HOW CAN WE QUARANTINE WITHOUT A HOME? RESPONSES OF ACTIVISM AND URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN TIMES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS IN LISBON

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ABSTRACT

In Lisbon, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, new spaces for contestation and the action of urban social movements intensified, capitalising on the visibility for the right to housing, as a basic human right and an unconditional public health imperative, to fulfil the duties of lockdown and social isolation, imposed by the State of Exception. Its narrative and strategies reinforces the counter-hegemonic movement that denounces the logics of commodification and financialisation in the housing sector, placing hope in a post-capitalist transition in the post-COVID horizon. We conclude that the actors in this urban struggle have limited power over the changes they initiate, or make an effort to inflict, if they are not involved in a concerted and politically integrated action, not least because the achievements they obtain are temporary and exceptional, like the state of emergency imposed by COVID-19.

Key words: Urban social movements; urban struggles; housing rights; COVID-19; Lisbon

INTRODUCTION

A global emergency situation due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic obliges Governments to mobilise resources to enable the response of health authorities and implement economic recovery plans that protect the most fragile citizens from the impacts of the crisis caused by the pandemic. The situation of an authentic State of Exception (Agamben 2010, 2020) that exists in Portugal due to the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic and the triggering of the state of emergency[1] with the mandatory social isolation and lockdown, as well as limitations on freedom of movement, resistance and economic activities, intensified the discussion around the right to housing in Portugal. It demonstrated how poor access to the right to housing, in the midst of a pandemic crisis, not only turns out to be a condition of worsening socio-territorial inequalities and residential segregation of the pre-COVID, but also an obstacle to full compliance with sanitary standards. Now, the collectives and associations that defend this right were able to capitalise on it as a human right, focusing on the difficulty of access to housing in conditions of decent habitability that allow the isolation required by the political health authorities, catapulting this issue to the top of the social and political agenda. Digital protests, campaigns, petitions, open letters and memoranda addressed to political authorities with responsibility in the matter have multiplied. After all, how can we quarantine without a home? (Accornero *et al.* 2020; Mendes 2020).

The period of COVID-19 has exposed the contradictions of the Portuguese urban

economic recovery model of the last decade in the post capitalist crisis 2008–2009, based on the pillars of the dynamics of real estate and the touristification of the territory, generating rapid growth, but with little environmental, social and economic sustainability (Seixas *et al.* 2015; Barata Salgueiro *et al.* 2017). The economic recovery was based on a rentist, extractivist and predatory model of austerity urbanism that generated numerous phenomena of accumulation by dispossession taking advantage of the capital gains produced by an overheated housing market, especially in the inner city of Lisbon (Harvey 2012; Peck 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago 2015; Mendes 2017). The urban restructuring of the main Portuguese cities, especially Lisbon, produced phenomena of strong socio-spatial injustice, massive evictions never seen in Portuguese urban history, based on transnational gentrification, real estate speculation and financialisation of housing (Aalbers 2012, 2016; Mendes 2018a; Sequera & Nofre 2019). The dynamics of social protest, demands and pre-COVID urban struggles are now essential in order to capitalise on collective learning, the social capital of the networks created and the impact they have had on placing the issue of the right to housing on the public and political agenda, in the last years (Mayer 2010; Colomb & Novy 2016; Sequera & Nofre 2018).

How are the urban social movements that formed in Lisbon in the pre-COVID responding to the growing and aggravated inequalities in the housing market during the current pandemic? Even though we know that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is recent, and that the problem of the right to housing is as old in Portugal, as in the world, this paper aims to contribute to fill the knowledge gaps that exist in the national and international literature on this matter. Did the reorganisation of the strategies of these activisms during COVID-19 allow the response of the government, the party system and representative democracy, which were made with a sense of urgency, by immediately suspending evictions and moving forward with temporary and extraordinary measures to guarantee the basic right to housing or shelter, that allowed isolation in lockdown period?

In order to answer these questions, and in addition to a review of the national and international literature on urban social movements and some recent interventions and papers on COVID-19, the methodological line is composed of qualitative methods and techniques (semi-structured interviews to activists[2] and critical content analysis of social media and other propaganda) that allow a macro analysis of the various laws that produced quarantine urbanism during this period of state of emergency, crossed with a micro analysis of ethnographic fieldwork of the performance of those various associations and movements, taking into account the research-action work developed by the author as activist in the last three years.

The paper is organised in three main parts. The first part very briefly frames the debates on activism and urban social movements on the right to housing in general, its principles and recent developments. The second part addresses the new spaces of contestation created by anti-evictions urban social movements in pre-COVID period in Lisbon, namely, their characteristics and organisational forms, assessing the political potential for reversing the current situation of housing crisis. The third part explores the recent dramatic expansion of the pandemic and the effectiveness of the COVID-19 contingency plan, and how the intervention of urban collectives, associations and social movements for the right to housing and the multiple and innovative strategies they used were fundamental to compel representative democracy to understand and act in conformity with the categorical imperative of housing defence for everyone. The paper concludes with a summary of main findings.

SETTING THE SCENE FOR PRE-COVID RIGHT TO HOUSING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: DEBATES AND PERSPECTIVES

Manuel Castells (1973) defines urban struggles as reclaim practices that attempt to modify or alter the contradictions that cross the capitalist city. When there is a convergence of these struggles with the workers' struggles, we are witnessing the emergence of urban social movements. These, also according to the author, are specific practices of urban struggles with ability to transform structurally dominant urban logic

(Pickvance 2003). For many authors who have come to address this problem (e.g. Castells, Touraine, etc.), one of the purposes of urban social movements is that they participate in the transforming capacity of the mass movement by virtue of correlation of forces that are established within it. Without this joint action, for example, with the labour movement – the centre of gravity of the historical struggles – urban struggles lose all its transforming potential (Miller 2000; Köhler & Wissen 2003). There is thus a need to expand the urban struggles to a whole multiplicity of urban contradictions conferring legitimacy organisation. Such an organisation can only process on the basis of mutual respect and support to the self-worth of each battlefield for different pressure groups involved (Künkel & Mayer 2012; Mayer *et al.* 2016).

In the past few years, several theses have emerged stressing the loss of centrality or even the end of work as a decisive value in structuring society. Important authors contend that we are witnessing a disenchantment in respect to work and a relegating of the work sphere to a secondary plane. Instead, alternative dimensions of exercising citizenship, such as associativism, activism, voluntary work and third sector areas, have been chosen as primary spheres for civic participation and factors in social cohesion and change. The breakdown of the old Fordist wage relation, the crisis of the Welfare State, the increase in competitiveness at a global scale, especially from the mid-1980s onward, occurred as a new liberal wave emerged, largely grounded on technological innovation and the IT revolution (Sousa Santos 1994; Estanque 2009). These trends are generating profound changes and new contradictions and social inequalities in every area of contemporary societies, with striking results in the recomposition and destandardisation of traditional forms of work, beyond that strongly demobilise any critical movement that challenged or attempted critique of neoliberal ideological system (Beck 1992; Castells 2002) in reclaiming social and spatial justice (Soja 2010; Harvey 2009, 2014).

The erosion of forms of contestation and reclaiming, typical of modernity and very effective until the 1970s (trade unions and political parties) gave rise to the emergence of other forms of protest more diffuse and flexible, in terms of organisation, and also wider and holistic in with regard to the issues in question – from labour relations, civil rights, political models and the cultural and artistic expressions. It is not that traditional forms of left organising (left political parties and militant sects, labour unions and militant environmental or social movements such as the landless peasants movement in Brazil) have disappeared. But they now all seem to be part of more diffuse oppositional movements that lack overall political coherence (Mayer 2010; Künkel & Mayer 2012).

Besides trade unions' action, several collective actors who fit in the spectrum of the network social movements emerged, clarifying the relevance of collective responses for social critical needs. The new social movements that have arisen in Western societies from the 1980s are characterised by: a heterogeneous nature; localised character, scattered and ephemeral; radicalism and spectacular actions; and lack of programmatic ideologies. They are also defined by the internal diversity of the subject of their social action, the development of contentious cultural practices and the rejection of institutional politics. The apparently opposed character of these movements could be put in the same level of the antagonistic character of the Marxist class approach to social protest and the critique to it which is implicit on the new social movement theory. The fact that they are markedly streamlined through the layers of the educated youth, conveyed through cyberspace, marked by flexible organisation, networking, with no identified leaders, making use of performative and dramatic arts, unrelated to any structured political programme, reveals its spontaneity, which does not mean that they lack a clearly defined mission that guides them, as well as a strategic vision and innovative practices that produce consequences for public opinion, in the mobilisation of the most vulnerable people and also the critical lines of the university to pressure the instituted political power.

Other features have to do with: a relative decentralisation in organisation, assembled and initiated by digital networks quickly and

predominantly with media distribution; the complex relationship between the individual subject and the movement as collective identity; a complex social composition of the actors in these movements in its multireferential, composite and flexible identity; the political struggle based on the calling for more heterodox forms of political organisation and political and democratic participation in the margins of institutions; and the internationalisation of very localised and territorialised movements, but not necessarily localist (Estanque 1999; Miller 2000).

The blurring of class-based conflict (especially labour), fragmentation and casualisation of wage relations, mass and simultaneous individualisation of consumption and lifestyles, the atomisation and fragmentation of everyday behaviours, no sharing of problems/collective projects and consequent fading of collective identity and sense of sharing within the community, all these factors contribute to an experience of growing loss of mobilising capacity of traditional associative structures (union, party, etc.; Hamel *et al.* 2000; Harvey 2012).

Despite an apparent detachment from the apparatus of institutional and party democracy, these new urban social movements gain emancipatory potential for critical transformation of the urban reality. This was particularly evident in the upsurge of urban struggles and urban social movements in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 capitalist crisis (Castells 2013; Mayer *et al.* 2016; Simões *et al.* 2018). The triggering of the 2008–2009 capitalist crisis and its prolongation for the next half decade has aggravated socio-spatial inequalities, having given rise to a wave of social protests and demonstrations that, in turn, give visibility to the issue of the right to housing, in a counter-hegemonic movement that denounces the logics of commodification and financialisation in the housing sector and of exclusively private appropriation of other facilities that were from collective and public urban use (Aalbers 2012, 2016; Rolnik 2015). Some of these social protests and urban struggles have given rise to the configuration of urban social movements, whose action has been oriented, especially, to affirm the issue of housing on the political

and social agenda in the contemporary cities (Brenner *et al.* 2012; Colomb & Novy 2016; Martínez 2019).

SPACES OF CONTESTATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS SEEKING FOR SPATIAL JUSTICE AND THE RIGHT FOR HOUSING: THE PRE-COVID PERIOD

In this context and focusing specifically on the Portuguese case, the resurgence of popular protest and new urban social movements not only continued to be primarily associated to the anti-austerity ideology, as gave a new impetus to collective action in the field of struggles for the right to housing and the city. In fact, since 2011, Portugal experienced the largest protest cycle since the 1974 democratic revolution (Sousa Santos 2011; Estanque 2014; Queirós *et al.* 2015). Lisbon´s housing activism has strengthened and trigged diverse and innovative spaces of contestation, strongly underpinned by anti-gentrification and anti-displacement claims (Mendes 2018b; Tulumello 2018).

The economic crisis that erupted in 2008, deepens the fragmentation and social exclusion in the territories and intensifies social duality of the central urban areas. It also increases the indebtedness of the cities through the rampant use of credit, tried to respond to increasing social demands. But the housing crisis that has been going on in Lisbon since 2015 is due to the combination of a specific conjuncture of pluriescalar causes that ended up producing a 'perfect storm' in the local housing market.

In the pre-COVID period, between 2009 and 2019, a neoliberal turn on fiscal and urban policies emerged, driven by post-crisis capitalist international austerity intervention 2011–2014 in Portugal. Both national as urban government has discovered the potential of touristification and overtourism in regenerating inner-city traditional housing areas, in order to increase the competitiveness of the city and certain neighbourhoods in the global context of urban competition. This catapulted the city of Lisbon onto the world map, making it a favourite destination for attracting tourist flows and foreign

investment, tying fixed capital from its transnational capital flows in Lisbon's built environment and housing stock.

The creation of aggressive programmes to attract foreign investment (as the Golden Visa and the Non Habitual Residents), the new urban rental law, the new tax regime for Property Investment Funds, the new law of tourist lodging (short-rental), along with a intense rent gap in the inner-city, a full liberalisation at the level of urban land use in the city municipal master plan, as well as a strong growth in tourism in the city of Lisbon, introduced significant changes in the residential market, which went from an abrupt pause to a high level of demand, with supply now beginning to fall short. This situation led to a very quick take-up of the new and good quality residential stock that was available, located mostly in the city's historic centre. The rapid take-up of apartments, the new tourism drivers – with an 'alternative' demand for stays in apartments – and tax incentives to boost urban regeneration, have created renewed interest among many national and international developers, leading to a great rise in the refurbishment of buildings in Lisbon's historic district (Mendes 2017; Cocola Gant & Gago 2019; Lestegás 2019).

As a result of the increasing volume of real estate interventions, physical and architectural improvements become increasingly visible. As a result, house prices in historic neighbourhoods begin to climb very rapidly. Without regulation or moderate control over rent increases, the eviction process expands to more aggressive forms as neighbourhood real estate values also increase and the state approves legislation that facilitates private initiative and evicts local residents and retailers from local and traditional retail. The better maintained housing and commercial properties become part of the upper- and upper-middle class market as homeowners seek to take advantage of the area's enhanced notoriety, which in turn leads to further displacement[3] (Mendes 2018a; Sequera & Nofre 2019).

Given the urban contradictions generated by the omnipresence of economic and financial crisis and the negative impacts on the housing local market by touristification and transnational gentrification (Hughes 2018; Sequera & Nofre 2018) on the scale of districts most affected by tourist accommodation, financialisation of housing and luxury real estate for the new middle classes (Aalbers 2019), anything else would not be expect than the resurgence of urban protest movements (Domaradzka 2018; Seixas & Brito Guterres 2018; Mehan & Rossi 2019). In the Lisbon case, an interesting and emancipatory connection has emerged between the transforming ability of these joint movements with the class struggle to create pressure on the local and national urban policy process, as with popular movements fighting for homes and the right to the city in the post 25 April 1974 Portugal (democratic revolution).

With specific orientation for the Right to the City and Housing, the collective 'Habita – Collective for the Right to Housing and the City', emerged in 2009, however constituted as an Association in 2014, but had already been active for more than a decade. This is a lively collective that fights for the defence that the realisation of these fundamental rights are essential to human life, since they are recognised by national and international law, in particular relating to the Article 65 on the right to housing and urban planning, as are arranged in the Portuguese Constitution. This collective belongs to several international networks and brings together activists with many years work experience in this area and that, over time, developed a dialogue with organisations and government agencies in several instances, fighting for human dignity and fundamental rights in terms of production and appropriation of the city (Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7).

In its statement of principles the collective Habita maintains that all people have the right to adequate housing. This is a fundamental human right for the experience of all economic, social, cultural rights as well as civil and political, and therefore have to be respected and treated in an integrated manner with other rights. Moreover, housing is a right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. The collective maintain that all people have the right to the city, and equal access usufruct to its various social spaces and active

participation in its production and appropriation process. The right to the city is closely linked to the right to housing and challenge the multiple processes of segregation, insecurity, discrimination, vulnerability and expulsion that limit the right to housing, as well as services, equipment and public spaces of our cities. They argue that housing and urban development should be part of a truly participatory public policy and for combating all forms of property speculation. The Habita organisation fights against housing seen as a financial asset and commodity, which is only seen as exchange value and devoid of use value excluding the most vulnerable people, who are expelled from their homes and their places when they cannot afford the inflated prices that for decades have favoured the real estate and banking sector (I4 and I7). The collective claims a dwelling compatible with people's incomes, adequate and integrated in the city, with access to mobility, culture, equipment and services. They also fight for the rights to housing and the city, looking for foster self-organisation and awareness of people and the training of activists (I5). This collective combines coherently the study and reflection of the root causes that limit the right to housing and the city; with direct intervention, complaint, political pressure and public to change systems, legislation and policies, supporting struggles and working for formulating policy proposals (I4).

Associated with the Habita Association, the collective *Stop Despejos*/Stop Evictions emerged about three years ago. It is collectively fighting for the end of evictions, for the defence of the right to housing and for the collective, inclusive and fairer construction of our cities (I5). In this context, they present themselves as a tool of struggle and resistance 'to the wave of financial real estate speculation and to the neoliberal policies that govern cities, privatise public space, attack our lives, threaten and trample fundamental rights' (see https://stopdespejos.wordpress.com/). They defend the right to decent housing for all, the right to the city and the right to remain in their neighbourhood, the right to stay put.

They seek to join the struggles of all who are in a situation of eviction, or of precarious housing, defending the creation of solidarity networks and the active and participative construction of alternatives, whose pre-COVID experience has proved essential as an urban struggle strategy (I6). As residents and/or supporters of the struggle for decent housing and the right to the city, they present themselves as a supportive collective, understanding that the issue of housing is a social, political and economic problem. They are constituted as a platform of encounter and space for the convergence of individuals, collectives and movements fighting for the right to decent housing and for an inclusive and fairer city (I3). They also demonstrate their willingness to form alliances with grassroots feminist, anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-capitalist movements, with whom they admit to sharing ways of seeing the world and fighting for a better one (I7). Stop Despejos is a horizontal collective (there are no hierarchies and decisions are taken in assembly), non-partisan (does not belong to or support any political party), self-financed (does not accept state subsidies) and autonomous (does not depend on any other organisation) (I3).

They claim the right to collective construction of the spaces where they live, the right to public space, the end of precariousness and the crisis in access to housing. 'In a country where real estate profits are privileged and laws disrespect the right to a decent life and housing, disobedience is legitimate and necessary'. That is why, in addition to communication and claim campaigns, they practise direct action and support the occupation and obstruction of evictions (I5):

> Despite the big complexity and diversity of grassroots actors at play, emergent struggles have had in common the capacity to play on different arenas – seeking media visibility, negotiating with institutional actors, acting in confrontational way, producing alternative data – with the explicit goal of fighting back the commodification of housing in 'post-austerity' Lisbon. (Tulumello 2018, p. 62)

Although these new urban social movements are quite autonomous against the manipulations of the political and partisan ideology of representative democracy, the truth is that they no longer have a social base really

organised (I2). The new social movements are located outside the sphere of work and production, away from the ideal of workers' struggle at developing a critical and contestation action, focusing, above all, in a particular and specific aspect of the general conditions of existence – housing rights, ignoring all others. They are characterised by a generalised distrust of the state (and political parties), by strong criticism to anti-conscience parties, and dominated by specific particularities which give them of a peripheral character in relation to the central contradictions between capital and labour. They express a new political culture, centred on the right values to be different, but do not have a connection with the various fronts of struggle, which is a relatively weak policy (Harvey 2012; Queirós *et al.* 2015; Fonseca 2018).

'EVEN AT HOME, THE FIGHT DOES NOT QUARANTINE!' 'SOFA ACTIVISM' AND ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES OF CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis took us by surprise, imposing unexpected pressure on families and essential public services and demanding challenges to the economy and labor. We are going through a health, social and economic crisis like we have never lived before. The outbreak of COVID-19 and measures of social distance took people and states by surprise and brought about profound routine changes. Given the unpredictable nature of the virus, there is a dominant narrative in the media that we are in the presence of a 'symmetrical shock', that is, something that affects everyone equally (countries and people) and that we all suffer the consequences, regardless of your socio-economic status. More critical opinions have recently paid more attention to the uneven impact of the virus on societies. Inequality begins to be noticed between countries: while the most advanced economies have mechanisms to mitigate economic impacts – for example, the role of central banks in the injection of liquidity in the markets that allows to contain the panic of investors and facilitate the conditions of state financing (preventing

public debt interest rates from skyrocketing) – developing countries are not so lucky. We are not 'all in the same boat' and this will also be reflected in the deep recession that lies ahead. On the other hand, decades of neoliberalism and the most recent period of austerity after the capitalist crisis 2008–2009 has left a major part of the population and territories totally exposed and ill prepared to face a public health crisis on the scale of coronavirus (Harvey 2020; Ferreira 2020; Tulumello 2020).

With regard to access to the right to housing, the ineffectiveness of guaranteeing the application of preventive measures, such as maintaining personal hygiene and guaranteeing distance and social isolation, the pandemic dramatically exposed the contradictions of the capitalist production of urban space and aggravated the lines of socio-territorial inequalities and residential segregation that came from the pre-COVID-19 period. How to wash your hands if there is not even soap and domestic access to water? How to think about social isolation in overcrowded houses? Again, how can we quarantine if we don't have a home? (I3) The collectives and urban social movements with emergence and action in the pre-COVID-19, which helped to put the right to housing on the public and political agenda, are the ones that are better prepared to defend the most vulnerable social groups in access to decent housing living conditions and proved to be decisive in the public pressure of the Portuguese government towards the adoption of urgent and exceptional temporary measures, during the COVID-19 crisis, but also in the socioeconomic crisis and the very strong recession that is looming post-COVID-19, as all respondents mentioned.

On 18 March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Portugal, through the Decree-Law of the President of the Republic no. 14-A/2020, of March 18. The World Health Organisation had qualified the current public health emergency situation caused by the epidemic of the disease COVID-19, making it imperative to provide measures to ensure its treatment, through a regime appropriate to this reality, that allows establish exceptional and temporary measures to respond to the epidemic.

Manifesto: 'How can we quarantine without a home?' Negotiating with institutional actors – In the previous weekend, Association Habita and the collective Stop Despejos had produced a manifesto entitled 'How can we quarantine without a home?', subscribed by more than 60 associations and collectives, including the Morar em Lisboa platform. This manifesto gave rise to a petition that gathers around 2,500 signatures in a few days. The manifesto calls for an immediate end to the evictions, the immediate resettlement of all evicted people and families and those living on the street, the requisition of empty houses, may they be tourist, luxury or municipal apartments, for emergency resettlement. On the other hand, they also ask for the suspension of the payment of rent for all tenants affected by the crisis, the suspension of the payment of housing loans and mortgages, the suspension of rent for social spaces, such as collectives and associations, as well as the small businesses affected by the crisis and that had a suspension of income.

This petition sensitised thousands of people in civil society and helped to catapult the most primary contradictions inherent to the problem of the right to housing onto the public agenda. This collective effort, associated with the sending of various memorandums that the Lisbon Tenants Association (a century-old association and of a more institutional character, that belongs to Morar em Lisboa) produced in those weeks of March and which sent to the Prime Minister of Portugal, the entire government and parliamentary groups, ended up having an effect, both on government discourse as in the measures adopted (I2, 6 and 7). It was suggested that, taking into account the gravity and the exceptionality of the COVID-19 moment, not only should evictions be suspended, but also that rental legislation should be suspended with regard to terms, which should only start counting after the end of the period contingency. It was considered that landlords should not be able to invoke the denunciation or opposition to the renewal of the rent contract during the contingency period. Finally, it was also defended the deferral of the payment of installments of loans for the purchase of housing by the ordinary citizen or in the case of the acquisition of property for social,

cultural associations, etc. All these measures enacted as a way of protecting the family and individual home while the pandemic and quarantine situation persists.

The Assembly of the Portuguese Republic welcomed with approval and with a sense of urgency some of the proposals made, and the consensus of the plenary led the President of the Republic to promulgate the Law 1-A/2020 on 19 March 'Exceptional and temporary measures response to the epidemiological situation caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and the disease COVID-19' where it is determined that the eviction actions, the special eviction procedures and the processes for delivery of the leased property are suspended, when the tenant can be placed in a situation of fragility due to lack of housing.

On the other hand, an extraordinary and transitional tenant protection regime was created, which determines that until the cessation of the prevention, containment, mitigation and treatment of COVID-19, as determined by the national public health authority, it is not possible to cancel the housing rental agreements (including retail and associations) made by the landlord and foreclosure on property that constitutes permanent housing.

'Resisting from home': seeking media visibility and producing alternative data – In addition to the petition and the sending of memos (direct communication with the political authorities) (I2 and I7), some more creative and innovative strategies in the performative sense were carried out, since the right to resist and to circulate or manifest in public space had been suspended by the state of emergency (I3 and I5). How to continue to resist from home? This was the primary issue with which social and collective movements were now confronted. I would like to highlight four strategies that seem relevant to me in this field: holding virtual platform assemblies, creation of a network of studies on housing (Rede H) at the academic level that promotes action research, email bombing and local networks of mutual support.

Regarding the first, Habita had been holding weekly Assemblies in the last months, where weaknesses, strengths and strategies of struggle were discussed with the victims of evictions or

threats of eviction. The moment was crucial to empower the most vulnerable victims of residential segregation, and to encourage socialisation and collectivisation of problems. The aim is not to find an individual solution but for solutions to be thought and taken collectively, strengthening class consciousness (I5, e I7). As these presential meetings are no longer possible due to the abolition of the right to resistance established during the state of emergency, in the absence of face-to-face meetings, these started to take place on digital platforms and online social networks.

The second strategy, founded in February 2020, Rede H – National Housing Studies Network brings together about 60 people, including academics, activists and other civil society actors, united by their interest in studying the topic of housing. In mid-March, before the declaration of the state of emergency, they published an open letter to the Portuguese government and society, addressing several urgent measures to be implemented in order to strengthen the right to housing in this pandemic period. This open letter marks the beginning of a path of reflection and active participation in the debate on housing in Portugal during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, although this network had been formed since June 2019, at the time, seeking to create an exchange of experience between different scientific projects and studies on housing, tourism and social movements.

The 60 individuals who are part of the network understand that the measures approved so far by the Parliament (such as the suspension of evictions, the effects of the termination of rental agreements and the execution of mortgages) and by some city councils (such as the suspension of evictions from the social housing park) are positive, but still insufficient in view of today's needs. Under a high risk of non-compliance with the Housing Basis Law and the National Contingency Plan COVID-19, as well as with the various information circulars from the Directorate-General for Health and the Ministry of Health, they request immediate compliance with a set of measures directed at housing, namely, the following. Mobilise the available spaces (hotel industry, airbnb or short-rental accommodation, municipal dwellings that can be temporarily assigned) to meet self-insulation and quarantine compliance in order to avoid risks to individual, family and public health. This immediate use, if necessary through a request as provided for in the declaration of state of emergency, should primarily benefit people in situations of homelessness, families living in conditions of extreme housing precariousness or overcrowding, victims of domestic or gender violence, workers precarious housing and, if necessary, health professionals. They also ask for an automatically extention of the rental contracts (housing or not) during the national emergency period, plus an adequate period to search for new permanent and decent housing, in the case of contracts that had already ended. They alert to the prevention of the increase in housing charges, through the reduction or suspension of payments of rents and credit loans for families that suffer a decrease in income. Protect smallholders whose income constitutes a substantial part of their livelihood, with fiscal relief and financial support measures (I1).

Rede H has two main objectives (see https://www.redehabitacao.pt/), the first is related to the research carried out in the field of housing studies and the second to the approximation of housing studies with the non-academic context. Each main objective is divided into secondary objectives that support the realisation of the vision of Rede H. The first objective is to develop collaboration within the field of housing studies: facilitate the creation of projects and work groups; articulate studies in different territorial contexts; bring together groups and individuals with similar research interests, avoiding overlapping studies; share results and data-research outputs, worked data and, possibly, raw data. The second objective is to enhance the visibility of housing studies outside the academic context and other contexts specifically interested in the topic (e.g. activism, real estate) (I8). Here is important to: produce alternative data and contribute to public deliberation through active participation in the public debate; facilitate access for journalists, politicians, technicians, and other interested parties, to studies and research results, through a repository organised by key themes and with priority to open access material; and stimulate public debate on housing and the necessary knowledge in this field (I8).

But, above all, Rede H favours the approach of the scientific world and its habitus to the practical field of activism, which will also have been mobilised by the participation of researchers and members of the network in activism in the last years, with the production of reports, opinions, political participation and in the consultation of political parties and even in various organs of institutional democracy and the legal system, for example, the Lisbon municipal assembly, Parliament's housing and land planning committee and directly influencing the institutional environment in the adoption of social measures for the right to housing. The collective learning cemented by some of its members, who reconcile the academic with the activist, feeds the Network's willingness to put pressure on political power and influence the taking of political measures legitimised by scientific knowledge, based on public decisions made and legitimised by technique and science. Thus, the production of alternative scientific knowledge, in addition to escaping the status quo of a positivist and hegemonic paradigm of scientific production, feeds civic intervention and active citizenship practices.

Another important strategy adopted was the email bombing. The collectives proposed that on 8 April at 12pm, thousands of activists and citizens would simultaneously send an avalanche of electronic messages with the same recipients, in this case political sovereignty bodies (Prime Minister, Minister of Housing, Secretary of State for Housing, among others), in order to flood the e-mail boxes of the sovereign bodies with their demands. In Internet usage, an email bombing is a form of net abuse consisting of sending large volumes of email to an address in an attempt to overflow the mailbox. Mass mailing is a common strategy used by organisations like Amnesty International. The objective consists of sending numerous duplicate mails to the same email address not only to block the service of sending and receiving institutional emails, acting in a confrontational way, but as a symbolic strategy to alert and dramatically wake up the political authorities of the need for robust intervention in the housing field, in this pandemic crisis (I7).

The last strategy, but no less important, is the formation of local networks of mutual support, especially the solidarity canteens, where dozens of activists from the aforementioned groups now collaborate (I3). This type of social strategy that already existed in a network of social support institutions and community centres, is now reinforced throughout the city of Lisbon, with the appearance of improvised cafeterias, even often in the spaces of the associations, aimed at providing meals, especially for individuals and families in a situation of socio-economic vulnerability. The localism of these networks of solidarity and mutual help promote a cooperative model of production and consumption and are not disconnected from a political intention and from access to a manifesto that also allows class awareness (I5).

FINAL REMARKS

Currently, with the pandemic crisis of COVID-19, a new wave of protest seems to have revived the theoretical debate on the praxis of urban social movements and collective action not on public space, but in everyone's individual home, pushing the reinvention of strategies of resistance, even in times of lockdown. The post-austerity social movements have called again attention to the academy, the public opinion, the civil society, the media and the political power.

And, especially in this period, the contradictions of capitalist production of urban space gain relevance and brutally expose extreme inequalities in access to the right to housing. This situation, associated with the narrative of the panoptic moral duty of self-government, through forced and compulsory lockdown, in order to respect the compliance with the sanitary rules of public health authorities, further evidence the brutality of cases of residential segregation, evictions and spatial injustice. Associations, collectives and social movements in defence of the right to housing were able to capitalise on these aspects, anchoring the urban struggle in housing as a human right, essential to life; conquering, even temporarily and exceptionally, important objectives such as suspension of evictions, suspension of mortgage payments, resettlement of the most

vulnerable on Airbnb or hotel rooms, thus imposing the right to housing on the right to property, setting precedents that can be useful in post-COVID-19 social struggle.

In this recent dramatic context of the expansion of the pandemic and the contingency plan, the intervention of these and other associations was essential to compel representative democracy to understand and act in accordance with the categorical imperative of defending housing for all. Some more moderate, some more radical, some more institutional, others more grassroots, reveal an effort of participatory citizenship towards another political agenda. But the greatest value of this broad spectrum of intervention, quite differentiated, is precisely in the diversity of action, but, above all, in the complementarity, integration and unity in the struggle (Mendes 2020). And the capitalisation of a culture of participation and critical intervention in civil society, as well as the mobilisation of collective learning developed in post-austerity urban struggles, is now proving, in this period of pandemic crisis, essential to make resistance consistent to shake the installed political power.

In a certain sense, the pandemic caused an interesting change in the centre of gravity of the activism of urban social movements in Lisbon: the objective of giving visibility and exposing the contradictions of inequalities in access to the right to housing, thus raising public awareness and the political agenda for this problem, has been replaced by a strategy of more reflective and purposeful actions in order to mobilise the community and expand networks of mutual support at different scales and pressure the political powers to take a more assertive decision and action regarding measures that promote an effective right to housing.

The coronavirus pandemic crisis also has triggered a new wave of collective practices that gesture towards another form of social organisation that is urgently needed. As Stavrides (2020) states: different neighbourhood initiatives, movement organised campaigns, dispersed rhizomatic acts of solidarity, community based management of local places are spreading throughout the world, under the radar of dominant institutions, as well as bypassing market and capitalist hegemonic channels of attendance, production, consumption and distribution. It seems that within these processes an intensive production of the common develops. The common emerges as both the form and the content of social relations that transcend the limitations and contradictions of the hegemonic capitalist, neoliberal and market system, putting emphasis not just only in a set of products and services to be shared, or in a set of organisational choices to ensure a more just distribution of the crucial means for survival to those in need, but also in a more collaborative and community way of life.

While the traditional left (communist and socialist in orientation) typically espoused and defended some version of democratic centralism (in political parties, trade unions, and alike), other principles are frequently advanced – such as 'horizontality' and 'non-hierarchy' – or visions of radical democracy and the governance of the commons (Castells 2013; Dardot & Laval 2015), that can work for small groups but are impossible to operationalise at the scale of a metropolitan region. That is, an excessive horisontality can be an obstacle to the victory of urban struggles. The challenge is thus to generate urban social movements capable of enhancing new subjectivities and critical and transformative social practices as well as spaces of freedom with interstitial and cross-cutting, in the form of rhizome, refusing authoritarian discipline, formal hierarchy of order priorities decreed from above (top-down). These are the heterotopias of Foucault; the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari; the transduction, experimental utopia and the urban revolution of the right to the city of Lefebvre; the dialectical utopianism of Harvey; or a new emancipatory political culture to a high-intensity democracy, proposals of Boaventura Sousa Santos. But this should not be seen as contradictory to the implementation of course of inevitable, necessary and even desirable decision centres. But at the same time we must ensure sustainability of struggle and constant critical scrutiny against conformity, free of devitalised and amorphous institutions, but also allows representation and decision-making in a democratic process.

In conclusion, the actors in this urban struggle have limited power over the changes that they initiate, or make an effort to inflict,

if they are not involved in a concerted and politically integrated action. Despite their weak capacity for mobilisation, their limited and fleeting character, the truth is that new urban social movements often include social and political innovation, as they aim at 'transformative' changes and new responses that imply transformation in power relations in the contemporary city. Although aware that these are exceptional and temporary measures, and that they correspond, therefore, to very ephemeral conquests associated with the state of emergency generated by this pandemic crisis, some see in the post-COVID-19 horizon that these anti-capitalist policies taken for a robust welfare state can anticipate some change to a post-capitalist transition regime. Let us not forget, however, that these are biopolitical measures, taken in a context of neoliberal systemic totality, in order to reproduce the bodies and the masses of the labor and consumption forces. After all, something needs to change so that everything stays the same.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. A country's government can declare that it is in a state of emergency. This means that the government can suspend and/or change some of the functions of the executive, the legislature or the judiciary powers while the country is in this exceptional state, while alerting its citizens to adjust their behaviour according to the new situation, in addition to command government agencies to implement emergency plans. A government can declare a state of emergency in response to natural or man-made disasters, periods of civil unrest, and declarations of war or situations involving internal or international armed conflicts. Due to the continuous expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, on 18 March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Portugal, through Decree-Law of the President of the Portuguese Republic No. 14-A/2020. The measures implemented will be addressed later in this paper. On the other hand, the State of Exception is characterised by the temporary suspension of constitutional rights and guarantees, in which power is divided and decisions depend on the approval of a plurality of agents – decision-making agility is compromised. The State of Exception is a temporary situation of restriction of rights and concentration of powers that, during its term, brings a State under democratic regime closer to authoritarianism. Aware of the current situation, Agamben (2020) and Sousa Santos (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis attests to the growing tendency to use the state of exception as a normal paradigm of contemporary government at the service of neoliberalism. It argues that most states reacted with a strong disproportion by triggering drastic temporary measures of State of Emergency that suspend many constitutional rights normally guaranteed.

2. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with members and activists from the following associations, collectives or social movements operating: *Habitar Porto* (I1), Lisbon Tenants Association (I2), Left Hand Rotation (I3), *Morar em Lisboa*, Living in Lisbon (I4), *Stop Despejos*, Stop Evictions (I5), Neighbors of Arroios (I6), Association Habita (I7) and *Rede H*, Network H (I8). The anonymity of the interviewees will be maintained, but identified throughout the paper, whenever the reference to the content of the interview justifies it. To all of them, I am grateful for the in-depth contribution of practical knowledge that they have offered me.

3. Between 2013 and 2017, the districts, already so depopulated in the inner city of Lisbon, lost about 15 per cent of their population (CML).

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