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Briefing Paper 3

What "structures of feeling" charge the affective economies of renting in the Majority World?

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Acknowledgement

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1. AFFECTIVE-PRS: project summary

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have exposed rental housing as a mechanism that generates important inequalities of wealth, health and wellbeing in much of the world, while failing to give many tenants a 'home'. Academic interest in the Anglo-Saxon and the old EU member states has recently contributed disturbing insights (e.g. poor housing quality, insecurity, eviction, economic stress), raising legitimate concerns about tenants' wellbeing in the more hidden, hence riskier private renting sectors (PRS) where informal transactions increase risks and hide vulnerability away from state regulatory gaze. Sharing these important concerns, AFFECTIVE-PRS project engages with the affective economies of 'hidden' or emerging PRS, such as those in much of the Majority World and Eastern Europe. It aims to:

- **Understand** a hidden social world, by asking why tenants and landlords engage in the sector, whether their practices permit making a private tenancy home, and how they construct ideas of power, risk and trust**;**
- **Advance** theory by introducing new concepts to housing studies, such as the concept of structures of feeling, presented in this briefing paper;
- **Inform** the debate on PRS regulation.

2. Aim of this briefing paper

This briefing paper reports the findings of a Critical Interpretative Synthesis of the qualitative academic scholarship on renting in the Majority World. The research question posed is:

- What "structures of feeling" charge the affective economies of renting in the Majority World?

Overall, 79 relevant qualitative publications reporting private landlords' and tenants' experiences of renting were identified covering 29 countries; of these, 17 countries were covered by just one paper. The detailed methodological protocol is presented in Briefing Paper 1 (https://zenodo.org/records/7566096). Given the geographical spread of the literature, a decision was taken to focus the analysis on the most represented regions:

- Eastern Europe (9 papers: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia)
- Western Africa (21 papers: Ghana and Nigeria)
- The Indian subcontinent (10 papers: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

The theoretical arguments presented in this paper draw therefore on the synthesis of 40 articles, however, the structures of feeling empirically explored – i.e. greed and exploitation; ethics of care; and cruel optimism – have broader geographical and theoretical relevance.

3. Structures of feeling

The concept of 'structures of feeling' was developed by Raymond Williams (Williams and Orrom 1954; Williams 1977a; 1977b; 1998) with the view of counteracting a too abstract Marxist thought and thus understanding the lived experience of people in deeper and richer terms. Williams refrained from defining the concept but described it across his work. For instance, he argued, structures of feeling refer to "*thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind*" (Williams 1977b p.132), that is a way of knowing affectively, which is commonly situated between the realms of conciousness and unconciousness. Structures of feeling, he emphasised, are different from the more tangible constructs of ideology, world-view or social norms.

For the purpose of this paper, and drawing on the more recent mobilisation of the concept by affect and other cultural theorists (Anderson 2016; Coleman 2018; Filmer 2003; Harding and Pribram 2004; Seitz 2022; Smith 2005), I posit structures of feeling as *an affective quality that shapes the ways in which groups of people understand their relationships with others and the world*, whether in taken-for-granted, intangible ways or more explicitly. With others (Anderson 2014; Anderson 2016), I think of structures of feeling in more plural terms than Williams did when he broadly posited them as the culture of an epoch, generation or class; or organised them in terms of their residual (e.g. organised religion, the idealized fantasy of rural community), dominant (e.g. capitalist culture) or emergent (e.g. alternative perceptions of certain groups) qualities.

Hence, the structures of feeling likely to charge the affective economies of renting are multiple since neither tenants and landlords are a homogenous group and the structural context of their relationships varies. For the purpose of this paper, I bring together three lines of thought, each serving to deduce a structure of feeling that may shape tenants' and landlords' experiences in specific and important ways:

- **Greed and exploitation** is a structure of feeling deduced directly from Marxist thought, being centred on the antagonistic interests of the haves and the have-nots, in this case landlords and tenants. A broad range of associated emotions could be expected to reverberate under its penumbra, such as greed, excess, selfishness but also exhaustion, distrust, anger, hopelessness, revolutionary hope.
- **Ethics of care** is a structure of feeling deduced mostly from the diverse-economies scholarship (Gibson-Graham 2008; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski 2020) across economic practices centred on mutual interests and solidarity, including those of the commons, the welfare state, alternative markets. Associated emotions may comprise love, duty, altruism, generosity, sentimentality, kindness; but also on the flip-side, othering, suspicion and distrust.
- **Cruel optimism** is a structure of feeling exposed by Laurent Berlant (2011). They define a relation of cruel optimism "*when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing*", for instance holding fantasies which no longer can be achieved, attachments that hurt. Their work has been developed mostly across the geographies of the Global North where the 'good life' promises of full employment, social mobility, welfare states, homeownership and others were stronger in the past but watered down in the

present. Associated emotions may comprise disappointment, frustration, boredom and waithood.

4. Data analysis

The analysis of the 40 qualitative articles selected for reviewing commenced by an attentive reading (stage 1), a stage of inductive, theoretical reflection. Stage 2 consisted of extracting relevant text in terms of paper summaries (i.e. research questions, theory, methods, findings, including authors' discussion and all participant quotes; particular emphasis was given to reflections on affects/emotions). This stage resulted in a main word document of 121p/73,000 words. At this stage, the three structures of feeling of greed and exploitation, ethics of care, and cruel optimism have already started to get empirical contour, directing me to additional theoretical reading. Stage 3 consisted of further focusing the summaries by extracting and coding text referring explicitly or implicitly to affective experiences, relationships and events, inductively delineating key themes and deductively sorting them under the three structures of feeling proposed.

5 Findings and discussion

Summary findings are presented in Table 1. The table shows the multipiple instanciations of the three structures of feeling proposed. It notes several policy contexts, market practices, family/community relationships and peoples' dreams/desires that charge specific affective economies of renting, which are highly contextualised. This is in tune with Raymond Williams' observations that structures of feeling are loosely aligned with broader socio-material and political-economic structures but not only with those dominant in the present: those of residual, alternative, marginal, unrecognised cultural spaces and practices also have their shared, collective ways of feeling-thinking the world. To give just one example from Eastern Europe: while anticommunist, pro-market moods have supported the commodification of housing, there still are deep yet delegitimised desires for the safety offered by social housing. This briefing paper will not discuss the landlord/tenant relationships and the range of associated emotions in each of these contexts as this is done in detail elsewhere. However, as an invitation for housing scholars to engage with the concept, the paper offers some more general observations:

1. **The three structures of feeling comprehensively covered the different socio-material and political – economic structural contexts** in which landlords and tenants interact as per the reviewed literature. This does not mean, however, that they should be thought of as being exhaustive.
2. **The three structures of feeling proposed were found to be nested in or linked to broader, context-specific ways of feeling-thinking.** For instance, property restitution in Eastern Europe has opened the door to the exploitation of state-turned-private tenants, who feel unfairly treated, but these policies were supported by widespread anticommunist, pro-market moods and by a strong sense that historic justice should be achieved via restitution of previously nationalised property (Lux and Mikeszova 2012). Likewise, the fact that the unregulated renting markets of Slovenia were found to be 'caring', with both tenants and landlords being satisfied, has been linked to conditions of exceptions, i.e. balanced demand/supply, relative affluence and small socioeconomic distance between tenants and landlords, which describe an affective context of historic equality, centred on a shared sense of mutual interests and solidarity (Sendi and Mali 2015).

Table 1 Thematic mapping

GREED/EXPLOITATION (8,341 words)	ETHICS OF CARE (7,815 words)	CRUEL OPTIMISM (12,688 words)
Property Restitution (State) *Words*: 1,439 *From:* Eastern Europe *Authors*: (Lancione 2019; Łuczak and Ławrynowicz 2021; Lux and Mikeszova 2012) **Slum Demolition (State)** *Words:* 1,234 words *From:* W Africa, Indian.sc *Authors:* (Chattaraj et al. 2017; Lata 2020; Malik et al. 2020; Uleme 2021) **Advance Rent (Market)** *Words*: 4,473 words *From*: mostly GHA *Authors*: (Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2020; Ahmed and Salam 2022; Akaabre et al. 2018; Ansah et al. 2020; Arku et al. 2012; Asante and Ehwi 2022; Luginaah et al. 2010; Malpezzi et al. 1990; Owusu-Ansah et al. 2018; Uleme 2021) **Poverty Business (Market)** *Words:* 1,013 words *From:* mostly CZE *Authors:* (Hegedüs et al. 2018; Huq-Hussain 1996; Kupka et al. 2021; Walach et al. 2021) **Muscle Men (Market)** *Words:* 182 words *From:* mostly BGD *Authors:* (Huq-Hussain 1996; Lata 2020)	**Caring Markets (Weak Ties)** *Words*: 69 words *From:* CZE only *Authors:* (Hegedüs et al. 2018; Sendi and Mali 2015) **Prejudiced Markets (Weak Ties)** *Words:* 558 words *From:* mostly HUN *Authors:* (Ahmed and Salam 2022; Asante and Ehwi 2022; Erdõsi et al. 2000; Hegedüs et al. 2014) **LL/TE Symbiosis (Weak Ties)** *Words:* 3,750 words *From:* W Africa, Indian.sc *Authors*:(Adebowale and Simpeh 2021; Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2020; Kumar 1996; Luginaah et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2021; Naik 2015; Uleme 2021) **Caring Communities (Weak Ties)** *Words:* 854 *From:* Indian.sc *Authors:* (Huq-Hussain 1996; Kumar 2001; Naik 2015) **Free/Kin Renting (Strong Ties)** *Words:* 717 *From:* W Africa, Indian.sc *Authors:* (Adebowale and Simpeh 2021; Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2020; Asante et al. 2018; Eduful and Hooper 2019; Gough and Yankson 2011) **Slum Upgrading (Weak/Strong Ties)** *Words:* 1,867 *From:* mostly GHA and IND *Authors*: (Chattaraj et al. 2017; Malik et al. 2020; Mukherji 2015; Owusu-Ansah et al. 2018)	**Urbanization Drive** *Words:* 3,497 *From:* W Africa, Indian.sc *Authors*: (Ahmed and Salam 2022; Chattaraj et al. 2017; Ebekozien et al. 2021; Huq-Hussain 1996; Ikejiofor 1997; Malik et al. 2020; Naik 2015; Owusu et al. 2008) **Struggle to Own** *Words:* 2,404 *From:* W Africa, Indian.sc *Authors:* (Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2020; Asante et al. 2018; Ezeanah 2021; Gough and Yankson 2011; Kumar 1996; Kumar 2001; Luginaah et al. 2010) **Desire for Social Housing** *Words:* 173 *From:* Eastern Europe *Authors:* (Lancione 2019; Łuczak and Ławrynowicz 2021) **Desire for Basic Housing Quality** *Words:* 6,614 *From:* mostly W Africa, Indian subcontinent *Authors:* (Asante and Ehwi 2022; Asante et al. 2022; Awunyo-Akaba et al. 2016; Eduful and Hooper 2019; Ezeanah 2021; Gbadegesin et al. 2021; Huq-Hussain 1996; Ikejiofor 1997; Kamruzzaman 2012; Kumar 2001; Luginaah et al. 2010; Malik et al. 2020; Naik 2015; Uleme 2021; Walach et al. 2021)

3. **There are complex entanglments between policies of state care and practices of exploitation**. For instance, historic Rent Control in Ghana, a policy of state care, has been highjacked by landlords who demand illegal payments of between 2-to-5 years Advance Rent, which most tenants see as an onerous, exploitative practice (Arku et al. 2012). Likewise, given widespread discrimination against Roma people,

generous welfare assistance offered to private tenants in the Czech Republic was highjacked through the "Poverty Business' (Kupka et al. 2021) in that Roma tenants are discriminated from accessing the main market and must accept squalor conditions offered by exploitative landlords.

4. **Structures of feeling are in flux**, not unlike Raymond Williams' view of some becoming residual, i.e. they lose their dominance across society while remaining equally vividly lived by those still endorsing them. For instance, the caring relationship of 'symbiosis' between resident landlords and their tenants living in the close proximity of compound houses or that of free/kin renting across the extended family seem to be equally popular and unpopular. Some tenants feel respected and understood by their resident landlords, others feel double exploited by both economic and social means, while some others remain ambiguous about the arrangement. Likewise, adult children or relatives as free tenants across the extended family both enjoy the opportunity to save while remaining reluctant to give up the freedom of independent living.

5. **Cruel optimism is an useful lens for understandinf affective experiences beyond the Global North**. While none of the selected countries had an historic past that could be described as a Lost Paradise; on the contrary, they all enjoyed historic liberation, this does not mean that their citizens do not attach themselves to big dreams/fantasies. Clearly, some of these dreams have a higher potential for achievement, such as the drive for urbanisation and the struggle for homeownership by self-building. Others, however, can be better described as cruel pessimism: the desire to access a social tenancy in Eastern Europe or basic housing quality in West Africa and the Indian subcontinent are such examples. This is not to say that a space of hope is non-existent but that it is so small that hope remains tantalising.

6. **Structures of feeling affect subjects and objects, they are performative**. For instance, landlords' greed does not just extract excess rent from the tenant and/or maintain the object of the house unfit, it also stimulates action and desire – it stirs tenants into self-building to escape renting, so expanding the peri-urban areas of the city. Likewise, the cruel optimism of achieving the good life in cities has instilled the third wave of urbanisation, marking urban and rural geographies while touching the rural migrants' bodies and subjectivities in ways of trauma, endurance, creativity, suffering, belonging and more.

6. Conclusion

Following on from the more general six observations presented in section 5, I conclude by drawing the scholarly attention to the conceptual potential of structures of feeling to illuminate some old and raise some new research questions. Housing studies have long debated the usefulness of the concept of housing regimes, and I suggest, there is excellent potential for including it in, or expanding it with that of structures of feeling. There are also long-standing empirical observations that private renting markets are 'diverse' and the concept of structures of feeling can contribute to unpacking that diversity in new and important ways. Finally, there has been a growing housing scholarship attesting to a vast range of emotions; I suggest it is timely to review the progress made and the concept of structures of feeling could help produce not only a meaningful synthesis that is critically attentive to context but also opens up new research questions, for instance regarding the ways in which neoliberal affects give credentials to the ideology of private property in the eyes of those well housed, precariously housed or unhoused.

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