-city slum clearance program (see Zanardo et al. forthcoming) and would have been larger – with an additional six 30-storey towers – were it not for organized opposition among working class residents and the militant Builders Labourers' Federation (see Burgman and Burgman 1998). The film follows this campaign, documenting residents' opposition to forced displacement and the paternalistic attitude of the NSW Housing Commission that saw residents' existing terrace houses as objectively inferior to modern apartments (apartments which are now, less than fifty years later, derided as unfit for purpose while the

remaining terraces are prized by wealthy gentrifiers). Zubrycki's *Waterloo* was re-surfaced during the contemporary campaign against demolition, with several screenings organized by the #WeLiveHere2017 campaign. These screenings were intended to demonstrate the possibility of successful opposition led by poor and working class communities. As Dalloul et al. write, "[r]emembering and honoring the past, as well as the present, is critical in building power for a more just future" (2021, 34; see also Tubridy 2023). In the next section, we turn our attention more explicitly to the question of how scholars can help build that power.

3. Resourcing and Relationships

While the interests of universities and other research institutions are rarely, if ever, aligned with housing justice, they can offer resources towards these ends. As we elaborate in this section, the time, money, status, and social relationships that the academy can afford us are valuable. So too are our methods and methodologies, theories, and concepts. These are not readily provided, much less encouraged, by universities. There are innumerable barriers, including unmanageable workloads, growing precarity, metricisation, constant restructures, research funding that is increasingly oriented towards commercialization and industry partnerships, ethics processes which prioritize institutional reputation and risk management, and speculative real estate development by universities and student housing companies that contributes to the gentrification of many campus neighbourhoods. The neoliberal university should be a target for everyone interested in housing justice; its dismantling is necessary for the expansion of activist scholarship. Nevertheless, creative, strategic, even fugitive engagement, the resources of the academy can be utilized (Harney and Moten 2013). Derickson and Routledge (2015) have outlined three ways that scholar-activists can do so, sketching the outlines of what they call a "politics of resourcefulness". In this section we describe our work in the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group and, later, Action for Public Housing, within this framework.

First, Derickson and Routledge describe the possibilities for channelling resources like research time, funding and university spaces towards activist causes. Channelling spans contributions big and small, from booking a meeting room on campus to applying for large grants. One useful contribution we were able to provide was access to digital devices so that they could use email and social media more effectively. Free printing is also an under-appreciated resource, helping us leaflet and letterbox thousands of flyers. University funds could also be used to pay for Freedom of Information requests to access government data, and for catering for public events. Most recently, we were able to fund a visit by Melbourne-based non-profit architecture practice OFFICE, who presented their work on public housing refurbishment as an alternative to demolition in a public seminar and private meetings with key bureaucrats.

Our capacity to channel resources can be limited by our status and security within the academy, yet the importance of small contributions – access to devices, free printing, funds to rent vans and pay for catering – are significant and perhaps underestimated. While graduate students and early-career researchers are unlikely to procure hundreds of thousands of dollars in competitive grant funding, compared to senior colleagues with more onerous administration and teaching workloads, they may be able to devote more time to engage with activist groups. In our experience, this is the most important

resource – time to attend meetings (and set up meeting rooms), door-knock and hand out leaflets, join working bees, and build relationships. Collaboration across paygrades is also important for navigating the structural advantages and disadvantages of different positions and career stages.

Derickson and Routledge's second axiom is to triangulate research questions in a way that considers the interests of activists, current theoretical debates, and the purposes that the research findings might serve. In short, this second dimension of a politics of resourcefulness involves designing research to ask questions that activists (also) want answered. In our experience, this is not a simple task. Such triangulation can surface tensions between the requirements for surviving and succeeding within an increasingly precarious and corporatized academia, on the one hand, and the imperatives of radical and grassroots political organizing, on the other.[1] It is often difficult to reconcile the questions that activists want answered with the latest theoretical debates and the pressure to produce "high impact" publications. Public housing tenants resisting evictions and demolitions want to understand the drivers of such processes, the potential outcomes for them and their communities, and opportunities for intervention. Neither question necessarily leads to innovative theoretical insights given such processes have occurred over several decades. For us, such questions had largely already been answered; the government had been pursuing this mode of estate redevelopment for fifteen years by the time they came to Waterloo, and there were numerous international precedents. Instead of original research, we could answer many of these questions by synthesizing and distilling existing research literature.

Pulido (2008) suggests that it can be more strategic for scholars to pursue the imperatives of academia and activism in parallel. A track record of "high impact" scholarly publications can act as cover for scholarship that serves political purposes more directly but is held in lower regard by university managers (despite their proclaimed desire for "research impact"). Furthermore, the most useful research skills for political organizing are often not the most theoretically or methodologically innovative but rather ones like quantitative data collection and analysis, grant writing, and policy literacy (Pulido 2008). Researchers do not necessarily need to be proficient in these areas to be "good activists"; they can utilize their networks of social relationships, facilitated through academia, to connect activist organizations to colleagues and collaborators who possess those skills. Nor do they need to be positivist, as evidenced by the proliferation of eviction observatories utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (e.g. Chew et al. 2020; Maharawal and McElroy 2018).

There is an inherent risk in this approach that the imperatives and incentives of academia overwhelm the less celebrated work of maintaining relationships and commitments to the communities within which we research and organize, and one's community engagement serves a merely legitimating function among other academics. Hence the two fundamental principles that Pulido identifies: accountability and reciprocity. Without making oneself accountable to other activists and community members and ensuring that their interests are served in a way that they recognize, scholars reproduce long-standing exploitative and extractive relationships between researchers and the researched.

Thus, while the #WeLiveHere2017 campaign had ended and the Waterloo Public Housing Action Group imploded (Chatterjee et al. 2019), the need to re-establish

accountability and reciprocity as a housing researcher led one of us to re-engage with public housing activism in 2021. In helping to (re)establish Action for Public Housing – a grassroots collective of public housing tenants and supporters from throughout Sydney – [*author*] sought to engage in Derickson and Routledge's third type of resourcefulness: to research "barriers to sustained and active participation and activism" (2015, 1). We might add *opportunities* to barriers: Action for Public Housing has sought to learn from previous experiences in Waterloo in attempting to build a stronger democratic culture, more robust political analysis, and more explicit values and objectives in relation to housing justice. One crucial lesson is the hard limits of local, place-based campaigns in under-served communities where many residents are contending with various types of ill health. In response, Action for Public Housing seeks to network multiple residents' groups together and integrate other left-wing organizations in campaigning for a radical shift in the state's approach to public housing everywhere.

Operating as an "observant participant" rather than participant observer (Vargas 2008), [author] has aimed to help chart and navigate political opportunities and pitfalls through critical observation and analysis of the contemporary social and political situation of public housing and by learning from movements in other times and places. This role is not to think *for* other participants; rather, it is to contribute to what Riemer (2023) calls (in a positive twist on the term) *groupthink*. In contrast to the "smartwashing" of many intellectuals – who justify inaction by continually demanding reflection and depth – Riemer's groupthink describes the reconciliation of thought, discourse and politics through political organizing.

Channelling resources, triangulating research questions, and investigating barriers to participation are thus three crucial ways in which researchers can contribute to struggles for housing justice. Yet we also want to further stress the necessity of the "scholar" side of the activist-scholar hyphen. For Ruth Wilson Gilmore, activist scholarship "attempts to intervene in a particular historical-geographical moment by changing not only what people do but also how all of us think about ourselves and our time and place, by opening the world we make" (2008, 56).

> In the constant rounds of discussion and reflection through which engaged work proceeds, the strictly attentive practice of making the familiar strange is as important in extramural circles where projects come into being as it is in the halls of academia where scholar-activists struggle to legitimate our trade. (Gilmore 2005, 180)

Such interventions in how we might think otherwise about housing justice in a given time and place – and indeed, think otherwise about housing itself – are our focus in the final section.

4. Reconceptualising

Many academic researchers have the privilege of being paid to think theoretically and conceptually, to develop new terms and intellectual frameworks, and to bring these understandings to bear on how others think about housing. As Gilmore (2005, 179) explains, theory is "a guide to action; it explains how things work. What can and should be made of this?" Theories and concepts help us understand the world, and how we

understand the world has direct implications for the question of "what is to be done" (Donald and Hall 1986). Of course, such re-framing is not only the work of academic researchers. Social movements produce their own knowledge about the world, and are at forefront of developing "oppositional knowledges", that counter dominant worldviews (Hale 2008; Rodriguez 2021). Radical activist knowledges in fact frequently find ways into academia to inform theory and practice.

In this penultimate section, we highlight three examples of scholarship which reconceptualize housing and housing justice beyond redistribution. We focus on scholarship and sites whose discussion of structural racism, of struggles for participatory justice led by Black women and of Indigenous calls for land restitution, is frequently overlooked in traditional housing research. This work tells us that while questions of distributive justice are often at the centre of housing struggles, the demands of participants in such struggles are frequently more than that (Lancione 2020; Roy 2017). Demands of economically and politically oppressed communities are also related to questions of political participation, citizenship, difference, and self-determination. Critical and engaged scholarship about struggles over housing acknowledges these aims, reimagines what housing justice is, and responds to the "housing question" beyond issues of affordability and shelter.

4.1. Housing and Structural Racism

The empirical and conceptual work of African American sociologist WEB Du Bois, which has only relatively recently begun to receive the attention it deserves, provides one of the earliest examples of empirical community studies foregrounding the political context of Black housing circumstances (Morris 2007). Du Bois initially believed that "scientific evidence" on the conditions of Black people would inspire white elites to work towards undoing a racist social order. They "needed a new way to think about race" (Du Bois 1996, xvii). But through his experiences in Philadelphia and Atlanta, Du Bois came to realize that no amount of empirical work could persuade people as such and began channelling his energy into activism and organizing (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020).

Despite the limited capacity of social research to persuade dominant groups to address social inequalities, Du Bois's community studies offered compelling explanations of how Black housing circumstances were produced by structural discrimination, by including historical analyses, statistical description, ethnographic work, surveys, qualitative interviews and sociological interpretation. Whilst not always directly linked to community organizing or activism, the studies were in the interest of "political and civil rights and economic opportunity for African Americans in the United States" (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 3).

The *Philadelphia Negro* was a study of the living conditions of Black city residents between 1896–1897, ascertaining information about residents' geographic distribution, occupation, daily life, housing, social organization, and their relationship to white citizens. Both a comparative and historic approach, alongside the accounting for systemic racial discrimination in analysis of inequality, were central elements of Du Bois's methodology used to investigate Black housing circumstances. These elements were critical in identifying how unjust housing circumstances had been shaped by wider societal racism. The study's first two chapters laid out a historic social and political context of Black Philadelphians, from slavery in the 17th century to the late 1800s, demonstrating the

significance of understanding past structural racism to make sense of the present. The contextualization demonstrated the "imposed structural barriers to the progress of the Black community are manifestations of white supremacy and political power" (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020, 116). Du Bois's comparative analysis revealed poorer health outcomes among Black Philadelphians – particularly a higher death rate for Tuberculosis, compared with white residents. The study found poor housing conditions, including inadequate sanitation, a lack of ventilation, space and lighting, as among the key drivers of such health disparities which in turn were causally linked to systemic racism (White et al. 2021). Specifically, Du Bois noted three main explanations as to why Black communities remained in unhealthy housing conditions in expensive accommodation in the middle of the city. First, white racism prevented access to cheap accommodation. Second, the character of Black residents' work, as "purveyors to the rich", meant Black communities crowded into the city centre to stay close to their workplaces (Du Bois 1996, 296). And third, historically Black social networks were based in the city centre. Finding housing in another place for a socially ostracized group held negative consequences such as racist hostility and being shunned, a consequence not borne by white residents.

Du Bois's methodology countered prevailing social Darwinist arguments that the high burden of disease among Black communities was due to an inherent biological deficiency, instead showing them to be a consequence of unsuitable accommodation resulting from systemic racial inequality. The research did not change the circumstances of Black Philadelphians. But its tracing of the relation between inadequate housing and structural racism, provides a useful framework for action to this day – one which takes the impacts of racial oppression seriously in responding to housing injustice. If theory is a guide for action, then the action demanded from Du Bois's study cannot only be concerned with a one-off redistribution of shelter. Rather, a sustainable just housing solution requires the dismantling of the underlying conditions, the root causes, which have produced poorer housing circumstances among Black communities, and among others facing similar discrimination. Calls for housing justice effectively become part of a wider terrain of political struggle against racism.

4.2. Public Housing as a Space of Participation

Akira Drake Rodriguez's more recent historical work, *Diverging Spaces for Deviants* (2021), illustrates how Black public housing tenants in Atlanta, Georgia, asserted political power under conditions of exclusion from representation. Their demands were for better housing and for urban space to meet their particular needs, but in making these demands, Rodriguez shows how they used the existing tenant organizational structures of public housing as a political opportunity to enact the right to participate in decision-making about their housing, and the wider spaces of the city. The post-war period up until the 1980s saw Black tenant associations in Atlanta transform racially segregated public housing into a political opportunity structure to serve the interests of residents whose way of life deviated from dominant social norms and who were not served by existing city infrastructures. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Black women organizers, excluded by the Atlanta Housing Authority's leadership structures and facing gender and racial discrimination, as well as the stigma of being single parents, led this charge.

Rodriguez describes how Perry Homes tenant association president, Mary Stanford, and Oselka Stanfield, a blind resident in the nearby Hollywood neighbourhood, worked with the NAACP to file a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (MARTA) in 1979, for its failure to provide equitable transport in urban areas. Residents in the northwest of Atlanta, home to a significant low income and working-class Black population, had to take multiple bus journeys to an east-west line, transfer downtown and head north to work as domestic staff in wealthier white neighbourhoods. Their children similarly had to make multiple trips to attend schools in these areas following desegregation of the school system. Stanford and others worked with the city, county, and MARTA to plan and advocate for a branch of the rail line to connect their community. This is one example amongst many, that Rodriguez offers, where Black feminist organizing leveraged leadership positions on tenant associations to *make* city space more hospitable to "deviant" interests – those of Black women-headed households whose workspaces and whose children's schools were not adequately connected to their housing spaces because of a history of racial segregation. Their advocacy was part of a tenant-led re-organization of the racially segregated space of public housing and its surrounds, into "Black participatory communities" (Rodriguez 2021, 13).

In framing public housing as a space of Black feminist participation, Rodriguez "stretches" traditional understandings of what housing means. "Stretch" enables a question [or theory] to reach further than the immediate object without bypassing its particularity; rather than merely asking a community, "Why do you want *this* development project?" one asks, "What is development?"' (Gilmore 2008, 37–38). This expansive framing avoids the trap of conceptual narrowness becoming a stand-in for specificity (Gilmore and Gold 2022). In relation to housing, research questions or theories that lack stretch separate distributional problems, such as those of shortages, quality and affordability, from those of public participation, evading the significance of housing as a democratic space. For example, instead of asking *what makes good housing and how can we realize this?*, a more limited line of thinking might ask *how can we address housing shortages*? Rodriguez's conception of *housing as participation* follows the more expansive theorizing by stretching the notion of shelter beyond *only* concerns of material distribution. She identifies and illuminates the role of housing in fostering Black community organizing, supporting residents' agency and leadership around their social needs, and in turn the role of this democratic capacity in advocating for developmental/distributive goals which serve the interests of those who have been excluded from urban decision-making.

4.3. Housing and Self-Determination

In a very different geographical context, our third example is from a lecture given by Vera Lovelock, an Aboriginal woman raised on the Walcha Reserve in rural NSW, who worked as a health officer in Aboriginal communities. Lovelock contributed to a series of lectures delivered by Aboriginal activists, intended for teacher trainees in the town of Armidale, published in 1975 as the edited collection *Black Viewpoints*. The Walcha Reserve formed part of a system of land reserves that operated between the late-19th and mid-20th centuries. The reserves functioned to segregate Aboriginal people from white society, but many were also established

in response to demands for land, of which Aboriginal people had been dispossessed through colonization (Goodall 2008). The early 20th century saw an acceleration of government efforts to expropriate reserve land, forcing residents to contend with another round of land loss, termed the "second dispossession" by the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (Maynard 2014, 89). In her lecture, Vera Lovelock discusses the loss of housing in the revocation of reserve land (Lovelock 1975, 64–65):

> 'Now Walcha Reserve was the biggest in New England. They had all one side of the river and … the burial ground on that side of the river … They camped around there, they had their tents …. Then the white man stepped in. He lived around the corner. He had a nice big home and he had more cattle – he kept buying … more cattle and more sheep and not enough ground to put the things on, so he said: "Well, there's about 16 black families on this side of the river; I'll ask the government if I can lease that and move the blacks on the other side." He got the lease. So he started moving in, pulling down their tin humpies.[2] The blacks threw their chairs and table and beds on their shoulders and they walked across the river and they set up camp there. Now Walcha Reserve has been leased to some white man, to the extent that the houses are between the gate and the road. He's restricted them moving. The housing commission[3] then decides it wants to sell a house … A plumber in town wants to buy a second house. He's already set up in a big mansion … he buys a house - one of the Aboriginal homes off the reserve. This is what make "Aborigines" mad. You can see what is going wrong, you can see what the government is doing and you get madder and madder … I don't know what's going to happen in 100 years time if they don't stop leasing all this land, if blacks don't get land rights.

Lovelock's framing of the experiences of Aboriginal people living on the Walcha Reserve is not only about the loss of housing, but it situates housing in a wider story of land and the urgent need for land rights. This is echoed in the work of researchers such as Larissa Behrendt (2003) and Heather Goodall (2008), who have both articulated the connection between demands for housing and land rights in their works (see also Foley, Schaap, and Howell 2014; Morgan 2006). She explains Aboriginal people's anger not as an irrational expression of emotion and aggression, as it is often dubbed, but rather, as a human reaction to colonial land dispossession. Lovelock's above framing is not conventional theory, but it nonetheless offers an insightful way of understanding housing displacement as an iteration of colonial dispossession. Her call for "land rights" in response, is not only a demand for the redistribution of material resources, but also a call for self-determination; the right to govern land being a central tenet of Aboriginal self-determination (Behrendt 2003).

In seeing the loss in Walcha as part of a structure of Indigenous land dispossession, Lovelock offers a "resilient" analysis of the situation. She connects contemporary and historic injustices and identifies the ethical and political stakes that unify them, making her conceptualization "flexible rather than brittle, such that changing circumstances and surprising discoveries keep a project connected with its purpose rather than defeated by the unexpected" (Gilmore 2008, 38). The loss of Indigenous housing through eviction might seem different from colonial dispossession, but when eviction is understood as a problem of land governance, its connectedness to colonization and to (anti)colonial politics becomes clearer. In identifying the loss of housing as part of a repeated expropriation of Aboriginal land, Lovelock's statements bring to the fore the question of

Indigenous land rights and the importance of the authority to govern and make decisions in relation to land, keeping the question of housing "connected" to anti-colonial agendas.

The late Colin Tatz, editor of *Black Viewpoints*, explained the importance of "concepts" in the introduction to the lectures, which included Lovelock's contribution. His statements hold for all three research examples we have discussed above:

> "fact" courses eliminate neither prejudice nor ignorance' . . . but some programmes have been effective . . . by offering conceptual ideas rather than facts, by asking students to explore openly their prejudices as preparation for accepting new concepts, by offering causal explanations of why things are rather than descriptions of what they are'. (Tatz 1975, 3)

In Tatz's account, how we conceptualize the world is vital. While "ideas" and "concepts" are not enough to change the politics of a place and the structural inequalities that build it (as Du Bois realized), how we theorize our social realities – that is, how we understand and interpret them – still matters. Du Bois's account of Black housing circumstances in Philadelphia, Rodriguez's research of Black feminist struggles for and through housing in Atlanta, and Lovelock's conceptualization of housing and dispossession in New England, Australia, frame the question of housing as part of wider political terrains – of structural racism, of participatory (in) justice, of anti-colonial struggles. Rodriguez stretches the idea of what makes "good" housing by analysing its role in enabling community organizing; Du Bois's and Lovelock's resilient understandings of "bad" housing keep housing justice connected to anti-racist and land rights struggles. If theory is a demand for social and political change in a given direction, then these framings call on us to respond to housing inequalities as problems of racism, of participatory justice, and of colonization. Theory with "stretch" and "resilience" offers a way of seeing housing realities in a way that mitigates against solutions that miss such fundamental issues.

5. Conclusion

Researchers have important contributions to make to housing justice: through a considered politics and practice of documenting and disseminating, through resourcefulness and relationship building, and by reconceptualizing the meaning of housing and housing justice. In discussing the politics of documenting we consider how research can give visibility to struggles and build support amongst a wider public. We argue that such work also needs to be balanced with a reflexive research practice and be grounded in an ethos of social justice. A politics of resourcefulness entails the transfer of material support from university spaces to activist spaces; the development of research directions that triangulate activists' interests with theoretical debates and the purpose of research findings; and an investigating of the barriers to, and opportunities for activism by being observant participants of social and political situations faced by movements, including the barriers presented by our own increasingly neoliberal institutions. Finally, reconceptualizations of what housing means and why it matters, by drawing on research that does not fit strictly within the disciplinary boundaries of housing studies, can locate struggles for housing justice in wider political contexts of anti-racism, participatory justice, and anti-colonial struggles. This positioning of housing as a site of inquiry beyond the

limits defined by *conventional* housing policy is important because it offers a way to stave off a narrowness which neglects fundamental inequalities and oppression in developing so-called solutions, and instead demands responses that are expansive in their understanding of housing (in)justice. If theory is a guide for action (Gilmore 2005), such generalized reimagining demands social responses that take these political contexts seriously. University based research is by no means the only form of research that can carry out the work of documenting, resourcing, and re-conceptualizing, but it is one space that can bring together "ideas and thinking and interactions that might not otherwise happen … it's a modest thing", but it counts (Gilmore and Gold 2022, np).

Notes

1. Despite the competing imperatives of academic and activist work, there is a risk that the triangulation model reproduces a binary between researchers and activists, implying a process of negotiation – implicit or explicit – between separate *interests* and *purposes*. This is not always the case; they are not always distinct and, indeed, researchers and activists are often the same people. As the Autonomous Geographers Collective argue, we should be wary of false distinctions between academia and wider society (2010, 247), and especially of presupposing that researchers enter the academy without relationships with communities struggling for housing justice or being a member of such communities. The structural distance between researchers and participants is not always so wide and often vanishingly thin (Derickson and Routledge 2015; Nagar and Geiger 2007).
2. A humpy is a makeshift shelter constructed by Aboriginal people in Australia using second-hand material.
3. Housing Commission refers to the former Australian state government bodies that were responsible for delivering public housing in the second half of the 20th century.

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