

GLOBAL URBANISM

Knowledge, Power and the City

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Chapter 36

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URBAN STRUGGLES AND THEORISING FROM EASTERN EUROPEAN CITIES

A collective interview with Ana Vilenica, Ioana Florea, Veda Popovici and Zsuzsi Pósfai

Ana, Ioana, Veda and Zsuzsi are scholars and activists based in Belgrade, Bucharest and Budapest. They kindly agreed to perform this interview collectively, working together to bring to the fore the powerful text that follows. Ana is active in urban movements in Serbia, as well as within the European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City (EAC). She is also one of the editors of the *Radical Housing Journal* and the *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*. Ioana is a researcher at the University of Gothenburg focusing on urban policies, urban power structures and related inequalities, as well as a housing activist based in Bucharest, Romania. Veda is an activist and engaged theorist based in Bucharest too, where she has been involved in resisting evictions, organising occupations and building community around collective space. Veda currently works as the facilitator of the EAC. Both Ioana and Veda are involved as militant researchers and organisers with The Common Front for Housing Rights and with the national housing justice confederation BLOCK for Housing, active in several cities and villages in Romania. Last but not least, Zsuzsi is a member of Rákóczi Collective, a group working on establishing rental-based housing cooperatives in Hungary. She is also a founding member of Periféria Policy and Research Center, an independent, critically engaged organisation working on issues of spatial justice and housing based in Budapest. Her work revolves around political economy, with an emphasis on understanding macro-scale dependencies, with a thematic focus on housing.

MICHELE LANCIONE AND COLIN MCFARLANE: If you have to think at Eastern European cities from a “global” point of view, what comes to mind? How can you position Eastern European cities within global urban geographies of exchanges, material and immaterial flows, and the likes?

ANA VILENCIA, IOANA FLOREA, VEDA POPOVIC AND ZSUZSI PÓSFAI: The historical position of Eastern Europe within global material and immaterial flows has been a semi-peripheral one, depending on and serving the Western core, while continuously trying to maintain its position as a less exploited territory than the Global South and the further East (Arrighi, 1994). Eastern Europe was largely rural at the beginning of the twentieth century and is still recording around 45% rural population today. Thus, historically, it has represented an extraction site for raw materials and agricultural products and, in the last three decades, for cheap

labour with “European quality”; this is considered by national and international decision makers and lobbyists as its main competitive advantage today.

The dependent relations towards the West came with a long series of disadvantageous commercial treaties (Ban, 2014), with accumulating cycles of extraction through financial relations (Raviv, 2008) and with a deepening debt relation both on the scale of the state and of individual households (Becker et al., 2015). With Western Europe struggling to tackle its own economic crises since the 1970s, the peripheries of Europe became an important “buffer zone” – mainly for investing surplus capital and for reducing costs of production by relocating certain production facilities to these countries. Thus we can broadly say that the West exported its economic crisis effects to the East – strong examples of which could be experienced in the years following the 2008 crisis (idem). In the meantime, generations of local elites have gazed towards the West with an aspirational ethos and with limited bargaining power when attempting to strengthen their (local/regional/global) positions. Since the nineteenth century, the dependency also came with a fast circulation of capital, technologies, political forms and discourses. This also deepened with the economic and political project of the European Union. Thus it is particularly interesting to understand dependent relations within Europe – which on a global scale is often seen as a “black box” of “advanced” economic development.

In parallel, the semi-peripheral dependency came with discourses of European belonging (Popovici and Pop, 2016) marked by what decolonial scholars termed “nested orientalism” (Bakić-Hayden, 1995): in dominant discourses, Eastern Europe has never been “actually Europe”; it always had to prove its Europeanness; it had to hide or reject its Oriental past as connected to the history of the Ottoman Empire or the Eastern Bloc; it had to prove its “return to Europe” after the 1945–1989 “deviation towards” or “kidnapping by” communist regimes (Florea, 2015). The main paradigm used in the last 30 years to describe the social/political phenomena in the region has been about “catching up” with the West, when in fact the uneven and dependent development of Southern and Eastern Europe has been a prerequisite for the economic advancement of core European countries (Becker et al., 2015).

In this broader process, cities have been crucial arenas of capitalist investment, and especially so during periods of financialisation, such as we are experiencing since the 1970s. Furthermore, the “catching up” or “transition” narrative always accompanied local bourgeois projects. Their rise ensured and was ensured by the growing affluence of their cities inside the region (Ban, 2014). But this growth was based on a competitive developmental model and always fueled by resources extracted from the hinterland, producing a nested hierarchy of cores and peripheries on different spatial scales (Hadjimichalis, 1983). Thus it meant a sharp hierarchy between cities, a deep inequality between capital cities and other urban localities, and an even deeper urban-rural divide. This internal polarisation is a required element of economic growth on the macro-scale (which can be seen as an apparent catching-up process) on the semi-peripheries (Hürtgen, 2015). As in other (semi-)peripheral regions of the world, growing Eastern European (EE) cities are dependent on extracting rural resources (from raw materials to cheap wage labour) and on attracting foreign investments, with subsidies, tax cuts and narratives of (catching up) Europeanness. In this developmental model, EE cities are assigned a role of performing Westernness, always proving their “progress”, “development”, “technological advancement”, “democracy”, etc. The most successful cities (usually the capital cities) are connected to the West and Western capital but always in asymmetric relations which facilitate resource extraction.

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ML AND CMF: The world is increasingly urbanised, and it will be even more so in the next decade. This brings very specific opportunities and challenges according to local histories and current socio-economic, cultural and demographic dynamics. In this context, what is “global urbanism” as seen and experienced from Eastern Europe?

ANA, IOANA, VEDA AND ZSUZI: We consider that the specific opportunities and challenges for EE cities in a globalised and urbanised world stem from the overlapping of their (semi-) peripheral position, their history of Western dependency, the bourgeois developmental projects to which they were associated, the 1945–1989 modernisation projects through which they were (re)built or abandoned, the post-1989 trade and credit agreements that the different EE states signed. We think there are varieties in their current situations, also according to (1) their relationship with the EU and their EU accession process, (2) their slightly different privatisation paths after 1989, (3) the post-1989 and post-crisis (uneven) urban development strategies at national and local levels. We think the varieties of Eastern European urban experiences are helpful in tackling the “global urban”.

First, we should note that there are differences between cities in the EU internal and external peripheries: despite the fact that cheap labour, raw materials and financial extraction have similar mechanisms, in the internal peripheries (EU member states), cities were required to be (and were made) more predictable, open and stable. Here, massive Western investments came a bit earlier and were also part of these countries’ process of EU accession – during which they were required to undergo liberalisation in various sectors of their economy. As a result, EE cities in EU member states have become important locations for attracting Western foreign direct investment and have also become arenas for credit-led financial extraction. Also, because of their EU membership, these EE cities could access structural development funds, which had an important impact on how urban restructuring has been done in the past years.

Secondly, as privatisation policies in the 1990s and austerity measures after 2008 were implemented under the pressure of international credit institutions and international corporate bodies (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, EU, international commercial banks, American Chamber of Commerce, the German Development Agency GIZ, etc.), they were quite similar across the region. Their social impact generally consists of the rise in unemployment and in-work poverty, wide-scale deindustrialisation and decay of industrial cities (Chelcea, 2008), strong work migration to the West, huge rise in housing costs, urban homelessness and housing precarity, the deregulation of real estate developments and household credits (Florea and Dumitriu, 2018) – processes which strongly mark the physical and social structure of our cities.

Specific to the region is the unsustainable structure of household debt, which was especially manifest in the years following the 2008 crisis, when many households went into bankruptcy. Beyond credit-based indebtedness, high levels of utility arrears are also prevalent in the region (Bródy and Pósfai, 2020). These forms of indebtedness can push people into migration – abroad, but also to urban outskirts, to smaller towns or even to rural areas where housing is more accessible. Also specific to the region is a high homeownership rate – around 90% of the housing units, which is higher than in any other region of Europe.¹ This specificity has its origin in the wide right-to-buy privatisation policies in the early 1990s and the property restitution policies² in the last decades – resulting in the sell-off of the vast majority of previously publicly owned housing – and in the strong policy support for private homeownership after the largest waves of privatisation. Indeed, support for homeownership

was pushed as the main housing strategy of the EE countries, especially by the World Bank and EU, but it has also been a clear political priority of national governments – as a way to ensure the retrenchment of the social state and the creation and deregulation of the real estate and mortgage markets (Vincze, 2017). Similar to other semi-peripheries, global corporate landlords are preparing to expand in EE cities, feeding on household debt and dispossession (Mikuš, 2019). A particular form this takes are international debt collector companies expanding their presence in EE countries, buying both collateralised and non-collateralised debt, capitalising on defaulting household debt originating in the pre-crisis credit boom.

In these processes, middle-size cities in EE face special challenges. They illustrate our third point here about uneven urban development strategies at national and local levels, generating specific conditions and variations among cities. As in other semi-peripheries, middle-sized cities are marked by a permanent tension between growing and shrinking, testifying to the moving frontline between capital investment and household strategies for social reproduction (Gagyí and Vigvari, 2018; Pósfai, 2018). If these cities strive for economic prosperity, they find themselves in harsh competition to attract global capital by any means. The growing ones are directly dependent on larger international investments (such as manufacturing plants for German car companies), struggling to have special industrial zones, dedicated to niche industrial sectors. Other middle-size cities use cultural strategies to attract capital, framing “urban renewal” projects as their catching-up magic stories (Oancă, 2018). When the tourism industry came to European peripheries, it came with the “European Capital of Culture” festive imaginaries (Gazeta de artă politică, 2016), but with unstable job contracts, huge public resources put into public-private partnerships for private profit, Airbnb tax evasion, social and ethnic cleansing of the touristic urban areas.

ML AND CMF: Continuing on the challenges that Eastern European cities are facing, can you take one or two examples and unpack those for our international readership? We would like to hear about the way you conceptualise those issues from the ground of your own practice.

ANA, IOANA, VEDA AND ZSUZSI: Continuous challenges for Eastern European cities appear at the intersection of international, national and local scales: as global capital comes to extract resources from the region, national and local governments often respond with deregulations and anti-social policies, facilitating further housing financialisation.

Urban regeneration projects have been often serving as Trojan horses for these processes, resulting in the displacement of the impoverished. Such projects are usually facilitated by municipalities and the state, undertaken in partnership with foreign capital or through EU projects. Their optimistic urban visions and seductive catching-up imaginaries promise growth, increase of employment, salvation from recession while facilitating the flow of public money into private hands, and processes of social cleansing.

One of the most indicative recent examples in the region has been the Belgrade Waterfront Project mega-development in Serbia. This project, being granted “national importance” status, has been planned through a public-private partnership (PPP) with the Eagle Hills company from the United Arab Emirates. Its status enabled the legislative “fast tracking”, avoiding and violating planning and construction requirements. The PPP binding contract revealed that, for the Belgrade Waterfront Project, the Serbian government granted land rights to a newly formed company and agreed to invest a huge public budget in its preparatory work, including the displacement of the main railway and bus station. Before

the initial phase of the construction work, more than 200 families were evicted, some of them remaining homeless and placed in temporary accommodation. These issues have not been left unanswered: a new urban movement, Don't let Belgrade d(r)own, arose in the city, opposing the project and the deregulations around it.

As we said before, housing has been an important battlefield in East European cities. In many of them, property restitutions to interwar owners and their heirs have been a key process in the capitalist restoration and development in ex 'state socialist' countries. Since the early 1990s, in Romania's larger cities, restitutions have been a major reason for mass evictions, as new owners raise rents to unaffordable levels, sell their properties (with tenants inside) to speculators or "cleanse" the poorer tenants from centrally located properties to boost real estate prices. Tens of thousands of families have been evicted by restitution profiteers only in Romania (Vişan and FCDL, 2019).³ EE states, under their unequivocal pro-capital anti-social(ist) urban regimes (Vilenica, 2019), have failed to provide adequate public housing to those evicted, leaving hundreds of thousands in improper housing, informal housing and homelessness.

In the last years, household debt has been the main articulation of processes of housing financialisation in Eastern European countries, directly connected to the broader context of economic dependency described previously. Through this, households become sources for financial extraction on an international scale. For a small unpaid debt, households can be evicted without any alternative housing being provided, and with the only roof over their head sold in auctions to repay the debt. In Serbia, with the law on debt enforcement (Vilenica and Pantović, 2019) and the introduction of public-private debt enforcers that profit from default cases, evictions became an everyday reality. In Hungary, the turning point in debt-related evictions came in 2016, when the unfolding new wave of mortgage lending made it necessary to "clear banks' portfolios" – although evictions related to utility debt had been common even before. In parallel, the state has destroyed social infrastructure that could protect people from homelessness. Social housing has been residualised and turned into the leftovers of previous 'state socialist' housing systems (Pósfai and Jelinek, 2019; Vilenica, 2019). Potential users of social housing have been divided into vulnerable groups that compete for housing crumbs.

To further facilitate the process of financialisation and to further limit the power of what they portray as "needy citizens", EE governments have been progressively introducing legal measures in order to criminalise poor households and housing movements. For instance, in May 2019, Serbia introduced new amendments to the criminal law and the law on debt enforcement in order to criminalise the obstruction of bailiffs during eviction actions. Hungary was the first country in the world to criminalise homelessness through its Constitution in autumn 2018. Since 2011, Romania has changed its civil code, enabling and speeding up evictions.

In parallel, through the new "identity urbanism" based on cultural strategies for development, in the process of establishing and urbanising neoliberalism, anti-fascist and socialist histories have been manipulated and emptied out of their political context (Florea, 2015; Vilenica, 2019). New populist and nationalist narratives have been promoted as "cultural heritage", together with narratives of European belonging/becoming, in order to create continuities with/legitimations of the pre-war capitalist past and nationalist futures. The touristification process has been creating new types of extractive territories based on roman-ticising the peripheral Other. At the same time, touristification brought in global industries connected to digital technologies, such as Airbnb, Uber, video surveillance, all framed in catching-up modernisation imaginaries, all designed for extracting and consuming our cities.

ML AND CMF: Since you are all part of international networks or struggles, we would like to hear your reflections in terms of ways of thinking that arise from the space that you occupy and spaces you know of. So, what does it mean to organise resistance in the contemporary EE city, and how do you think that this relates to other modalities to be found elsewhere?

ANA, IOANA, VEDA AND ZSUZSI: Resistance movements in Eastern Europe found themselves after 1989 in the particular historical moment of “postsocialism”, a paradigm dominated by neoliberal imperatives and producing specific adverse conditions. The post-Cold War victory of capitalist liberal ideology broadly meant the structural, material and symbolic attack on socialist, communist and generally left-oriented ideologies, socialities and political organising. Histories of resistance – to either state authoritarianism or capitalist values and materialities – that were anchored in socialist times were either erased or forgotten (Udvarhelyi, 2014; Gagyí, 2015). This normative narrative has been negating the rich history of resistance and has put EE political subjects in an infant position of needing to be educated on democratic values and resistance organising. Against this backdrop, fostering agency, asserting dignity and reclaiming one’s own collective historical past become crucial for regional left social movements. Delegitimising the socialist and communist world – not only its state structures but also its social behaviors and mentalities, everyday life and popular values – has become the dominant ideology through which local elites ascend to power and become recognisable to Western transnational structures. Additionally, it enables policing and soft-to-hard repression of all broad-left movements that articulate class analysis and anti-capitalist visions.

In spite of such adversity, progressive radical left politics have always been present. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Macedonia, occupations, strikes, protest and plenums have become more visible in the last decade and are the indisputable sign of new “radical politics” based on direct democracy that is seriously undermining neoliberal ideological consensus. Parallel to this however, one can notice within urban social movements the rise of a particular liberal direction appropriating left vocabularies of the commons and social justice. Often, this direction takes the form of urban liberal movements with a green thumb but with little to no class or anti-racist analysis (Vilenica, 2017). Aligned with middle-class interests and resting on the political subject of the concerned citizen (Florea et al., 2018), such agendas may oppose projects of urban development or renewal only as long as they threaten middle-class ideals and lifestyles: the reduction of green space, increase of traffic or the destruction of architectural heritage, petty corruption in allocating building permits. Such articulations mask the violence of evictions and displacement of communities; moreover, in their discourse, anti-capitalist sentiments are silenced or at best marginalised while anti-racist positions are dismissed to the category of identity politics.

Another condition to consider is that members of regional social movements anchored in the urban environment face everyday precarity. Mass privatisations and loss of social and labour rights are affecting social movements both within the horizon of their struggle and the everyday survival strategies of their constituencies. Financial precarity, loss of labour, social and health rights mark differences between EE social movements and their Western counterparts. Reconciling life and political work is, thus, a challenge with local particularities often translating in everyday life as great obstacles to developing political work. The processes of privatisation and liberalisation in the past decades has meant a loss of resources for building up resistance movements – both in terms of historical knowledge of social organising and of material resources. To these losses, the infrastructure of regional social movements

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is marked by NGO-isation and a dependency for funding from Western structures. This dynamic has deep consequences for the autonomy and continuity of our movements.

In spite of this, new radical grass-root movements and infrastructures of care have been emerging. In Serbia, for instance, the anti-eviction housing movement *The Roof* has been progressively growing in membership and public influence since May 2017. Its organising is based on direct actions and case-based work. The movement has a clear anti-capitalist politics, and its strong media presence has contributed to the change of discourse regarding primacy and inviolability of trustee-debtor relationships by putting the focus on a home as an inalienable right.

In Hungary, Serbia and Croatia, after the 2008 crisis, forex mortgage debtors have organised themselves to demand a re-evaluation of the legitimacy of the credit contracts that pushed them into bankruptcy, and achieved important political responses (Mikuš, 2019; Florea et al., 2018). A housing movement called *The City Is for All* has been organising in Hungary since 2009, first mobilising people living in homelessness (in shelters and in self-built shacks) and then pushing against evictions and mobilising social housing tenants. Their strategies range from direct support to individuals, to demonstrative actions and occupations. In the past decade, this group was important in putting housing on the political agenda in Hungary.

In addition, solidarity housing care infrastructure has been emerging in the midst of the migrant crisis at the borders between Serbia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Macedonia, Hungary and Croatia. International activist groups have been working together with migrants in order to build infrastructure for domesticity in extreme conditions (Vilenica and Stojić, 2019). This housing “mobile commons” (Trimikliniotis et al., 2016) has been emerging in forests and occupied abandoned structures, such as factories, storage places and farmhouses.

In order to counteract the vulnerability of individual movements in the region, we think it is crucial to form international networks which give tangible support to groups working on the ground. Most of us are or were previously linked to the European Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City – which is a European network aiming to avoid the reproduction of core-periphery inequalities within its organising structures. Furthermore, we also work to create specifically Eastern European networks, such as MOBA Housing Network, aiming to establish new housing cooperatives in the region.

ML AND CMF: Thinking about some of the things that you just enumerated and about the future of the EE city, what can cities do to tackle these issues in EE? What should be done and by whom?

ANA, IOANA, VEDA AND ZSUZSI: Aspirational Western models dominating the visions of regional liberal movements reproduce and enhance an archetype of the activist as a Western, urban, white figure. Strategies of resistance developed outside of such models, not only the ones based on left-oriented ideologies but also the ones coming from modes of living and resisting outside of conventional categories of “the citizen” must be brought to the fore in our movements. Such models are especially linked to racialised histories of citizenship in Eastern Europe, testified to by experiences of Roma communities (Kóczé et al., 2019).

While both research and organising have shown us that processes of housing injustice rest heavily on anti-Roma structural racism, building our movements with an anti-racist basis has revealed the diversity of the resistance tactics employed by Roma communities. Challenging categories of citizenship and property while critically addressing issues of access, assimilation

and inclusion, resistance tactics used by Roma communities forge often more radical understandings of how evictions happen, of the history of the property regime or the racist politics of urban renewal (Lancione, 2017; Vincze et al., 2018). While strong anti-racist positions consolidate the radicality of both the analysis and the strategies employed, building solidarities within neighborhoods or with Roma rights organisations enables housing movements to contribute to a broader regional and global anti-fascist resistance.

Looking more closely at the particularities of the EE city, we see that it is in the midst of becoming more and more segregated. While continuous processes of gentrification, urban “renewal” and displacement are rapidly changing our cities, three decades ago, they retained lower levels of ethnic segregation compared to other regions. Whole neighborhoods and still some city centres contain an assemblage of social classes and backgrounds sometimes marked by tensions with each other. This experience, coupled with an anti-racist position, constitutes a resource for our movements towards developing radical class and anti-racist solidarity.

As our struggles proceed, we continuously create the material and discursive possibilities of emergence and development for our movements. For this, we often look for further resources in the fields of art and academia. Housing movements in Eastern Europe have developed innovative tactics by using theatre or video documentary to not only represent experiences but also deepen community cohesion and solidarity. Used frequently as agitation and pedagogical tools, such tactics are embedded within the strategies of movements (Vişan and FCDL, 2019). Moreover, the leftist international academic and art fields support the EE movements’ need for autonomy by serving two functions: as a way through which movement members are able to reconcile wage work and political work, and as a financial redistribution channel.

In Romania, the fields of art and academia can be an arena for recuperating, excavating and resurrecting histories of organising and resisting, silenced by anti-communist ideology. This has become a crucial imperative for local movements and their need for autonomy, agency and epistemological dignity. Although long-time allies of social movements, both fields of art and academia can also be territories of co-optation or dissipation. This is why we constantly need to pose questions concerning issues of depoliticisation or compromise in the context of strategies anchored in artistic or academic methodologies.

Broadening the tactics of our movements also implies continuously developing our alliances and communication. The most challenging aspect of this consists of the ongoing debate regarding working with state institutions. In Romania and Serbia, the housing movements still try to push the state to act in the public interest, while in Hungary, this has been hopeless in the last decade. In articulating this, differences must be kept in mind in terms of municipal and governmental administrations, regime changes, national, regional and EU level differences. Nonetheless, housing movements in EE consider an antagonising position to be key in both challenging capitalist, racist complicities of the state and resisting co-optation and assimilation of grass-roots movements in the state apparatus. Alliances beyond state structures remain crucial in broadening and strengthening our movements. Some of the allies considered by housing groups in Romania, Hungary and Serbia consist of labour unions and autonomous agricultural movements. Tackling these intersectionalities opens up our analysis to a more in-depth look at class issues as they are related to the dismantlement, precarisation and cultural suppression of both the urban and rural (agricultural) working class. Key issues such as social housing, ghettoisation, social reproduction costs, critique of property and the further development of mutual aid networks and vocabularies of the commons can be more widely addressed in such new alliances.

ML AND CMF: Back to more conceptual issues. How do you conceive the future of global urbanism worldwide? What kind of alliances are needed, in which domains, by whom and why (if any)?

ANA, IOANA, VEDA AND ZSUZSI: One of the questions that we have been asking is how can we think of global regions in different timelines. Underlying such questions is the certainty that breaking from the linear narrative temporality of Western modernity – a temporality that places the West as the most advanced present – needs to be part of any EE struggle. Much of our concerns are shared across other non-Western geographies and epistemologies too (de Sousa Santos, 2017).

Instead of considering the Western city as the enlightened democratic future of the neo-liberal utopia that we need to “catch up” with, we consider it a dystopian future threatening our livelihoods. Reframing such temporality empowers us to see “transition” not only as a neoliberal ideological intervention but a narrative that we can intervene into. Thus transition stops being an unchangeable sequence of events that has to necessarily lead to the absorption of our cities and socialities in the neoliberal conditions of Western urbanities. Peripheries are not “catching up” but advancing from their own historical experiences towards still unknown futures that are yet to come. To imagine a transition that would get us out of this paradigm of “catching up” with a dystopian future, we need to redefine Eastern Europe as a territory with histories of redistribution and resistance.

In the case of Yugoslavia, if we look back, we can find ideas and movements to learn from, such as the concepts of societal property, workers self-management and the Non-Aligned Movement of the pre-1989 regimes. These constructs and practices generated important urban politics and territorial-administrative social organising in a dynamic and contradictory process. Societal property was the concept and practice of “a property-without-proprietor”, a novelty in the dark history of the ever-present world domination of private property ideology. The dynamic process of “urban self-management” as a form of local territorial and political organisation has been envisioned, but never fully put in practice (Rakita, 2014). On a broader scale, the non-aligned movement tried to build an alternative to the binary (East/West) division of the world and had a significant role in supporting the anti-colonial liberation struggles of countries in the Global South; however, Yugoslav leaders failed to recognise systemic international racism and their own privileged position in such a divided society (Subotić and Vučetić, 2019).

Today, the pressures coming from the neo-colonial dystopian West have triggered a more and more consistent call for action. This call is materialising as a resistance to new enclosures, dispossessions and anti-social measures, as well as a process to build new social institutions that will protect us from further extraction. Besides direct action, advocacy and protest movements, cooperative movements have been emerging at the local level. In order to make these structures stronger, there is a need to go beyond financial dependency on external structures and create our own financial mechanisms (interconnected at international scale). All of this builds on our need for an intervention into the temporal developmental narrative of the neoliberal neo-colonial transition: socialist histories of alternatives to capitalism are reclaimed so as to build continuity with postsocialist resistance movements. The movements we are part of have detached themselves from narratives of Western democratisation and development, and see the future as an international anti-capitalist struggle that fights the dystopian present of the Western city.

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Notes

- 1 But also a very high overcrowding rate, a very low percentage of public and social housing (generally less than 5%), comparable to other (semi-)peripheries in the world.
- 2 In the late '40s and early '50s, the EE regimes nationalised multiple-flat houses, villas and properties of landlords with more than three to four housing units, redistributing them to the large strata in need of housing. This process happened especially in cities, where housing needs were growing and where housing was concentrated in bigger property portfolios due to previous bourgeois developmental projects. After 1989, in some Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, such as Romania, East Germany, Poland, ex-Yugoslav countries, the pre-nationalisation owners and their heirs reclaimed these properties – a process of (re)privatisation through restitution/ retrocession.
- 3 In countries where housing was not restituted to previous owners, but privatised to sitting tenants in the early 1990s (which was the case of Hungary, for instance), the main reasons for displacements and evictions are different.

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