

Insurgent practices of ‘communal place making’: repair and prefiguration at the Cissie Gool House occupation in Cape Town

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Abstract

Occupations of land and abandoned buildings are one of the main ways in which marginalized urbanites in South Africa claim their share of the urban space and make a home for themselves. However, these housing solutions and their inhabitants are often criminalized through political discourse, legal actions and police-enforced evictions. The work of autoconstruction and repair carried out by residents of housing occupations tends to be overlooked by planners and local politicians. In order to shift the perception and understanding of such practices, this study aims to explore the insurgent practices of ‘communal place-making’ performed by the residents of Cissie Gool House – a large housing occupation in Woodstock, Cape Town. Through a Participatory Action Research framework, I focus on residents’ stories of involvement in the occupation’s organizational structures and communal projects, including the Security and Safety Task Team (SSTT), the community kitchens and vegetable garden, and the weekly Monitors Meeting. Through a workshop on storytelling and complementary methods such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, I gained insights on the junctures between individual and collective forms of spatial agency. These are discussed in relation to debates on popular and peripheral urbanization. By looking at the shared ways to address intergenerational trauma, this study advances the concept of ‘repair as healing’ to describe the more-than-material practices of repair that sustain the community of residents. This dissertation also explores the prefiguration of alternative urban futures embedded in insurgent planning actions by looking at existing communal projects in the occupation. Finally, by looking at the work of the SSTT addresses the risk of celebrating forms of reactionary insurgency if they are studied without proper historical and political contextualization.

Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
BNG	Breaking New Ground
CC	Coordination Committee
CGH	Cissie Gool House
DC	Disciplinary Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NU	Ndifuna Ukwazi
PAR	Participatory Action Research
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
RTC	Reclaim The City
SSTT	Security and Safety Task Team
TRA	Temporary Relocation Area
UCT	University of Cape Town
UISP	Upgrading of Informal Settlements Program
WCAEC	Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Nearly 30 years into formal democracy, the signs of Apartheid's spatial planning are still extremely visible in South African cities and the curbing of segregation and exclusion in favour of greater spatial justice still has a long way to go (Christopher, 2001; Burger et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the massive projects of public housing rolled out by the African National Congress (ANC) government in the past two decades, houselessness and precarious housing conditions are still an extremely central issue in the everyday life of millions of people in South Africa. In the Western Cape alone, a backlog of 600,000 people on the housing waiting list, with an average waiting period of 15 to 17 years (Mafolo, 2020), raises questions around the strategies people adopt to deal with housing precarity while waiting for state-subsidized housing.

Occupations of land and abandoned buildings are some of the ways in which marginalized urbanites advance claims over the urban space, by gaining access – even if precarious – to a shelter and basic infrastructures. While these represent a substantial opportunity for people to find some relief from the absence of a dwelling or from the economic pressure of increasing rents, informal housing solutions and their inhabitants are often criminalized through political discourse, legal action and police-enforced evictions. In Cape Town, arguably still one of the most racially and economically segregated among South African metropolises¹, removals of shacks, evictions of occupied abandoned buildings, and policing of houseless people are a common occurrence and have spiked in numbers and violence in the last years and months due to the City's criminalizing approach to houselessness².

¹ See 'We must end Cape Town's housing "apartheid" - think-tank' by Munyaradzi Makoni, May 4th, 2017. Retrievable at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/safrica-capetown-housing/we-must-end-cape-towns-housing-apartheid-think-tank-idUSL8N1HW2YQ>

² See 'City of Cape Town Law Enforcement drag naked man out of his house' by James Stent, July 1st, 2020. Retrievable at: <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/city-cape-town-law-enforcement-drag-naked-man-out-his-house/> and 'Criminalisation will not resolve Cape Town's broken housing system and the plight of the homeless' by Jonty Cogger and Danielle Louw, October 27th, 2021. Retrievable at:

Many voices, ranging from political parties to civil society organizations, militant groups, and scholars claim that land and housing occupations should be seen as legitimate ways to address the spatial injustices produced by colonialism and Apartheid, which is reproduced under neoliberal rule (van Rooyen & Lemanski, 2020). However, many state officials and urban planners seem not to recognize the socio-political value these modes of spatial production and place-making hold, finding it more convenient to approach them with repressive tools. One of these tools is the spreading of stigmatizing public discourse – often accompanied by threats of eviction – that portrays occupiers as criminals, ‘queue jumpers’³ and goes as far as blaming the City’s failure to build and deliver affordable housing on occupations and occupiers. This shows how, alongside the material fight for redistribution of land and houses, the narratives on housing occupations are an important site of struggle to achieve greater spatial justice.

In order to further the effort in shifting the ways in which we perceive and engage housing occupations, this project aims to explore the communal practices of place-making performed by the residents of Cissie Gool House⁴ (CGH), a large housing occupation in Cape Town’s inner-city located in the old Woodstock Hospital. This building, which was occupied in 2017 by evictees from Woodstock and activists from the social movement Reclaim The City (RTC), is today a house to about 1400 people. Many of the residents are actively involved in the production and maintenance of their living space as part of their struggle for access to affordable and decent housing. This housing occupation has a very articulate organizational structure and a range of Task Teams and communal projects aimed at improving the material and social condition of life in the House.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-10-27-criminalisation-will-not-resolve-cape-towns-broken-housing-system-and-the-plight-of-the-homeless/>

³ This term, which is often used by mainstream media and politicians, refers to people who occupy land or abandoned buildings as a way to secure a shelter. The moral argument behind it is that those who patiently wait for up to twenty years for housing delivery are good citizens, whereas those who occupy during this waiting time are unlawful queue jumpers who perpetrate a form of injustice towards their lawful peers. The use of this term seems to transfer the state’s political responsibility for failing to provide housing onto those who respond with direct actions to this very failure.

⁴ I will refer to Cissie Gool House also as ‘CGH’ or ‘the House’.

1.2 Theoretical context

To contextualize my case study, I turn to scholarly work on housing in South Africa. Authors in this field have shown how the housing plans rolled out by the post-Apartheid South African government have not succeeded in curbing houselessness and reducing the number of people on the housing waiting list (Pithouse, 2009; Tissington & Clark, 2017). The increase in occupations of land and buildings for housing purposes is therefore to be understood as part of the individual (Oldfield & Greyling, 2015) and collective (Levenson, 2017a, 2017b) strategies deployed by people to cope with the precarity or lack of a dwelling while waiting for state subsidised housing.

Looking at the everyday actions of residents of Cissie Gool House, the work of Cirolia et al. (2021) focusses on the practices of retrofitting, repurposing, and re-placing that rendered the structures of the old Woodstock Hospital⁵ suitable for human inhabitation. Building on their work, this research project aims to expand the understanding of the phenomenon of vacant buildings occupation by observing the forms of spatial agency performed by those who inhabit them. In this respect, this project contributes to debates on urban informality, which focus on those modes of urbanization that occur beyond the sphere of state-sanctioned urban planning, attempting to overcome the dualism between the ideas of formality and informality (Roy, 2005, 2011; Yftachel, 2009; Caldeira, 2017). Working across such a conceptual binary, Caldeira's concept of peripheral urbanization (2017) offers a useful framework to unpack the manifold ways in which neighbourhoods in cities of the Global South are largely built by their residents. 'Autoconstruction' – as Caldeira terms it – does not occur completely outside the realm of formality, but rather follows transversal logics of engagement with the state and the market.

To hone the concepts of autoconstruction and peripheral urbanization for the study of housing occupations, I suggest two adjustments. Firstly, I borrow the concept of popular urbanization (Streule et al., 2020), which describes a phase of peripheral urbanization that is driven by collective practices of self-organization and political mobilization. Secondly, I draw from Bhan's work (2019) on the concept of 'repair', which

⁵ This is the building that was occupied by the social movement Reclaim the City in 2017 and renamed Cissie Gool House.

further specifies the ways in which cities' physical structures in the Global South are maintained and revitalized by ordinary people rather than built anew – as autoconstruction suggests. On the one hand, looking at place-making actions performed by Cissie Gool House residents provides original insights into the disjunctions and interconnections between individual and collective forms of spatial agency involved in processes of popular urbanization. On the other, it enables further elaboration on the forms of repair that take place in housing occupation beyond the strictly material maintenance of existing urban structures.

In order to better understand the implications of such actions, I turn to a set of contributions that revolve around the concept of insurgent planning (Sandercock, 1998; Miraftab, 2005, 2009). This body of work is interested in the spatial practices of resistance against past and present forms of oppression performed by marginalized urbanites in the Global South (Miraftab, 2009). In the context of Cape Town this concept helps me to reflect on the role of housing – and land – occupations in reversing historical forms of spatial injustice and articulating alternative futures. To make the framework offered by insurgent planning more suitable for the study of Cissie Gool House, I draw from recent work on housing occupations in São Paulo where residents articulate prefigurative politics (Paterniani, 2018) and alternative narratives on people who live in housing occupations (De Carli, 2016) as part of their collective struggles for access to housing. This study investigates material and discursive practices of place-making performed by CGH residents through the lens of insurgent planning and attempts to retrace the alternative urban futures they prefigure.

1.3 Research objectives

The core research question of this dissertation is:

- In processes of popular urbanization, what is the role of junctures between individual and collective spatial practices in the prefiguration of alternative futures?

In order to answer this question I will address the two following sub-questions:

- 1) How are individual and collective dimensions of spatial practices weaved together by Cissie Gool House residents?

2) In what ways do communal practices of place-making carried out by CGH residents sustain, embody and articulate imaginaries of alternative and more just urban futures?

I discuss these questions based on the empirical data that were generated I through Participatory Action Research (PAR) with residents of CGH over the course of six months.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I discuss in greater detail the literature and the concepts this project revolves around in order to articulate a conceptual framework for my case study. In Chapter 3, I present my case study and discuss the methodological choices that informed my fieldwork. Chapter 4 contains the presentation of the data that emerged from my observations of communal projects and spaces at CGH, a workshop on the theme of storytelling and in-depth interviews with CGH residents. These are discussed in Chapter 5 in conjunction with my theoretical framework and a summary of my conclusions is provided in Chapter 6.

2. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I outline the main theoretical debates this project is in dialogue with. The bodies of work I review can be organized in three main areas: peripheral urbanization, insurgent planning, and housing in South Africa. While these debates overlap in many ways, and the specific issues I review might not perfectly fit into this threefold categorization, I find it useful to provide a structure to the mapping of concepts' use and development.

2.1 Informal urbanization: working across and beyond binaries

Urban informality is often associated with cities of the Global South and, in particular, with the image of slums, often described as the quintessential form of urbanity in the Global South, being dominated by extreme poverty and an overall lack of regulation (Roy, 2011). One of the effects of such narrow conceptions of informality is that of essentializing forms of urbanization that occur outside the control and planning of the state, failing to account for the role of the state in generating informality rather than being its conceptual opposite. Embedded in this view is the assumption that a stark contrast exists between the formal and informal city, legal and illegal spaces, wealthy and poor urbanites, spaces of whiteness and blackness.

While these oppositions do exist and are very visible in cities across the world, prominent urban scholars (Roy, 2005, 2011; Yftachel 2009, Caldeira, 2017) offered critiques of such conceptual binaries and tried to reframe the study of informality and urbanization in order to overcome dualistic reasoning. Taking distance from mainstream Anglo-American urban theory – but also from some proponents of subaltern studies – Ananya Roy (2011) argues that informality is a 'mode of the production of space' rather than an ontological or topological category, shifting the focus to the continuities rather than the oppositions – between formal and informal urban realms. In this way, informality is approached instead as 'a heuristic device that uncovers the ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized' (*Ibidem*: 33).

Exploring how space is produced in-between these socio-institutional realms is one of the broader objectives of this project. In this respect, the concepts of 'peripheral urbanization' and 'transversal logics' elaborated by Caldeira (2017) foreground a set of aspects that I find particularly relevant for the study of housing occupations: the first one has to do with the everyday actions of ordinary people aimed at 'autoconstructing' their neighbourhoods; the second is concerned with the transversal ways in which these actions relate to the formal logics of state and market; a third aspect is the emerging of new spaces and modes of politics, but also of highly unequal cities, as a result of these processes (*Ibidem*). While I believe the definition of peripheral urbanization offered by Caldeira is useful for this project, there are two adjustments I wish to suggest in order to adapt her framework to this study.

The first concerns the term 'autoconstruction': a distinction should be made here between the occupation of land with the consequent autoconstruction of houses by the occupiers, and the occupation of abandoned buildings where the existing structures tend to be maintained and transformed by occupiers. In this regard, Bahn's definition of 'repair' (2019) seems to better capture the type of interventions that occur in occupied buildings, underscoring the cyclical nature of repair as opposed to the linearity of autoconstruction actions. Looking at the Indian context, Bhan describes repair as a practice that prioritizes functionality over 'substantive material improvement', that relies on largely accessible materials and technical knowledge and that stems from an impulse towards reuse and renewal of what is existing and available (*Ibidem*: 8).

The choice of this term does not undermine the agency of residents observed by Caldeira (2017). Instead, it helps to further specify the type of actions, resources and knowledges involved in the process of physical restructuring of abandoned and underutilized structures. The concept of repair, as formulated by Bhan, mostly looks at structural and infrastructural interventions carried out by residents to make existing urban environments suitable and functional for human habitation. The concept is, in this sense, extremely useful to frame the case of the Cissie Gool House occupation, whose material existence largely relies on such forms of repair.

However, in this study I build on Scheba's recent development of the concept of repair (2022) including the symbolical and political dimensions of reparative actions. She advances the concept of 'repair as refusal' to describe those actions push back

against discourses and practices that aim to displace and render disposable the lives of marginalized people (*Ibidem*). Her contribution is useful for this project, in that I am here interested in stretching the concept of repair to capture those actions, both material and symbolical, that are aimed at repairing the social fabric of communities that have historically experienced – and still experience – incredibly violent forms of segregation and marginalization, therefore carrying a substantial amount of intergenerational trauma.

The second adjustment I propose is inspired by the recent work by Streule et al. (2020) on ‘popular urbanization’. In direct conversation with Caldeira and, as they declare, working within the framework of peripheral urbanization, the authors attempt to differentiate, rather than group together, the peripheral modes of urbanization they observed in their study. By looking at case studies from Mexico City, Istanbul and Lagos, they identify popular urbanization as one type – or better, a stage – of peripheral urbanization in which collective action, socio-political mobilization and self-organization play a major role in the production of neighbourhoods. The contribution by Streule et al. (*Ibidem*) enables me to observe collective spatial practices in relation to the broader political struggle for decent and affordable housing in which the occupiers at Cissie Gool House are engaged.

An interesting tension emerging from this scholarly thread concerns the ways in which people who live in occupied sites move across and weave together individual and collective forms of spatial and political agency. By looking at this aspect of popular urbanization, this project examines occupiers’ collective and individual stories of place-making in the occupation. By doing so, it aims to better articulate the differences between forms of popular and peripheral urbanization and question the binary distinction between individual and collective spatial agency within these processes. In order to enrich the conceptual framing of the interrelation between informal spatial practices and political action this project aims to explore, in the next section I turn to an inspiring body of work on ‘insurgent planning’.

2.2 The insurgent production of space

The term insurgency made its appearance in the social sciences, and in particular in urban studies, in the late 90’s in the American continent (for an accurate

reconstruction see Beard, 2003). The association between the concept of insurgency and urbanization was firstly featured in an early essay from US anthropologist James Holston (1995) and few years later in the publication of the book edited by Leonie Sandercock '*Making the invisible visible*' (1998). This volume gathered a set of contributions which challenged the positivist epistemologies, methods and practices that inform Euro-American planning theory and their role in advancing modernism as an urban project.

Part of this volume, Holston's chapter 'Spaces of insurgent citizenship' (Holston, 1998) articulates a critique of the widespread erasure in mainstream Western planning theory of the actions carried out by marginalized and oppressed people. He tries to capture the multiplicity and diversity of practices, desires and experiences that contribute to the planning and production of urban spaces against and beyond state-sanctioned definitions of citizenship and officialdom (Holston, 1998, 2009). There are three interconnected aspects of this debate that are of great interest for my study. The first one is the deconstruction of urban planning as a function wielded by and exerted strictly within state's institutions. Insurgent planning, instead, contends that actions carried out by ordinary people should be acknowledged as legitimate forms of planning.

Secondly, a focus on insurgency poses epistemological challenges to centralized, top-down forms of urban planning by retracing political vision and agency among people and spaces that are usually stigmatized as illegal, non-compliant and unruly. Thirdly, as a result of the previous ones, planning is reconfigured as a contested field rather than a strictly technical domain that is a prerogative of highly trained professionals. A consequence of this epistemological challenge is that supposedly unqualified people retain crucial shares of the knowledge and skills needed in urban planning.

In this regard, this project takes, as an analytical starting point, the fact that housing occupations – and neighbourhoods that are largely autoconstructed, repaired and maintained by their residents – are spaces where a large amount of work and knowledge are employed and shared by ordinary people in order to make such spaces liveable and thriving. As a result, a place like Cissie Gool House and the insurgent practices carried out by its residents, are treated as a source of learning and theoretical production for the field of planning rather than an exceptional or a deviant case of

urbanization to be brought back within the boundaries of institutional knowledge and official planning.

The concept of insurgency in relation to urban planning gained further traction in the last decade thanks to the influential work of Faranak Miraftab (2004, 2009; Miraftab & Wills, 2005) who conducted extensive work in Cape Town with members of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC). She offers an exciting and useful formulation of ‘insurgent planning’ which locates the concept in the Global South by centralizing issues such as the colonial legacy of spatial planning, the neoliberal turn of postcolonial states and governance, as well as the centrality of ordinary people’s actions in the production of urban spaces (Miraftab, 2009). At the base of Miraftab’s work (*Ibidem*) there are two main concerns: articulating a critique of public participation as a tool for consensus building under neoliberal governance; and developing a Southern definition of insurgent planning that bolsters the project of decolonization of imagination in urban planning, which – she argues – is still dominated by modernist assumptions of what a ‘good city’ is (*Ibidem*).

Her elaboration of the concept gained traction and inspired work on insurgent planning in several cities of the Global South (Lombard, 2010; Meth, 2010; Velásquez Atehortúa, 2013; Freitas, 2019). Some have warned against the risk of celebrating insurgent actions *simply* because they challenge the logics of the state or the market, in that this alone would not allow us to determine whether such practices are truly transformative and emancipatory (Meth, 2010). By looking at the insurgent practices of vigilante women groups in informal settlements in Durban, Meth (*Ibidem*) invites researchers to capture the nuances of insurgent actions – such as the use of brutal physical violence in vigilantism – and reject a dichotomous view of insurgency as either progressive or reactionary. In fact, she suggests that ‘[t]ransformative and repressive practices can be mutually constitutive, and can also be enacted by one and the same “community”’ (*Ibidem*: 242).

While her contribution is important to advance debates on insurgency beyond moral dualisms, I find that her conclusions are largely informed by the very definitions of ‘vigilantism’ and insurgency she chose. Concerning the former, she draws from Harris, who states that ‘[v]igilantism is a blanket term for activities that occur beyond the parameters of the legal system, purportedly to achieve justice’ (2001: 6, as cited in Meth,

2010: 244). This definition is emptied of any political connotation and can encompass any interpretation of justice, including highly reactionary ones. Regarding the definition of insurgency, on the other hand, Meth picks a very open-ended one, retrieved in a passage by Sandercock who contends that '[t]he very word "insurgent" implies something oppositional, a mobilizing against one of the many faces of the state, the market or both. Insurgent planning is insurgent by virtue of challenging existing relations of power in some form' (1999: 41, as cited in Meth, 2010: 243).

Again, this definition, just like that of vigilantism, focusses on the movement beyond or opposition to the logics of the state and the market rather than the political direction and ideological underpinning of such practices. I believe Meth's call for a more nuanced and situated analysis of insurgency is of crucial importance in that there is a real risk to romanticize oppressive practices or celebrate them as transformative simply because they happen to reclaim spaces of organization and action against and beyond the control of state and market. However, I believe Miraftab's definition of insurgent planning holds the potential for avoiding naïve engagements of contentious urban practices:

Insurgent planning practices are characterized as counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative. They are counter-hegemonic in that they destabilize the normalized order of things; they transgress time and place by locating historical memory and transnational consciousness at the heart of their practices. They are imaginative in promoting the concept of a different world as being, Walter Rodney says, both possible and necessary. (Miraftab, 2009: 33)

Whoever the actors, what they do is identifiable as insurgent planning if it is purposeful actions that aim to disrupt domineering relationships of oppressors to the oppressed, and to destabilize such a status quo through consciousness of the past and imagination of an alternative future. (Miraftab, 2009: 44)

In her work Miraftab foregrounds a historically informed analysis of power relations to define oppression and -consequently- justice. This definition helps to discern actions that hold a potential to destabilize the status quo and those that are instead aimed at reinforcing it. Furthermore, this formulation of the concept proves particularly compelling for this project in that it enables to explore the intersection between material and symbolical practices of spatial production. By weaving together

marginalized people's claims to space as both physical structures serving their basic needs and a site of struggle against past and present forms of oppression, it is possible to deepen the understanding of the political and historical value embedded in everyday actions of place-making. In this respect, collective practices carried out by the residents of housing occupations can be seen as material and discursive tools to express a refusal of past and current forms of oppression and gesture towards radical alternatives of urban futures.

In this study I aim to work across the dualism of materiality and discursiveness of place-making actions by focussing on the narrative dimension of communal practices performed by Cissie Gool House's residents. In this respect I draw from scholarly work on housing occupations in the inner city of São Paulo, Brazil. While they do not explicitly frame their case studies as examples of insurgent planning, the work of De Carli on *Ocupação Marconi* (2016) and Paterniani on *Ocupação Mauà* (2018) offers inspiring insights concerning the occupiers' ability to revitalize previously abandoned buildings in ways that are not limited to survivalist strategies. Paterniani (2018) classifies the practices of residents at *Ocupação Mauà* as 'resisting', 'claiming' and 'prefiguring'. In this way, she shows how a) resistance against current and past forms of racial and class oppression, b) claims to affordable housing in the city centre and c) the prefiguration of alternative urban futures, permeate the practices and discourses articulated by the residents within the occupation, in the surrounding neighbourhood and in relation to the state's institutions.

Paterniani's engagement with the concept of prefiguration, which she draws from anarchist theory and social movements studies, is useful for this project in that they enable a centring of the imaginative work of counternarrative embedded in those actions that aim to practice in the present the future they aspire to achieve (Yates, 2015). In a similar vein, De Carli (2016) describes how, for residents of *Ocupação Marconi*, the imagination of futures in which existing systems of oppression are overturned includes the disruption of mainstream narratives on 'illegal housing' and 'squatters'. She shows how dwellers at *Ocupação Marconi* developed narrative forms of

their own⁶ in order to tell different stories of how people end up living in an occupied building and how they inhabit such spaces.

Both Paterniani's and De Carli's works provide interesting and inspiring insights on the role of narrative practices in processes of place-making in the context of building occupations and struggle for dignified housing. In this respect, they directly speak to my project in at least two ways⁷: the first is a focus on the intersections between material and discursive articulations of alternative urban futures performed by inhabitants of housing occupations; the second is the recognition of the importance of counternarratives in socio-political struggles. I contend that, on the one hand, insurgent planning, as defined by Miraftab (2009), could serve as an overarching theoretical framework to help understand the practices and discourses deployed by residents of housing occupations across the global south.

On the other hand, I believe it is important to draw empirical insights and conceptual contributions from case studies like the ones from Sao Paulo I have briefly discussed in order to hone and expand the conceptual toolbox that insurgent planning offers. In this project I look at material and discursive practices articulated by occupiers as part of the work of insurgent planning intended as prefiguration of alternative futures but also as a powerful tool in the struggle for housing and spatial justice. In order to provide further theoretical contextualization for my case study I now turn to a selection of scholarly work on housing in South Africa. As the literature on this matter is extremely vast I focus on authors who approach the issue of housing in relation to the contentious politics it generates.

2.3 Housing in South Africa: a political vanishing point

The post-Apartheid Constitutional mandate of the South African government to provide access to adequate housing to its citizens arguably makes housing provision one of the cornerstones of the post-Apartheid democratic project undertaken by the

⁶ One example is the use of the building's façade as a space to communicate with the surrounding neighbourhood.

⁷ I draw from De Carli's work again in the methodology section to present her approach to Participatory Action Research.

African National Congress. As part of a series of subsequent policies (see Tissington, 2010, 2011, for a comprehensive review), the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) - rolled out over the first decade after the legal end of Apartheid - is one of the largest housing delivery programs ever undertaken in the Global South (Charlton, 2009) with an estimated 4.5 million delivered housing subsidies in the form of publicly built houses and money hand-outs to help people build their own houses. With Breaking New Grounds (BNG) and Upgrading of Informal Settlements Program (UISP) the ANC government tried to give housing delivery a new impulse by focussing on the quality over the quantity of housing and incentivizing *in-situ* upgrading of existing settlements.

However, some authors showed that notwithstanding the progressive policy framework elaborated by the government, a lack of political will (Pithouse, 2009) and institutional capacity (Tissington & Clark, 2017) determined the failure of such programs in articulating substantive solutions for the housing crisis in South Africa. A recent article in the Daily Maverick (Mafolo, 2020), reporting about the recent halving of the national budget for housing delivery, claims that in the Western Cape area alone 600,000 people are on the housing waiting list, with an average waiting period of 15 to 17 years. Looking at this very context, Levenson (2017c: 25) argues that the often-illegal ways in which people cope with the absence of access to decent housing are used by the state to construct a differentiation between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.

A common exemplification of such a dynamic is the discursive deployment of the image of queue jumpers as a threat to the rational waiting list system, which feeds into the legitimization of violent evictions and shack removals (*Ibidem*; Tissington, 2013:7; Scheba, 2021). The work by Oldfield and Greyling (2015) offers an accurate description of the range of subversive strategies people adopt in order to engage the state and secure an accommodation during the long periods on the housing waiting list. While the authors of 'Waiting for the state' (*Ibidem*) mostly focus on everyday individual actions, others have explored the role of organized collective strategies for gaining access to decent housing such as organization through social movements and occupation of land (see Levenson, 2017a, 2017b; Pithouse, 2008, 2014). Taking up the call for a 'multiscalar reading of informality' by Cirolia and Scheba (2019), I wish to locate this project somewhere in between the individual and the collective, the mundane and the spectacular, the organized and the casual in order to explore how different modes, scales

and temporalities of action are experienced and weaved together by people who do not have access to formal housing solutions.

Finally, I would like to turn to a recent publication by Cirolia, et al. (2021) to address the question of place-making and home-making practices in housing occupations as part of the debate on housing in South Africa. The authors, who conducted their research at Cissie Gool House, underline the importance of expanding the study of housing occupations in South Africa by looking at cases of ‘repurposing’ of abandoned buildings, in that most of the available literature focusses on land occupations (*Ibidem*). Another conceptual move that both Cirolia et al.’s article and my project aim to do is that of engaging occupied sites beyond a survivalist perspective, trying instead to capture and understand the practices of place-making and resistance against structural forms of oppression (*Ibidem*).

The authors contend that the reworking of spaces at CGH fulfils a broader range of needs than strictly material ones, bringing as examples the construction of communal spaces for social, political and recreational activities or the several interventions aimed at making the building’s interior more beautiful and livelier. In this respect, the article introduces three different terms to identify specific forms of repair:

[R]etrofitting is specifically concerned with the material restructuring of external and internal infrastructures. In contrast, repurposing focusses on using the existing infrastructures and spaces, but for new purposes. Finally, replacing focusses on how place is given meaning and constructed by the residents. (Cirolia et al., 2021)

Their work speaks closely to the objectives and focus of this project and serves as a juncture between the different bodies of literature this thesis is in conversation with as well as between my conceptual framework and my case study, which focusses on the stories on place-making practices of Cissie Gool House’s residents.

There are two main ways in which I aim to expand and build on Cirolia et al.’s work (*Ibidem*). Conceptually, I try to offer a deeper exploration and understanding of how place-making practices contribute to building alternative urban futures by addressing current and past forms of material and symbolical oppression. In this respect my research is complementary to recent work by Urson, Kessi and Daya (2022) which explores from a decolonial psychology perspective how the struggle conducted by Cissie Gool House and Reclaim The City has the effect of challenging what they call the ‘colonial

spatial imaginary', namely a set of degrading representations around identity and belonging that contribute to normalise and perpetuate colonial spatial practices of displacement and segregation. Methodologically, instead, this project seeks to expand the range of 'creative methods' (Cirolia et al., 2021) employed in the study of housing occupations by combining different techniques of storytelling within the framework of a Participatory Action Research. In the next chapter I introduce my case study and discuss the methodological choices and ethical dilemmas that informed my fieldwork.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, following a presentation of my case study, I present the work on Participatory Action Research that inspired my project. Subsequently, I discuss the techniques I employed in my fieldwork to generate primary data. After a review of the analytical frameworks I used to interpret my data, I reflect on the research process with a focus on my positionality as a researcher, the limitations of this study and some ethical issues it raised.

3.1 Case Study: Cissie Gool House and alternatives to dispossession in Woodstock

Here the residents claim a home through mundane acts. These acts are aimed at improvement and ascent – making the space better than what they left. [...] Through beautifully decorating the entrances to their homes, celebrating acts of natural beauty (such as the view of Table Mountain) and creating shops in their homes, residents are challenging their market-led displacement through acts of replacement. They are creating not only new spaces, but new places, which are improved and provide better material and symbolic conditions (Lehrer, 2006). They are actively claiming their role as city-makers, repairers, carers, transformers and transgressors. (Cirolia et al., 2021)

Named after anti-apartheid activist and first black woman acting as City Councillor in Cape Town Zainunnisa “Cissie” Gool, CGH is a housing occupation that brought new life to the previously abandoned old Woodstock Hospital. Currently houses about 1400 people, it was started in 2017 by activists of the social movement Reclaim the City and Woodstock residents who were evicted or could no longer afford to live in the neighbourhood due to roaring gentrification. Most new developments in the area essentially respond to the commercial and residential needs of the predominantly white middle-class, at the expense of less affluent residents, who are mostly people that would have been classified as Black or Coloured under Apartheid.

This largely market-led process has been actively supported by the City of Cape Town's designation of Woodstock as an Urban Development Zone (Joseph, 2014). In this context, Cissie Gool House represents an alternative to displacement and expulsion for many people and families who have spent most of their lives and have strong cultural and affective roots in Woodstock or its surroundings. In fact, Woodstock has historically been a working-class, racially-mixed neighbourhood, one of the few that resisted the ferocious forced removals enforced by the Apartheid government and its Group Areas Act laws from the 50's to the 80's, which left indelible scars on the city – see for example District Six – and on its residents' sense of place and belonging (Trotter, 2009; Field, 2012).

As Cirolia et al. (2021: 7) report, unlike other cities in South Africa, 'Cape Town's inner-city land values have skyrocketed in the last twenty years, resulting in market-led displacement and overcrowding'. In addition to this, the 'conflicting rationalities' between different spheres of local government led to state-subsidized housing being largely delivered in poorly connected and under-resourced areas in the city's outskirts (Ngwenya & Cirolia, 2019), thus making the inner-city even more exclusive and segregated. Cissie Gool House residents are currently resisting eviction orders and offers by the City to be moved to Temporary Relocation Areas (TRA) some 30 km away from Cape Town, with minimal or non-existent services and infrastructures.

Most of the literature on housing occupations in Cape Town focuses on land occupations and shack settlements which house a substantive amount of Cape Town's working-class. However, Cirolia et al. (2021: 17) claim that, due to the increasing density of the city along with the scarcity and unsuitability of peripheral vacant land, the occupation of abandoned or underutilized buildings in central areas of the city 'will become an increasingly important mode of urban development not only in Cape Town but throughout the global south'. At Cissie Gool House collective action and self-organization (Streule et al., 2020) are a fundamental part of the place-making practices through which residents have turned a previously abandoned space into a home for hundreds of people.

CGH has a very articulate organizational structure and a range of Task Teams (Youth, Security and Safety, Welfare etc.) and communal projects, such as the communal garden and kitchen or the library and childcare programs, aimed at improving the

material and social condition of life in the House. This allows residents to actively participate in the production and maintenance of their living space as part of their struggle for access to affordable and decent housing. The forms of repair (Bhan 2019) operated by CGH's residents are not limited to the retrofitting (Cirolia et al., 2021) of the building's physical structures, they also transform the social function of space as well as its symbolical value. By constructing and attaching new meanings to a space, the occupiers inscribe their everyday actions into the insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009) of a different and more just city.

In this respect, the case of CGH resonates with housing occupations in São Paulo inner-city in which the imagining and prefiguring of alternative urban futures is central in the everyday communal practices carried out by occupiers (Paterniani, 2018). The insurgent planning of alternative urban futures in which past and present forms of oppression are addressed through collective and communal practices of place-making involves the re-appropriation of the narratives over a place and its inhabitants (De Carli, 2016). The struggle that Cissie Gool House's residents conduct together with the Reclaim the City movement and the legal NGO Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU) is not limited to securing shelter.

Through public campaigns and legal action in the state's courts, the community that revolves around CGH is trying to shift the discourse on housing occupations from a stigmatizing one – which lays the ground for repression and displacement – to one of support and inclusion. It is both on academic and political grounds that this case study matters and represents an extremely inspiring and resourceful project for imagining alternative urban futures against the criminalization, bureaucratization, and individualization of poverty and houselessness. Adopting and developing further methods and concepts that allow us to understand these aspects of peripheral urbanization processes is important to keep up with foreseeable urban dynamics.

3.2 Research Design: Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The participatory turn in social sciences and human geography has seen the exploration of research methods and approaches to knowledge production that aim to deconstruct and redefine the power relationships embedded in academic research and poses questions around whose voice gets to be heard, who the research is realized by

and for (Kendon, Pain & Kesby, 2009). In order to engage in fieldwork with CGH residents in ways that attempted to support their struggle and actively involve them in the production of research materials and outputs – alongside allowing me to fulfil the requirements for my Master – I decided to adopt a Participatory Action Research framework.

I drew insights from the work of Beatrice De Carli (2016), who conducted Participatory Action Research PAR with the residents of Ocupação Mauà, a housing occupation in São Paulo's city centre, with the aim of producing 'actionable urban theory' (Allen, Lampis, & Swelling, 2016: 305, in De Carli, 2016). De Carli defines PAR as 'the practice of collaboratively identifying and cultivating innovative practices at the micro-scale, in order to strengthen transformative processes that are already underway' (2016: 779). Locating knowledge production within this framework involves a decentralization of academic outputs and a centring of the socio-political actions it aims to support. According to Urson, Kessi and Daya (2022: 169), who adopted a PAR framework in their fieldwork at CGH, centring the voices of marginalized people and collaboratively producing knowledge that supports processes of transformation of their living conditions 'destabilises the relationship between researchers and participants' and represents a step towards the 'decolonisation of knowledge'.

In the case of CGH residents, an important part and strategy of their struggle for decent housing consists in reclaiming the representations and narratives that circulate on the occupation. Often targeted by detrimental and stigmatizing public discourse, CGH residents engage in a number of actions aimed at shifting the perception that people in Capetonians have of the House and of housing occupations in general. These range from direct engagement with City officials, to having them visit the House, to participation in workshops with other housing occupations to collect and render visible the stories of occupiers.

The slogan 'Nothing about us without us' has been used by CGH residents to protest against the City's reluctance to actively involve them in a transparent process to determine the City's intentions and commitments to help resolve the precarity of CGH both in terms of legal status and dwelling conditions. The slogan shows the residents' awareness that the stories being told about them are an important site of struggle in their campaign for housing-related rights. In light of this, I decided to join Dr. Suraya

Scheba in the organization of a workshop on storytelling with residents of Cissie Gool House, as part of my research project and to support the production of counternarratives about life at CGH.

3.3 Data Generation: the workshop on storytelling and complementary methods

The workshop was first presented to the Leadership of CGH in early 2020 but was put on pause due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. By April 2021, after numerous engagements between Dr. Scheba and CGH House Leaders, the project received the green light and we started inviting residents to the sessions. It ran between April and June 2021 and involved sixteen people who attended the workshop in groups of three to five people - smaller than planned, due to Covid protocols. All the sessions were held in the Main Hall at CGH, which is a communal space, familiar to most CGH residents.

The aim of the workshop was to develop and tell residents' stories through a range of different tools and techniques that allowed participants to express and represent themselves in the ways they feel most comfortable with, without being pushed to conform to pre-determined formats. We therefore structured each workshop sessions – three per group – around a different storytelling technique: walking and affective mapping, oral storytelling, and participatory photography. In addition to these sessions, we had imagined a conclusive one in which the participants would reflect back on the materials they produced and the workshop process. Once we started running the sessions, we soon realized we had, on the one hand, overestimated our own ability to coordinate such activities and, on the other, misjudged the participants willingness and availability to carry out all the activities we proposed.

After the first cycle of workshops, and thanks to the ongoing feedback we received through our weekly attendance of the Monitors Meeting⁸, we decided to restructure the sessions, adopting a more flexible approach that could accommodate each group's actual interest in specific activities. We then started using the first session to kickstart group discussions around the residents' histories before arriving at CGH and

⁸ The Monitors Meeting is a weekly meeting for active residents in the occupation to meet the leadership and discuss problems related to the House, organize events and activities and coordinate communal projects that exist at CGH. A whole section of my findings is dedicated to the Monitors Meeting.

their experience once in the occupation. At the end of this session, we gave disposable cameras to participants who showed interest in using pictures to narrate their life at CGH and suggested to the others to use written and voice notes to record thoughts or anecdotes they wished to include in their story. The walks and mapping were too complicated and difficult to coordinate, hence we decided to suspend them. However, walking interviews with some participants still took place outside the workshop sessions.

It also soon became clear that most participants expected us to realize the 'storying' of the materials they produced during the workshop. While this was not what we had envisioned, it felt inappropriate to place excessive demands on those who took part in the research. We therefore decided to conduct one conclusive session – instead of one per group – where all the people who participated in the workshops convened and were invited to reflect back on the research process with the help of prompts resulting from a preliminary analysis we conducted on the transcripts of workshop sessions and interviews.

The workshop served as a platform to realize multiple outputs. In addition to my thesis, the main non-academic one is a zine called 'Cissie Gool House – a city occupied', consisting of photo portraits and excerpts from the interviews and focus groups with residents. We also shared insights from the storytelling workshops through presentations we gave at a workshop on the collaborative re-designing of CGH organized by the House Leadership and within a project facilitated by the Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education aimed at collecting stories of occupiers across Cape Town. Finally, a short documentary was shot as a separate project but drawing insights from the storytelling workshop to inform the storyline. Each of these projects contributed to and drew from the stories being shared during the workshop and added further methods or storytelling techniques to complete the different outputs I listed above.

As for this thesis project, a set of complementary methods were deployed in addition to the open-ended focus groups that took place as part of each group's first session of the workshop. The focus groups enabled me to gather preliminary information about the core topics of my thesis (Longhurst, 2003) and they allowed for collective narratives to emerge thanks to shared discussions. I, Dr Scheba and Kathryn Byrnes – who was also completing her Master thesis – then conducted follow-up in-

depth interviews with thirteen residents, which enabled a more detailed exploration of the themes emerging from the focus groups (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003).

Of all the interviews, eleven were standard in-depth individual interviews and one was a double interview with two members of the gardening team. In two instances the interviews involved walking to places in the House that are meaningful to the participants, and some interviews involved the use of the photo elicitation technique (Harper, 2002), utilizing the pictures taken by participants as prompts for the interview. The unstructured nature of the interviews provided participants with the freedom to share parts of their personal stories they deemed relevant. At the same time, I made use of follow-up questions to make sure a set of topics related to my thesis were covered during the interviews. These could be summarized as: trauma induced by histories of dispossession and eviction, the experience of houselessness, the life in the occupation and practices of communal organization, visions and desires for the future of CGH.

Some interviews with members who are active in communal projects and Task Teams focussed more explicitly on the work they conduct as part of these groups. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed word by word and constituted the core set of data for my analysis. However, other forms of observation contributed to this project, including participant observation ethnographic fieldnotes and photography, used especially during the Monitors Meetings and political events organized by the House Leadership. I have also engaged in various forms of 'deep hanging out' (Geertz, 1998), including spending free time with CGH residents I bonded with, attending events at CGH that were not directly related to my research, having informal chats with residents⁹. Mixing these modes of engagement and research techniques allowed me to generate what Kimari (2021: 4) calls a 'patchwork of lived experiences'. The data gathered as described so far was the object of my analysis work.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted following a combination of thematic and narrative analysis approaches. While the first allowed me to develop a systematic

⁹ This was made possible by the fact that after I decided to conduct research at CGH I rented a room two blocks away from the occupation. Meeting CGH residents and having conversations with them has since become a spontaneous daily occurrence rather than an intentional research technique.

structure to categorize data and retrace patterns across interviews (Alhojailan, 2012), the second allowed for deeper engagement with the life trajectories of participants and their process of attributing meaning to reality in the social contexts they inhabit (Elliot, 2005: 26). This was useful, for instance, to observe how CGH residents make sense of their life in the occupation in relation to their past or how they navigate the different scales at which they perform spatial agency in the occupation.

The thematic component of my analysis enabled the articulation of more explicit connections between the conceptual tensions explored by this project and the data generated through the fieldwork. The narrative analysis, instead, offered a dense and textured account that helped me to locate people's words and ideas within the context of their personal stories. In this sense, the holistic approach of narrative analysis balanced the categorical dissection of transcripts typical of thematic analysis (Elliot, 2005: 38; Earty & Cronin 2008). The adoption of narrative analysis is also connected to its grounding in social constructivism, which postulates that 'the social world is constantly "in the making" and therefore the emphasis is on understanding the *production* of that social world' (Elliot, 2005: 18). Furthermore, such a paradigm recognizes the role of 'competing narratives' that exist alongside a 'dominant' or 'mainstream' one at any given time in history (Czarniawska, 2004: 6).

These ideas align with the commitment of this research project to support the production of counternarratives by letting the residents of Cissie Gool House tell their own stories about life in the occupation in order to undo the stigmatizing mainstream ones that are often told about CGH. Due to the nature of thesis projects though, what emerges in this work is a selection of narratives that I carried out and combined within a plot line. While this was informed by several dozens of hours I spent with CGH residents and by the numerous insights I gained about their thought, the story being told in these pages is my own and, unlike projects like the zine¹⁰, does not consist of an iterative collaborative process with participants after the fieldwork stage.

The analysis of themes and narratives emerging from the interviews was conducted with the help of the NVIVO software for qualitative analysis, which I used to

¹⁰ The selection of excerpts from transcripts used in combination with photos to create portraits of residents, was shared with participants in order to obtain feedback about the representation of their persona emerging in the zine. Only after some back and forth the final versions of the portraits were approved and the zine was printed.

carry out comprehensive manual coding of the transcripts. The coding process started with an initial list of codes which included:

- 3) a set of *a priori* codes (Bazeley, 2013: 170), consisting of a synthetic list of the main conceptual tensions this thesis wishes to explore, and a small number of codes more explicitly focussed on the narrative analysis component.
- 4) a provisional set of *in vivo* codes (*Ibidem*: 166) resulting from a preliminary reading of the transcripts and my fieldnotes.

During the first round of coding according to this list, it became apparent that the organization of codes into broader themes needed a restructuring and that some of the codes for the narrative analysis component were too broad and vague. I therefore reworked the list of codes and re-coded the interviews accordingly. The final list of codes I obtained (Appendix A) constitutes the pool of excerpts and themes I drew from to build the findings section.

3.5 Ethical considerations, positionality, limitations

In the following lines I reflect on the research process in relation to the ethical questions we grappled with before and during the fieldwork, our role as academic researchers at CGH and the limitations of this work. I decided to combine these elements together in this section to avoid a dry, formalistic discussion of the ethical dilemmas involved in research with marginalized communities. My intent is to show how ethics, positionality and limitations of this work are connected to the type of relationships we managed to build with people at CGH.

3.5.1 Negotiating relevance and building reciprocity

In this respect, an important aspect of the workshop and subsequent engagements with participants is that the project had to be submitted to, discussed with and eventually approved by the House Leadership. Repeated instances of extractive research conducted at CGH by researchers who were never heard from again once they had gathered the data they needed, prompted CGH and RTC Leadership to develop tools to assess and oversee the research that is conducted in the occupations that are part of the movement. This is to ensure that researchers who are allowed into RTC occupations

do not simply try to avoid potentially detrimental effects of their work but, in fact, actively contribute to support the struggle of the movement. In addition to this step of review and clearance by the Leadership, the projects connected to the workshop on storytelling benefitted from an ongoing engagement with Leaders and Monitors through recurring informal conversations as well as through attendance of the Monitors Meeting.

In the case of my thesis, the latter has been of fundamental importance to building accountability and trust with residents as well as to receiving feedback about the content and process of the fieldwork I was conducting. I have made extensive use of the notes I took during the Monitors Meetings to reshape the conceptual framework of this thesis as well as the questions I posed during the interviews in order to address issues that I knew were meaningful to the participants. This contributed to filling the gap between my own thought process and that of CGH residents around what matters are worth exploring and reflecting on in the occupation, disrupting the conventional roles of researchers as those who think and decide what is relevant and participants as those who passively provide empirical evidence without having a say on the process and content of the research.

Another relevant aspect of the ongoing engagement with Leaders and Monitors is that we were asked to make the materials produced through the workshop available for other projects and workshops that involved CGH. As a result, we gave small presentations, shared points from preliminary analysis, or simply reflected on the research process in multiple instances, as mentioned in the section on data generation. The fact that these types of contributions were expected of us made me realize that, notwithstanding our commitment to deconstructing the role of academic researchers, we were still – mistakenly – perceived as holders of some sort of exclusive knowledge and expertise. However, at the same time, the fact that the Leadership felt completely comfortable in asking us to do such work represented a very straightforward way of building reciprocity between us. While we were using people's time and work to complete a number of projects that in many ways contributed to our own academic degrees and careers, we got a chance to give back to the occupation based on the requests of its Leadership.

3.5.2 Limitations and challenges

The relationship between the workshop on storytelling and the Monitors Meeting has largely been a fruitful and inspiring one. However, given that the Monitors Meeting was our main – if not only – interface with the House, one limitation is that we did not manage to involve in the workshops residents who are not Monitors or Leaders. While on the one hand Monitors are nominated in each section of the occupation, which diversifies the group, on the other hand the Monitors are a group of people who chose to take a formal step into the leadership structure of the occupation and meet on a weekly basis. This is likely to have an influence on the perception and shared narratives that Monitors and Leaders have around CGH and the struggle for housing.

Wingfield's work on RTC (2019) addresses the differences that exist between 'rank-and-file members of RTC' and the full-time professional activists that work for NU showing how these groups often have different perspectives aspirations and availability around the struggle for housing these two organizations conduct. A focus on the Monitors Meeting is hence helpful to add complexity to the description of RTC activists in that the Monitors occupy a hybrid position in between the formally elected leadership of RTC and the – supposedly – less active residents who inhabit the occupation. However further research at CGH and within RTC should attempt to involve residents who are not active in formal spaces of communal organization in the House so to explore whether and how their accounts of the life in the occupation differ from those presented in this thesis and the existing work on RTC as a movement.

Another interesting tension I experienced during the fieldwork was around language. Most people at CGH are Afrikaans speakers and prefer to express themselves in Afrikaans rather than English. While everyone knows English, it happened in several circumstances that they needed to turn to Afrikaans to express specific concepts they would not otherwise be able to explain. Not being an Afrikaans speaker myself I often felt I was missing important parts of their views and ideas when this happened. However there have been times, such as during the conclusive session of the workshop in which we reflected together on the preliminary findings of the research, where someone would offer – and often insist – to translate for me so to allow participants to

express themselves in their preferred language without making me feel excluded. While I initially felt slightly embarrassed when this happened, I then learnt to accept it as a sign of welcoming and inclusion, showing how participants felt invested in the project and took upon themselves the burden of enabling translation of meanings across language and culture.

A limit I encountered during the research process has to do with the attempt of involving participants in the 'storying' of the materials produced during the workshop. As I mentioned before, on the one hand I had to recognize my lack of skills in facilitating such process and, on the other, acknowledge participants' limited availability to work on the transcripts and pictures they produced to turn them into stories. This raises questions around the participatory nature of this project. While most of the materials were indeed co-produced and, as I described above, the ongoing feedbacks of the Monitors influenced my research questions and methods, exploring forms of co-authorship was also one of the intentions of this project.

On one side, I overestimated how much room there is to bring co-authorship into a Master dissertation, which is a conventional piece of academic work, whose main objective is to engage with existing academic literature. On the other side, it became clear that a large amount of work and experience is needed to achieve such an ambitious goal. However, I do not think this should take away from the genuine forms of participation, reciprocity and accountability experimented in this research project. In this respect I find interesting Benson's and Nagar's questioning of the centrality of co-authorship within a collaborative research approach, contending that '[w]e must resist an institutionalization of reciprocity that turns authorship into the be all and end all of sharing authority, and recognize that multiple aspects of reciprocity and accountability can be actively built into one project' (2006: 589).

3.5.3 Ethical issues: Anonymity as protection or invisibility?

As a conclusion to this chapter, I briefly discuss the issue of anonymization of research participants as a form of protection against undesired exposure of their identity. The names of the participants were anonymized to avoid unconsented disclosure of their personal information. This was not applied to two of the participants who are House Leaders and public spokespersons for CGH and RTC. Their identity and

opinions can be easily retrieved on newspapers and social media. This thesis does not disclose any sensitive information about them that is not already in the public domain. There are also two pictures where faces of participants are identifiable but are not associated to their names. Consent to use these photos was sought in addition to the informed consent form signed by all participants.

I believe it is worth reflecting on the politics of anonymization as an academic gold standard for protecting participants. Besides the slightly patronizing assumption that academic researchers are in the position of protecting participants beyond the participants' own ability to protect themselves, I think the appropriateness of anonymizing research participants should be assessed case by case. Denejkina (2018) offers an interesting discussion of anonymization, claiming it is just one way of treating the identity of research participants who belong to marginalized communities. Her argument is that a condition of marginality is sustained by different forms of oppression and exclusion, which could also include silencing, erasure and invisibility in society and in the public sphere and researchers should be conscious of this when imposing what she terms 'forced anonymity' or 'de-identification' (*Ibidem*).

Rendering houseless people invisible is arguably one of the most common tactics used by governments to avoid taking responsibility for the issue of houselessness. It is not by chance that one of the struggles CGH residents are currently fighting is precisely that of publicly telling the stories of occupiers, to push back against the various forms of shaming houseless people must deal with, and to bring back dignity into the circulating narratives around residents of housing occupations. Furthermore, all the residents who took part in the workshop gave their consent to have their photo portrait printed next to their name on the pages of the zine we created, showing that their visible and public ownership of their identity as occupiers is not something they are uncomfortable with. It is therefore not without hesitation that I changed the name of the participants, to adhere to the recommendations of the university ethics committee. I trust reflecting on cases like the one I presented can contribute to questioning the routinized ethics standards in social science research with marginalized communities and develop more pertinent and meaningful approaches based on the social and political context in which the research takes place.

In the next Chapter I present a selection of the data that was generated as part of the workshop and the complementary interviews and observations I conducted. Far from being a comprehensive representation of life at CGH, what follows is a patchwork of narratives shared by the participants that I assembled in specific ways to tell address the questions of this research project.

4. Findings

In this chapter I present and discuss my findings resulting from the thematic and narrative analysis I conducted on the transcripts of interviews, workshop sessions and my personal fieldnotes and observations. The structure of the chapter roughly corresponds to that of my research question: the first section on the Monitors Meeting helps me to articulate answers to the question on the junctures between individual and collective spheres of action in processes of popular urbanization whereas the second section looks at communal projects – the kitchen and garden – and the work of the Security and Safety Task Teams (SSTT) to provide insights on the overlaps between material and discursive dimensions of communal practices at CGH and how these prefigure alternative imaginaries of more just urban futures.

However, there are multiple overlaps between the sections and while they might predominantly speak to one research question, they offer important insights for the other too. The organizational and democratic practices performed by the Monitors Meeting, for instance, feed into the discussion of prefiguration of alternative futures, while the stories of members of communal projects and Task Teams speaks of the connections between individual and collective forms of spatial agency. Hence the choice to discuss the connections between findings and literature in one final section of this chapter so to avoid unnecessary compartmentalization of my data.

4.1 'Every member is an organizer'

In this section I address the first of my sub-questions by focussing on how residents at Cissie Gool House developed spaces for discussion and organization that enable them to design, maintain and transform the space they inhabit. In order to do so I present and describe the Monitors Meeting and the role it plays in the organization of communal spaces, conversations, projects in the occupation. I introduce the discussion of my observation with a brief summary of the organizational structure of the social movement Reclaim The City, which CGH is a part of. This section's content is largely based on the observations I conducted in the period between April and October 2021, during which I consistently attended the Monitors Meeting. Alongside informing residents about the storytelling workshops and reporting to them about the progress of

the research, attending this meeting allowed me to better understand the issues occupiers face on a daily basis and the collective strategies they adopt to sustain the occupation and further their struggle for decent housing. Furthermore, having access to the weekly meetings of the Monitors enabled me to gain insights on the articulation of democratic practices within the occupation.

CGH is part of a larger network of housing occupations in the inner-city of Cape Town that shares claims and political strategy through the organizational structures of the social movement Reclaim The City and is supported by the legal backing of NU. Each House elects House Leaders who play functions of coordination within and connection across the occupations. Together with RTC Chapter Leaders, who are elected by the movement's members in the neighbourhoods where RTC is active, they form the Coordination Committee (CC). The CC's main task is that of strategizing and organizing political actions to further the struggle for decent and affordable housing in the inner-city. In this respect CGH House Leaders – just like other House Leaders – have the task of reporting from the CCs to CGH residents and vice versa. Furthermore, House Leaders sit in the Disciplinary Committee (DC), which is in charge of ensuring the respect of the House rules and taking initiative against members of the movement who break them.

While the political coordination across the occupations and RTC chapters is conducted according to a hierarchical leadership structure that only involves a limited number of people, the individual Houses organize internally through more horizontal spaces for engagement that are open to all residents who are willing to get involved. In the case of Cissie Gool House these are:

- The Task Teams, which are working groups consisting of -in theory- at least one person from each floor or section of the occupation. The currently active Task Teams are the Security and Safety Task Team, the Welfare Task Team, the Youth and Children Task Team and the Maintenance Task Team.
- The weekly Monitors Meeting, which brings together the House Leaders and the Monitors on a weekly basis. The Monitors are residents who are actively and consistently involved in the work of the Task Teams as well as the organization and coordination of communal projects in the House.

- The weekly Section Meetings, where Monitors encounter the people who live in their same section – or floor – of the building to discuss issues occurring at this level and report to and from the Monitors Meeting.
- the Mass Meetings, where House Leaders meet all the residents to discuss important issues concerning the House or invite residents to political rallies, but also to build accountability towards the residents by engaging with their questions and criticisms.

As for this research project, I have mostly focussed on the Monitors Meeting – and, as a result, on the work of the Task Teams – which is the space where most communal projects and activities that take place in the occupation are discussed, organized and coordinated. The Monitor’s Meeting also represents an interesting mid-level tier of the organizational structure of the House and the RTC movement, where elected leaders meet and work together with active residents. While the House Leaders play a central role in facilitating this meeting, many inputs and discussion points come from the Monitors.

In this sense, the Monitors Meeting represents an interesting space of connection between individual and collective spheres of action in that it brings together the skills, imagination and lived experiences of individuals inscribing them in a collective framework of organization and discussion. In fact, as a space, it constitutes a juncture between the political mobilization for decent housing and spatial justice and the everyday actions that sustain the occupation. It does so by offering a space to socialize problems, share the burden of maintaining the building, nurture the community that inhabits it and by giving visibility, structure and greater political relevance to the acts of care and maintenance carried out by residents on a daily basis. In the following I provide a more detailed description of the Monitors Meeting so to draw some analytical points for discussion from my observations.

4.1.1 The Monitors Meeting

I think ours is the only occupation in Cape Town, that has a second layer of leadership, that has the Monitors, that is a voluntary leadership. It was a decision that was taken by

elected leaders to say that we want to work with the people in the occupation. And we want to see how best we together as a community can build this alternative model. It's not easy. It comes with its struggles every day; [...] Hence, we draw more and more people in to participate in coordinating the occupation. So that it's not only the elected leaders who are taking charge of the occupation, but that it is the people themselves that are taking the charge of their own land and housing, are taking charge of their own alternative. (Karen, CGH House Leader, 2021)

The first Monitors Meeting was held at CGH in 2019 and it has since become a weekly appointment. As Karen, who is one of the House Leaders, explains in the quote opening this section, the elected leadership was unable to address the issues and needs raised by residents without their active involvement in the organizational structure. Hence, they asked people from each section of the occupation to nominate a few Monitors – usually four – that would participate in, oversee and promote the activity of Task Teams across the House.

Task Teams, which consist of members from each section and floor of the occupation, are groups of residents that work together to articulate various forms of social and structural intervention in the House. Their work includes several fields, such as activities for the youth and the children, maintaining safety and security, fight against gender-based violence, education on land and housing questions, infrastructural maintenance and several forms of community-based welfare. Monitors and House Leaders have then established the weekly Monitors Meeting to formalize and improve the coordination across different Task Teams. This meeting offers a space for residents to put their different skills, interests and visions to the service of the community of residents by organizing communal projects that make CGH a more inclusive, livelier and safer place.

Uncle Bevil, also a House Leader, echoes Karen's contention that the emerging of Task Teams and subsequently of the Monitors Meeting stemmed from material and organizational needs. However, in addition to this, they both explain how these structures perform a more complex role in the life of the occupation:

[O]ne of the things that we set up immediately, when we moved in was to create different committees. The reason for that is located in the Soviet style of organizing: every

member is an organizer, and every organizer is an activist [*slightly ironic*]. So we didn't take a hardcore theoretical approach, but we took a hardcore approach about participation. So, whilst you live here you have to participate in some aspect of the life of the occupation. And so we discover the skills that people have. And so how to harness those skills, how to make those skills accessible to the community? (Uncle Bevil, CGH House Leader, 2021)

As Uncle Bevil suggests, 'harnessing' people's skills does not only contribute to sustain the occupation socially and infrastructurally, but it is also a way to put knowledge in common among the community of residents. A very interesting aspect of the Monitors Meeting is precisely the diversity of issues that are discussed during the meetings and the different forms of expertise that inform such conversations. Even though in practice it does not always happen, all Monitors are encouraged to express themselves on the matters being discussed.

Being part of the Task Team that is responsible for the issue being discussed is not a requirement to intervene in the debate. In fact, it is not rare that new suggestions to address challenges within the House come from Monitors who are not part of the specific Task Team raising an issue. This is to be attributed to the ongoing process of active and passive learning enabled by the accessibility and horizontality that are characteristic of the Monitors Meeting. In this respect the meeting presents an interesting degree of hybridity, in that elected House Leaders sit and work together with the nominated Monitors and a number of voluntary participants, sharing information and knowledge in mutual ways and utilizing consensus as the main tool for decision-making¹¹.

One aspect of the Monitors Meeting that makes it extremely interesting and relevant for this project is the fact that it plays a pivotal role in the articulation of communal socio-spatial practices in the House. It does so by bridging the gap between individual experiences and collective forms of organization. Borrowing vocabulary from debates on insurgent planning, a space of this kind could be described as an 'invented space', in that it embeds and enables the elaboration of alternative urban imaginaries and advances the spatial claims of black and working-class people against gentrification and racial segregation. The connection between the creation of the Task Teams –

¹¹ During my attendance of the Monitors Meeting, I have not witnessed a single resolution or decision taken through a voting mechanism or by leaders imposing their will or putting a veto on decisions taken by the Monitors.

followed by that of the Monitors Meeting- and the imagination of alternative futures for the old Woodstock Hospital is expressed by Karen with great clarity:

In some of the sections, there was no electricity and it was occupiers here who got together and coordinated to put those basic services there. So that everyone could benefit. That takes us to how this occupation is structured. [...] The Task Teams came as a result of this co-design and this reimagining what the space should be. Us imagining this alternative housing model. That is how these structures came into place and these Task Teams came into place. But it also came into place as a way of pushing back against all the narrative about occupations. (Karen, CGH House Leader, 2021)

There are two main points I find particularly compelling about Karen's reflection. The first one is the deliberate attempt to create autonomous institutions to reclaim the urban planning of housing projects for working-class people by involving residents in the decision and design of such solutions. An immediate effect of this is that the forms of oppression and marginality people experience are much more likely to inform the imagination and choices around place-making practices and the structuring of communal activities in the occupation.

From the perspective of democratic processes, it is interesting to notice that this participatory setup functions through mutual forms of delegation between Leaders and Monitors. While elected Leaders receive a mandate by residents for political representation within RTC and in public campaigns – which is typical of representative democracy – the Monitors have in turn a mandate to coordinate projects and interventions elaborated within the framework of the Monitors meeting. Enabling practices of direct participation such as those described above should then be seen as an insurgent practice not only in relation to the planning process and the forms of spatial re-design it enables, but also in terms of the radical rethinking of the democratic process and relations that shape communal life among the community of residents.

The second important contention Karen makes has to do with the importance of developing an alternative housing model to shift the narrative on CGH – and housing occupations more broadly. While in the excerpt I reported there is only a brief mention of this concept, it is a recurring one among many of the residents I spoke to during my fieldwork. Most people at CGH are aware of the detrimental effects of the mainstream representation of the House as a den for criminals, a place where chaos and violence reign and where people try to cut corners by jumping the decade-long state housing list.

Through the creation of solid organizational structures that enable interventions to support the CGH community, Leaders, Monitors and many active residents try to push back against this detrimental narrative, which is the one espoused and spread by City's officials¹², and other forms of prejudice that lay the ground for the criminalization of the occupation and its treatment as a public safety issue.

By developing their own intuitions, discourses and practices, CGH occupiers are carving out for themselves an interesting space to advance radical claims around the reversing of Apartheid spatial planning and the continuation of spatial injustice under a post-Apartheid regime of liberal democracy and capitalist market. I will discuss in the next sections how class solidarity, antiracism and feminism are the main values that inform the activity of the Leadership, the Monitors and the Task Teams, as well as the broader RTC movement. I wish for now to dwell on the contention that the circulating narratives around CGH – and any other occupation for that matter – are a site of a struggle for the legitimacy and right of people to exist in, inhabit and design certain parts of the city.

In this respect, another important aspect of the development of alternative institutions at CGH is the major role played by the Monitors Meeting in connecting residents' personal stories within a framework of political and social action and how this contributes to shaping communal life and spaces in the occupation. As described by the House Leaders, the layered nature of the House's organizational structure – of which the Monitors meeting is a crucial tier – enables a connection between individual and collective action and narratives by letting residents' life stories, skills and vision be the driving force behind the communal re-design and maintenance of the space they inhabit. At the same time these do not result in scattered, fragmented and clashing interventions thanks to the logistical and political coordination occurring at the Monitors Meeting – and to some extent at the other levels of the organizational structure.

Before discussing in greater detail the work of some Task Teams and communal projects that are active at CGH, I wish to conclude this section by providing examples of the connections between the Monitors' personal stories and the activity they conduct in

¹² See for instance recent statements by MayCo member for Housing Malusi Booi available at: <https://www.da.org.za/government/undefined/2021/01/more-homes-handed-over-in-citys-the-hague-housing-project-to-qualifying-beneficiaries>

the House. In addition to this, the following lines aim to give a general idea of the kind of links between different communal projects and Task Teams that emerged through the Monitors Meeting. Residents like Daniel and Marlene, who grew up in rural towns of the Western Cape and developed a very intimate connection with plants since a young age, oversee the vegetable garden. In their (rather scarce) free time they recruit people and organize days of collective work so to expand the patches of soil where food can be grown and to plant new vegetables and herbs.

By taking part in the Monitors Meeting, they connected their work with that of Uncle Bevil, who is a former chef, Zahra and Boeta Haruun, who started the Communal Kitchen project to serve meals for the residents or to do the catering for events and workshops hosted at CGH. While residents grow and pick their own vegetables from the garden, part of the harvest supports the kitchen, generating interesting forms of mutual support. People from both the kitchen and the gardening group are also involved in the RTC Land and Housing Task Team¹³, through which they undergo political education around issues of spatial justice and restitution of land and make their experience as occupiers, gardeners, and cooks available to other members of the movement.

Auntie Elize, who was the first occupier to move into the abandoned hospital, is a living archive of the history of CGH and knows very well every corner of the rather complex map of the building. She works in the Security and Safety Task Team and often does night shifts at the gate and perimeter of the House to make sure there are no attempts of theft or trespassing by people who do not live there. Due to the nature of its work, the SSTT happens to have a grip on 'unsocial'¹⁴ and illegal activities carried out by some residents as well as on the hotspots where these usually take place.

This form of experiential knowledge, which is shared via the Monitors Meeting becomes extremely useful for other members of the Meeting such as the Youth Monitors, who are tasked with preventing kids and teenagers from getting involved in criminal activities, falling into drug addictions and dropping out of school. Auntie Anja and

¹³ This Task Team is one of the Reclaim The City's Task Teams and it involves member from other occupations or people who are active in the movement

¹⁴ This term is often used by Monitors and Leaders to refer to behaviours displayed by residents that have the intentional or unintentional effect of deteriorating the sense of community, belonging and safety in the occupation. These range from vandalism, drug dealing, aggressive behaviours and gender-based violence to neglect of communal spaces and lack of engagement in political actions within and outside CGH.

'Granny' Yusrah, a former schoolteacher, are extremely passionate and busy Youth Monitors and with the help of other residents they organize after-school activities for the youth, sports days, movie nights and a range of other activities aimed at helping young members of the occupation to feel cared for and grow a sense of belonging and responsibility towards each other and towards the House.

These fragments of stories show how, despite internal power dynamics and, at times, lack of specific expertise, the Monitors Meeting represents an extremely dynamic and innovative space for community organizing, nurturing and growing. It also offers a collaborative platform for planning, re-designing and maintaining communal and personal spaces in the occupation, which relies on residents' everyday experience and embodied knowledge. Through this space ordinary citizens get to have a say and play a key role in the imagining and designing of more just urban futures by bridging gaps between individual and collective modes of action.

4.2 Communal projects and Task Teams

In this section I turn to the second aspect of my research question, which is concerned with the ways in which communal spatial practices carried out by CGH residents embody and articulate imaginaries of alternative and more just urban futures. In order to do this, I offer an overview of the activities and practices that exist at CGH and what functions they perform for the community of residents. This is informed by residents' accounts, and my personal observations over the course of about 12 months during which I frequented the occupation as a researcher, a neighbour and an ally.

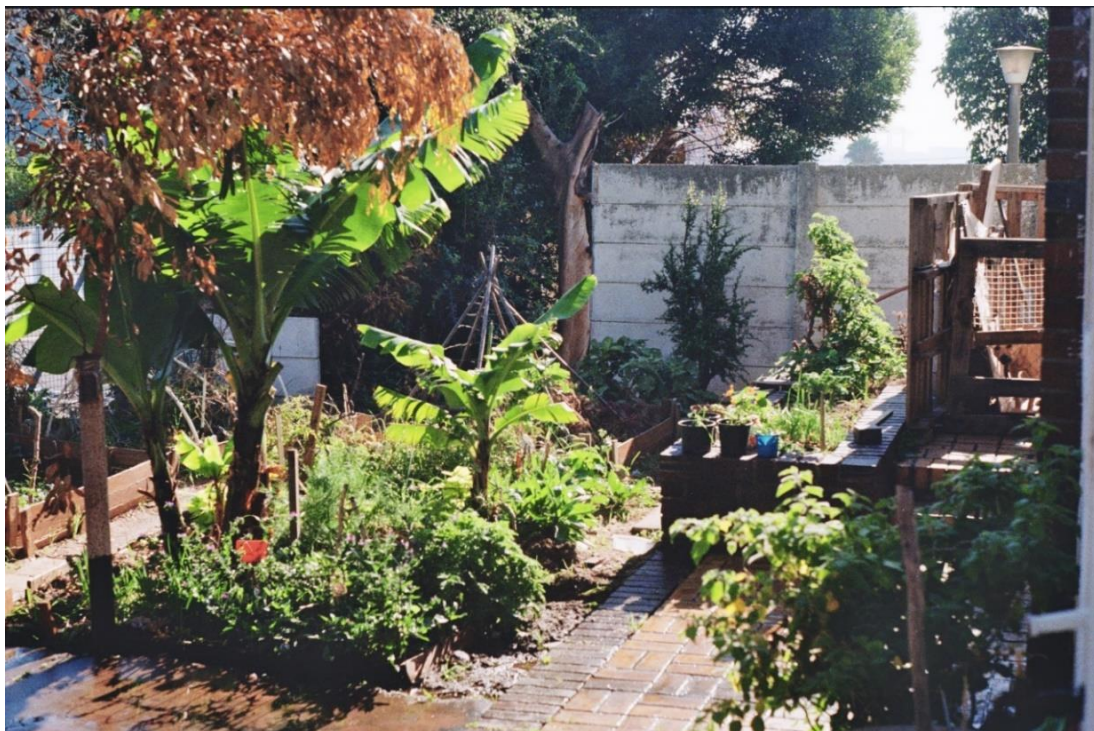
Alongside discussing the collective practices that exist at CGH and their function in the occupation, I wish to bring attention to the meanings and narratives that are articulated through such practices. The main contention I make in this section is that engaging communal projects and organizational structures as – also – narrative practices can help to avoid dualistic distinctions between the materiality and discursiveness of spatial practices and show how such dimensions equally contribute to the prefiguration and embodiment of alternative futures.

Of the several communal projects existing at CGH, I chose to focus on the communal garden and kitchens and on the Security and Safety Task Team. This choice,

which is to some degree arbitrary, was forced by the limited space available in this manuscript to report and discuss more projects in appropriate ways. Another reason to focus on the selected activities, is the centrality that these play in the occupation and the amount of prefigurative meanings that emerged from my analysis in relation to these projects. However, it is my intention to surface the interconnectedness of the kitchen, garden and SSTT with other communal initiatives that exist at CGH so to avoid a compartmentalized description and discussion of these groups' practical and prefigurative work.

4.2.1 Community kitchens and Vegetable Garden

While the community kitchens and the vegetable garden are separate projects, I decided to group them together in that they address the same issue – access to food – but at different levels – production and transformation. Both made possible by the repurposing, repairing and retrofitting of some of the hospital's spaces, the garden and the community kitchens have the aim of supporting the families living in the occupation with access to decent, healthy and tasty food. These projects are run by residents that



PICTURE 1 - View of the communal vegetable garden. Source: Tommaso Cosentino

are part of the elected and nominated leadership, namely the House Leaders and the Monitors. People from these two groups tend to be at the forefront of collective organization and initiated most of the existing projects and structures that are active at Cissie Gool House. Both garden and kitchens are also sustained by the work of other residents and volunteer workers from outside the occupation. However, these are more intermittent and dependent on opportunities to earn money – which are often not present. As a result, both projects, have lately been affected by a shortage of labour and had to reduce their operations to whatever is possible in light of the current availability of people.

The vegetable garden was started by some residents who saw an opportunity in the patches of non tarred land by the North-West end of the building's perimeter, at the intersection between Victoria Walk and Earl Street. According to Anja, a member of the Monitors, herself and Oupa Ebrahim, an elderly man who is very active in the occupation, cleaned up the area, started producing compost and planted seeds and trees, 'a banana tree' (Anja, CGH Monitor, 2021). Other residents got involved because of personal interest or through the incentives system of a digital platform called Zlto¹⁵, like in the case of Daniel and Marlene – who are still very active in the garden.

After it was kickstarted, the garden had a phase of growth which involved the expansion of the cultivated patches and the participation of the garden team in a permaculture course proposed by two members of the gardening team who are also part of the Woodstock Chapter of Reclaim the City. During this time, forms of fundraising were explored in order to sustain the project:

The end of the year, we had projects that we did to raise funds... And we would put it online and last year, we made, the year before, we made about R15 000. Last year we made close to over R10 000. [...] The year before we made boxes with homemade products in it and some seed that comes from the garden from our seed bank. And then we had last year we had, we made wooden boxes, also with some homemade products and plants in it and seeds. (Lorraine, CGH Monitor, 2021)

¹⁵ Zlto is a platform that creates a system of incentives and rewards for individuals and communities who engage in 'positive behaviours' such as green development, self-provision of food, community and personal upliftment and empowerment. Users earn points by posting photos and reports that speaks of the impact of their projects and conduct surveys in their community. Points can be turned into rewards such as Shoprite, electricity and transport vouchers. Main partners of Zlto are the NPO RLab, Google, Shoprite, Mastercard Foundation, JP & Morgan, Unicef and UNDP.

During its peak period of participation and activity, the vegetable garden was providing small parcels of food for those who took care of it and to families in the occupation who struggled to buy their own food. In addition to this, part of the vegetables and herbs growing in the garden were given to the main Communal Kitchen to contribute to the meals the kitchen team prepares weekly for the residents of the occupation. By the time I started frequenting Cissie gool House in early 2021, the garden had started going through a phase of neglect and decay. While the initial patch – visible in the photo – is still well looked after, the patches that were subsequently started have been reclaimed by weeds except for a few sturdy kale and spinach plants that stand as a reminder of more thriving times.

According to the gardening team members I interviewed, the current state of decay of the garden stems, on the one hand, from internal discord among some key members of the group that led to some of them leaving the team. On the other hand, the lack of available funds to remunerate the work of volunteers is seen as the main reason



PICTURE 2 - Members of the Communal Kitchen team preparing food for an event, while the documentary crew is collecting footage. Source: Tommaso Cosentino

for the drop in enthusiasm and participation among CGH residents. On a strictly material level, it is intuitive that people who are unemployed or underemployed and must take care of their families look for income-generating activities to fill their time with. However, this pattern, which emerged from many interviews in relation to other communal projects too, is interpreted by many Monitors and Leaders as a symptom of a lack of willingness and sense of belonging in the community.

The community kitchens at CGH are faced with similar issues. The main Communal Kitchen is located in the former hospital canteen, which is adjacent to the Main Hall, where events, mass meetings, workshops and religious and social celebrations take place. The main kitchen was found by early occupiers in a state of dire neglect, covered in rats' and pigeons' excrement – like most of the indoor spaces in the hospital – and was cleaned up by residents who thought it would be useful to restore it and utilize it. The development of the Communal Kitchen project that provides cooked meals for residents was started by Boeta Haruun and Uncle Bevil – two elected Leaders in the occupation – who equipped the kitchen with bigger pots that enabled them to cook for large amounts of people.

Through food donations, harvests from the garden and voluntary contributions from the residents, they started handing out meals on Fridays for people who live at CGH in order to respond to many families' struggle to secure consistent access to food. When the food is ready, Zahra – who also works in the kitchen – sends messages via Whatsapp to the chat groups that connect residents across the occupation and waits for people to come fetch their meals. The Communal Kitchen project is run and sustained by members of the Leadership and the Monitors but several other people offer to help when needed.

In addition to weekly catering for residents, the aim of this project is that of providing food for the events and initiatives hosted at CGH in the Main Hall. At times, the kitchen team shares the kitchen or prepares meals to support other political groups who are part of the struggle for spatial justice in Cape Town. These uses of the kitchen have a different and somewhat more explicitly political connotation in that resources that could be used to attend to everyday needs of residents are employed to support workshops, meetings and initiatives that relate to the struggle for housing that CGH is part of. In this respect, as I discuss later in this section, providing food is not only a matter of attending

to bodily needs but also a tool and infrastructure to political organization.

The Communal Kitchen project, however, just like other communal activities at CGH, is lacking financial resources and labour to expand its operations, as Boeta Haruun contends:

Okay, two years ago, when we started with the kitchen. We collected some things within the occupation. Everybody that could donate something they would donate towards the kitchen. But that all died out. Why? I don't know. And I mean, I would a lot of times use out my own pocket to buy for the pot but I can't keep on doing that. So, with even, I wanted to make porridge in the mornings. Then we ground to a halt because there's no sugar, we need milk, we need the spices. And to do it every day, every morning. I mean, it takes a lot, not just for supplies. But I mean, imagine you had to get up five o'clock every morning. (Boeta Haruun, CGH House Leader, 2021)

Currently the Communal Kitchen project provides meals to residents weekly and caters for events' attendees, but it is not managing to produce a stable income for those who work in it nor increase the weekly number of meals it serves to the residents of the occupation. While this represent a serious obstacle to the project's own objective of achieving greater food security in the occupation, the kitchen team is not alone in its mission. Alongside the main kitchen, there are a number of smaller 'soup kitchens' informally ran by active residents who have different channels for sourcing food and who are located in different wings of the building.

Auntie Laeeqah, who is a Monitor at CGH, uses her own kitchen to cook soup once or twice a week mostly for kids whose families cannot always provide food for them. She runs the kitchen on a completely voluntary basis and without any income resulting from her activity:

Like myself and the other group that run the soup kitchens, we do it selflessly, we don't get paid for it. It's hours of hard work day-before prepping, cooking the whole day. But at the end of the day, there is nothing you can buy in the shop that can show the gratitude and the happiness that I see with the kiddies. I look forward to my soup days. (Laeeqah, CGH Monitor, 2021)

As this quote suggests, there is an understanding among those who run community kitchens at CGH that providing access to food means more than just feeding bodies. What gives Auntie Laeeqah the energy to make extra time in her already busy days to keep the kitchen going is a selfless sense of solidarity and responsibility for the

residents of the occupation, aimed at creating stronger and warmer bonds with her neighbours. Similarly, Boeta Haruun, who is the head chef in the House's main kitchen, wishes he had enough money to fix his car so to 'put the food in the boot [a]nd then just take it down the main road and go stand on the main road. And the people will come with their bowl and their cups' (Boeta Haruun, 2021). This shows how the sense of community that animates projects at CGH extends beyond the rusty fences that demarcate the boundaries of the old Woodstock Hospital, including the houseless people who live in the neighbourhood. The work of community kitchens is, in this sense, an agent of community building, making a hot bowl of meaty bones soup or a dish of Akhni an act of solidarity and care and not only filling delicious meals.

Another interesting meaning attached to the work of the kitchens is expressed by the sentence 'you can't think on an empty stomach', which is what Boeta Haruun answered when asked why it is important to keep the kitchen running, suggesting that feeding people has a direct connection with enabling them to stay intellectually active. This conceptualization of the role of food, which is basic yet very important, informs not only the provision of weekly meals, but also the catering activity that accompanies the dense schedule of political workshops and meetings that take place at CGH. While this is linked to a generous culture of hosting and caretaking, food is provided to attendees and participants so to encourage and enable active and engaged contribution to activities that are aimed at addressing and acting on the internal and external socio-political issues CGH is faced with. The work of the kitchen could therefore be seen as an infrastructure to the intellectual work that informs political and social action, which are core elements of the struggle for housing and spatial justice that CGH fights, both in its own capacity and as a part of Reclaim The City.

While the range of non-strictly-material meanings people at CGH attach to food and cooking is extremely vast, I am interested here in pointing out one last set of ideas and perception of food that underlines its political significance: the connection between food and culinary (re)education. It is worth here quoting Uncle Bevil:

So here I've been able to, once again, be of service through the kitchen, cook quite a bit. And I show people also how particularly vegetarian foods, I have them to see that you don't have to always just cook meat. You... and it's because of how people have been socialized. You know? That people can't think beyond the salad. They think vegetarians live on salads. I'm not a vegetarian. But I just love.... having lived in Durban, I mean, you just become exposed to all

different kinds of vegetarian and even vegan type of foods. So it's just a good space to be in. (Uncle Bevil, CGH House Leader, 2021)

This quote stresses the role community kitchens can have in undoing culinary and nutritional habits that people took up as a result of socialization and lack of access to unprocessed and fresh ingredients.



PICTURE 3 - Members of the gardening team making seedballs with DIY mixer. Source: Tommaso Cosentino

The influence of disseminating a culture of healthy and flavourful food extends beyond the handing out of weekly meals or the catering for events and workshops. It also has an impact on the people who work in the kitchen, who get to learn how to use new ingredients and new ways of using familiar ones as Zahra points out:

Yes, now I'm into cooking. And we don't just cook there, Bevil teaches us and he'll ask me! Yes we make jokes and stuff like that and say 'what can we do with this now?' 'What do you think?'. Then I said 'no man' like I never knew I could put honey into my... I don't eat honey although I'm diabetic and I must eat honey, but I like my sweet stuff and then he made butternut and carrots with honey, and I told my mommy and I got a book where I write all the recipes that I can't remember. But he teaches us. He made such a lovely fish for Easter yoh! And you know as soon as Bevil comes back I need to make that fish, but I know how. And now I'm making fish in my room, the batter and stuff. (Zahra, CGH Monitor, 2021)

The educational role of communal projects emerged quite strongly also in the work of the vegetable garden team. It is relevant that most of its members have a strong connection with plants and farming, which is often due to having spent their childhood or part of their adult life on farms in rural areas, where agricultural activity tends to be more integrated in people's everyday life. Through the work they do in the garden they get to share their familiarity with the process of growing plants and the relative skillset they hold with other residents who get involved in activities such as collecting organic waste, starting and maintaining worm farms, making compost, planting seeds, fertilizing the soil.

Marlene, for instance, has been trying to set up a system for collecting organic waste across the floors of her section, in order to produce compost, which is in turn used to fertilize the soil. In addition to producing nutrients for the garden, her initiative aims at stimulating people to think critically about how to dispose of waste and acknowledge its value once it is reintroduced in the organic cycle that connects waste, soil, plants, and food. This same connection is also visible in the attempt to use the garden as a source of food for the community kitchens at CGH, which gestures towards forms of autonomous production of food and independence from the large-scale farming chain that supplies supermarkets.

4.2.2 Security and Safety Task Team (SSTT)

I now turn to the work of the Security and Safety Task Team in relation to the processes of articulation and enforcement of rules within the occupation. As I will discuss, this offers extremely valuable insights on the structuring of autonomous communal practices and discourses around security and safety. Furthermore, the account provided by some residents and leaders around this matter provides an interesting viewpoint onto the interactions and differences between state-led and community-led systems of justice and law enforcement. It is not my intention to elaborate a moral assessment of the practices and discourses on safety and security at CGH. Instead, I am interested in unpacking the modes, rationales and ideas that underpin the process of rule formation and enforcement. In other words, I am not interested in discussing whether it is right or wrong to police, for instance, petty crime inside the House, but rather I wish to understand why and how this is done and what are

the meanings that such actions assume in the context of self-organized community-based policing.

The Security and Safety Task Team is in charge of preventing and responding to situations that might put at risk the safety of the residents of the occupation or contribute to deteriorate the social fabric of the community. It consists of members of the Monitors meeting and residents who voluntarily join the team to support its work. The SSTT mostly operates at night, patrolling the gates and the perimeter of the building in order to enforce the night-lockdown and prevent people who do not live at CGH from entering the occupation. It also intervenes in the case of altercations or fights between residents, and it reports cases of behaviours that are not accepted within the occupation such as child abuse, gender-based violence and petty crimes such as theft, vandalism and drug dealing. Karen Hendricks, who is an elected leader at CGH and a prominent member of Reclaim The City, gave an account of how and why the Security and Safety Task Team was created:

The first and foremost [Task Team], I think would be the Security and Safety Task Team. So, that Task Team started in late 2018 as a Task Team looking at the safety and the security of the occupiers. So, the task that they had was to patrol at night. The task that the Security Task Team had was to see to it that the children, for example, are safe and well, inside their homes. The security Task Team also had a task to see to it that the gates were protected. This came as a result of the raid that happened at Cissie Gool House in 2019. The South African Defence Force, as well as the police force, they came in, rushed into the occupation at 1:30am in the morning, and brutalized the occupiers. And so, those structures came as a result of the... that was one of the reasons. The other reason, too, was the interdict that was brought against the occupation back in 2018, that said that no more occupiers could move into the occupation.

According to this excerpt, the Security and Safety Task Team emerged in response to a number of needs. The first is that for internal security, which includes both the protection of residents from ill-intentioned intruders and the monitoring of safety conditions within households. Following Hendricks's words, the existence of the Security and Safety Task Team at CGH is also connected to the danger represented by the operations of the South African Police Services (SAPS) and Metro Police. During the time of my fieldwork alone, the police has broken into and raided the occupation three times, each of which without



PICTURE 4 - Unhinged gate of the Meeting Room after the brutal police raid of the 31st of January 2022. Source: Tommaso Cosentino

providing any notice and displaying various forms of violent and intimidatory behaviours, including unnecessary damage to structures, humiliation of residents through verbal and physical harassment, spectacular deployment of armed forces including cavalry, helicopters and water cannons (Christianson, 2019).

Finally, Karen suggested a link between the mandate of the SSTT and the City's interdict against the further intake of residents at CGH. While the City of Cape Town had already placed its own private security company at the entrances of the building to prevent the access of new residents into the occupation, the CGH Security and Safety Task Team decided to align with the City around the disposition of the interdict – issued in 2018 but

only finalized in 2019 – as part of the process of obtaining legal recognition of the occupation, supported by the legal NGO Ndifuna Ukwazi.

The circumstances that determined the emerging of the SSTT speak of the non-linear interactions that exist between the structures set up by the community of CGH residents and the formal institutions of the State and the City. Looking at community-based forms of policing allows us to observe the connections and disconnections between formal and informal systems of security provision as well as better understand the forms of prefiguration that are embedded in the discourses and practices around security and rules enforcement articulated by CGH residents and leadership.

While the drive for self-organized internal security practices at CGH can be partially explained by the overall disillusion towards the work of police forces – which are seen as enforcing oppression rather than protection of CGH residents – there is also a belief that cooperation with SAPS and Law Enforcement should be pursued in order to ensure safety for the community. However, as Uncle Bevil, elected RTC leader and CGH resident, claims, the potential for fruitful collaboration between CGH's leadership and the police is limited due to the police's reluctance to embrace a community-centred approach to policing:

Of course, there are social behavioural problems within the size of this community, but it has not been of our nature that we could not address it. And we do find challenges in addressing it in that the state agencies such as the law enforcement agencies are not always cooperative, are not always supportive. Our hands as the leadership of CGH are always found wanting. And it's made life very difficult. Where we've had situations where we've invited law enforcement agencies or seek support from law enforcement agencies with regards to some of the unsocial behaviour and found not getting the kind of support. And what we're talking about is where we know certain people are conducting themselves in a particular way, like with gender-based violence with child abuse, with alcohol abuse, with general misbehaviour.

The lack of cooperation by the police and the extremely violent policing methods it deployed in the occupation across the years, have contributed to the development of an autonomous approach to security in the occupation, which operates within a radically different framework than that of the national and local police forces.

First and foremost, among the leaders and the active members of the occupation there is a widespread understanding of the structural roots of violent and harmful behaviours that occur at CGH. This becomes visible in the ways in which these

behaviours are perceived by residents as well as by how they are dealt with. The engagement with social challenges at CGH is shaped by a set of ideals that most of the residents who took part in the research mentioned during the workshops and interviews. Antiracism, feminism and class solidarity are political stances that inform the work of the Task Teams.

The Security and Safety Task Team, which is mostly composed by women, adopted a non-violent and weapon-free approach to its actions. If on the one hand this choice is influenced by the association of CGH with RTC – which defines itself as a non-violent movement – on the other hand it stems from a rejection of the criminalization of poverty and the extremely violent policing practices this translates into when enforced by the national and local police forces. At CGH, antiracism and class solidarity bolster an approach to security and policing that is conscious of the structural roots of inequality and oppression experienced by working-class people under a system of racialized capitalist exploitation, which is deemed responsible for many of the social challenges that affect the community of residents. Consequently, forms of so-called petty crimes are not perceived and treated as a wilful choice of individuals but rather as a product of a highly unequal society, thus moving away from an individualized attribution of guilt - typical of the State’s justice system.



PICTURE 5 - Member of the SSTT on night patrol duty. Source: screenshot from the documentary. Courtesy of Dr. Suraya Scheba

The House rules and principles are signed by people moving into the occupation to inform each prospective resident of the limits within which social life is supposed to unfold inside the House. The rules, in turn, are drafted through the ongoing engagement between the Reclaim the City organizational structure, the House leadership, the Monitors meeting, the CGH section meetings and the CGH mass meetings, which involve the body of residents at large. While this is not a completely horizontal process there are several spaces for engagement on rules and enforcement that residents can attend to.

During one of the Monitors Meetings I have attended during my fieldwork, one of the most active members of the Security and Safety Task Team reported the recurrent misconduct of kids and teenagers in the communal spaces of the occupation and raised the need for greater control and support to his work in that he had repeatedly experienced rude and aggressive responses from the people he reprimanded. While this matter aligned with similar complaints raised by other Monitors numerous times before then, one of the participants intervened to question the conduct of the member of the Security and Safety Task Team who had just raised the issue by pointing out that he often is too strict when patrolling in the occupation and approaching misbehaving youths.

This sparked a collective conversation around both the issue of youth's misbehaviour in the occupation and the manners adopted by those who are on patrol duty. Interestingly, the rather consolidated belief that stricter rules and greater control over the youth is needed was somehow counterbalanced by the question of whether this alone would be effective in achieving a reduction of misbehaviour in the House. In addition to the need for a greater presence of Monitors in the overseeing of the youth, several other interventions were discussed and approved – some of which expanded on already existing structures and projects. These included a set of events and recreational activities for the youth, such as sport tournaments, movie nights and celebrations for Youth Day. Forms of transversal overseeing of the youth were proposed, such as the involvement of older youths in looking after the younger ones or the participation of parents in workshops on parenting skills and management of aggression within the domestic space.

The nature of these actions indicated a shift in the very conceptualization of the issue, identifying aggression and misconduct among the youth as a mere symptom and

vocalizing the need to act on what are seen as the causes of the problem. The sentence 'my child is your child' was used by many throughout the conversation to reassert the need for communal parenting against individualistic approaches to education. This is for many residents much more than just a phrase or an idea; it is the very mode of parenting they grew up with and preserving it is not only a matter of security and order but also a way to maintain a deep connection with their past and with the history of their community and neighbourhood.

Another feature of the Security and Safety Task Team that differentiates rule enforcement in the occupation from the work of the police or private security is that at CGH it is conducted by the residents themselves, who mostly rely on collective power, avoiding the use of physical violence and weapons of any kind. The fact that the members of the Security and Safety Task Team are part of the community of residents and, in many instances, have known their neighbours for many years contributes to the accountability and respectfulness in the Task Team's work. Before more resolute action is taken, a system involving three warnings and repeated engagements with offenders is employed to deal with those forms of minor misconduct such as drug dealing, theft, vandalism and abuse of substances, which are seen as resulting from historical and current forms of racial and class oppression.

It is recognized that these issues still contribute to increase the levels of trauma and harm experienced by the community and reinforce the perception of the House as a refuge for delinquents – as often contended by members of the City's Mayoral Committee. Many residents therefore believe these behaviours need to be dealt with rather than simply tolerated, which at times goes as far as removing people from the House. However, the identification of the systemic roots of such offences informs a more humane and fair engagement with individuals who perform these kinds of actions, ruling out the use of physical violence as a tool for enforcing rules.

A stricter and accelerated approach is instead adopted in the case of violence against women. This is a way to reassert the complete absence of tolerance for such offenses and avert the risk of reiteration of abuse on victims. One of the residents who took part in the workshops¹⁶ told us about her history of being in abusive marriages, the

¹⁶ The identity of the person is here concealed due to the confidentiality of the information she shared. While she consented to the use of the content of her story for the purpose of the research, I decided not to

latest of which was still standing by the time she moved into the occupation. In fact, the very move to CGH was part of her attempt to take distance from her violent husband. After some time though, she allowed him to live in her room, but he carried on abusing her. She then decided to report him to the leadership of the occupation and asked for help to remove him from the House. Given the extremely serious circumstances and the long history of abuse at the hands of her partner, this case was dealt with as quickly as possible and support was offered to the victim and her son throughout the aftermath of this traumatic experience.

As this episode shows, the presence of a strong feminist leadership and the substantial contribution of women to the communal practices in the occupation contributed to the centring of gender-based violence in the set of priorities and levels of tolerance that guide the work of the Security and Safety Task Team and the Disciplinary Committee. This is reflected in the words of Karen Hendricks when she speaks about the occupation in relation to her vision for a truly inclusive and feminist city:

[T]he occupation connects to that vision because the occupation is the only space that I personally found myself in where women tend to be at the forefront of every struggle. Women tend to be at the forefront of every decision that has to be taken and made. Women in the occupation are generally and physically more active in the life of the occupation, than, than men are. And it's women who support women in the occupation struggle. And because I'm a part of that struggle, and I'm living that experience myself, I can say that the occupation is a feminist or women led occupation. (Karen, CGH House Leader, 2021)

Finally, following several months of observation and participation in the occupation's meetings, it is evident that policing actions and security measures in place at CGH are complementary to a set of self-organized welfare interventions aimed at tackling the causes of violent behaviours and protecting the community from the traumatic effects that the experience of violence causes. For instance, a cycle of workshops to address the issue of violence against women was organized to raise collective awareness around this matter – especially among men – and to offer a safe space for women to unpack their trauma and develop shared ways to tackle the issue of GBV. A partnership with social workers is in place to assist with psycho-social support to those households who deal with extreme poverty, drug addiction and domestic

associate this passage with her name in that I did not have an extensive discussion with her about the potential risks this might expose her to.

violence. A number of informal creches, childcare and afterschool groups as well as a study support group for high school students contribute to reducing the pressure on individuals who have long working hours or lack skills and resources to consistently attend to their children's education.

A program for basic care and medicine delivery and administration for sick people in the occupation was started with nurses from Groote Schuur public hospital. The various forms of food provision, as described in the previous section, also represent an attempt to respond to the hardship experienced by many in the occupation. At the time of my fieldwork, a free yoga and meditation class and a stress management group were run by residents of the occupation. These initiatives, which might seem to have little to do with security, all speak in different and lateral ways of the ideas and vision that inform discourses and practices around security in the occupation. They do so in that they identify the uninterrupted history of oppression of poor black people in South Africa as the main source of violence in the CGH community and tackling it at all possible levels to achieve a safer environment for people to live in.

5. Discussion

In this section, I discuss the data I presented in relation to the theoretical debates this thesis is in conversation with. I do so by discussing the main themes that emerged from the findings I reported concerning communal projects and Task Teams at CGH. It is my intention to not only analyse the role collective projects and forms of organization in relation to their material function in the occupation but also to retrace the explicit and implicit narratives that underpin and emerge from their work. I am interested in retracing the intersections, synergies, and disjunctions existing between material and discursive dimensions of communal actions and projects at CGH. In this respect, the challenge posed by this thesis is to engage CGH residents' actions and discourses as stories in the making, connecting people's individual and collective past histories and future aspirations. I believe such an approach enables a reading of communal practices and discourses as equally constitutive of the prefiguration of alternative and more just urban futures, offering the possibility to deepen the understanding of what we regard as insurgent planning.

5.1 Communal place-making: a juncture between individual experience and collective organization

The data I presented shows how Cissie Gool House participates in the informal production of space, where most aspects of everyday life and place-making actions occur outside the state-sanctioned sphere of planning but in a dialectical relationship with public institutions. While conversations around urban informality (Roy, 2009; Yftachel, 2011) help to identify the shifting balances between realms of spatial production, the concepts of peripheral (Caldeira, 2017) and popular (Streule et al., 2020) urbanization offer a broader set of tools to investigate informal practices of place making beyond dualistic thinking. For instance, the coexistence of resistance against and cooperation with the police forces by the House Leadership and the SSTT is well captured by the concept of 'transversal logics' (Caldeira, 2017), which describes the non-linear modes of engagement with the state by people who participate in peripheral processes of urbanization.

While Caldeira's work focusses mostly on the process and features of peripheral urbanization, the work by Streule et al. (2020) helps to specify the forms of agency that characterize what they call popular urbanization. The latter suits the analysis of the forms of organization in place at CGH that connect its residents to the broader struggle of Reclaim The City. In this sense, it is accurate to describe CGH as part of 'a form of the production of urban space that is based primarily on the collective initiative of the people' (*Ibidem*: 667). Collective organization and political mobilization are indeed central features in place-making at CGH. However, what emerged from engaging residents' stories and attending moments of collective organizing is a more nuanced picture, in which the articulation of collective initiatives often stems from the encounter between a multiplicity of individual experiences and desires.

Both Caldeira's (2017) and Streule et al.'s (2020) contributions provide insightful examples of studies of the role of everyday actions and individual experience in peripheral – or popular – processes of urbanization, with the latter being more explicitly interested in observing how these relate to other dimensions of the production of space, such as 'territorial regulation' and 'material transformations' (*Ibidem*: 654). Following Streule et al.'s attempt of narrowing down the scope of their concept, as opposed to Caldeira's peripheral urbanization, I presented the work of the Monitors Meeting to further describe the articulations of agency in the context of collective spatial practices.

The data I reported in the first section of my findings provides evidence of how resident's everyday actions and personal stories are connected to collective structures and modes of action by the intermediate tiers of CGH's leadership and organizational structure, which fills and blurs the conceptual and practical gap between individual and collective dimensions of place-making. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the involvement of residents in the Task Teams and the Monitors Meeting enables them to take full responsibility for the place they inhabit beyond a strictly private conception of their living space. This has the effect of reinforcing accountability between elected Leaders and residents of the occupation, preventing forms of mutual alienation, filling knowledge gaps between them, and avoiding misuse of power in the case of Leaders or individualistic behaviours by residents when they are faced with issues. Furthermore, the converging of a diverse range of life stories, views, and skills into a weekly meeting

acts as a driver of social integration and community building in that different individual needs and desires, once socialized, become part of a shared place-making project.

The work of Task Teams and the influence of Monitors' life stories on the type of contribution they make to the planning of space and communal projects in the occupation are a sign of the flexibility and adaptability that such organizational structure provides. A passage from Streule et al. describing the advantages of popular urbanization processes resonates with features of the work of the Monitors I have described:

While born out of specific and often precarious circumstances, [popular urbanization] can also advance utopian moments of collectivity, engagement and mutual self-help. It provides some very practical advantages: it enables a high degree of flexibility and adaptability, allowing for the incremental evolution of the settlement responding to the needs and requirements of the inhabitants, adaptation to changing socio-economic situations, and offering opportunities for social inclusion.' (Streule et. al., 2020: 668)

Expanding on this excerpt I wish to advance a proposition to hone the concept of popular urbanization: I contend that the set of place-making practices aimed at making a home I observed at CGH, which are performed by residents through the framework of the Monitors Meeting and the Task Teams, are better described as 'communal place-making'. The use of the word communal aims here to capture the work that takes place at the intersection of individual and collective spheres of spatial production and agency and, by connecting them, poses a challenge to the conceptual dualism between them. In addition, the idea of communalism seems better suited to refer to the act of sharing responsibilities and duties but also to the cooperation towards common needs and desires.

5.2 Repair as healing: collectively addressing intergenerational trauma

Due to the almost complete absence of the state in maintaining the building and supporting the community that inhabits it, self-organized communal place-making practices at CGH range from structural and infrastructural maintenance of the space to interventions aimed at improving the conditions of life in the occupation. The concept of repair (Bhan, 2019) helps to describe the forms of maintenance and adaptation of the old Woodstock Hospital as a residential space. Further terms, such as retrofitting, re-

placing and repurposing (Cirolia et al., 2021) further specify those actions aimed at transforming and attributing new meaning to the spaces CGH residents inhabit. Among these, the institution of a maintenance contribution, which sustains the work of the Maintenance Task Team, the coordination and implementation of communal projects, or the many forms of community-based welfare, all speak of how the communal approach to place-making underlies the work of repair, retrofitting, repurposing and replacing coordinated by Monitors and Leaders.

One aspect of these initiatives that I find particularly compelling for this project and that has not been addressed in the available literature is the potential they hold in helping the CGH community to work through the intergenerational trauma that black working-class communities carry in post-Apartheid South Africa. A recent piece by Urson, Kessy and Daya (2022), adopting a decolonial psychology approach to study the production of alternative imaginaries at CGH, touches upon the trauma deriving from displacement and disruption of communities operated by colonialism, slavery and Apartheid. The authors look at how residents of CGH and members of RTC articulate ways of pushing back against these forms of oppression, whose aftermaths continue during the post-Apartheid period.

It is significant that a number of the people who took part in the research see their work and efforts as Monitors or Leaders as part of a process of healing – with – their community. A passage from the interview with Lorraine, a CGH Monitor, perfectly illustrates this very idea:

This is what, this is the after-effects of Apartheid. You know, like most of our people, we weren't allowed to be educated. If you, if you needed higher education, your parents had to send you out of the country. So very low educated people, and families. Not well educated, struggling. They have no rights. So, it's alcohol abuse, selling drugs, are means to survive. So, there's a whole lot of healing that must be done and I don't, I don't know. I think for myself, from my side, I would say 'I broke the cycle', it's a cycle that must be broken if you become a parent, and I think it's each and everyone's responsibility. Don't repeat the cycle that you went through. (Lorraine, CGH Monitor, 2021)

This passage, just like the contention made by many participants that 'Monitors have to be an example for other people in the occupation', shows how Monitors are, residents who more deliberately than others decide to take care of shared spaces in the House and improve the quality of social life in their floor or section. They listen to

complaints, try to solve problems, mediate fights, call out people for misbehaviours, and have, in general, an enhanced sentience towards what happens around them. These aspects of their work can expand the scope of what is understood as repair and reparative actions.

It is here useful to draw from Scheba's recent work on CGH (2022), in which she advances the idea of 'repair as refusal' to describe occupiers' actions that aim to undo historical forms of oppression, silencing and displacement of marginalized people. In order to further her attempt to identify radical forms of repair – as opposed to reactionary ones – I contend that practices of community healing aimed at tackling cycles of violence that stem from and reproduce intergenerational trauma, should also be regarded as forms of radical repair. In this respect, the idea of repair is stretched to include collective processes of healing, which rely on substantial amounts of care, patience and strength by those members of the CGH community who strive to 'break the cycle' of violence and trauma they are caught up in. In the case of CGH The idea of 'repair as healing' is connected to that of communal place-making I presented above, in that the space offered by the Monitors Meeting enables those who choose to 'break the cycle' to articulate communal strategies to address trauma and share the burden of such work instead of dealing with it in scattered and private ways.

Lastly, what emerged from the discussion of the work of the Monitors Meeting is that reparative work and communal place-making at CGH are purposefully addressing past and present forms of oppression and by doing so communally, experimenting new forms of participation and self-organization, they articulate alternative futures for their community as part of a communal process of healing. The imaginaries of alternative and more just urban futures that stem from communal place-making practices at CGH are discussed in greater detail in the next sections, by focussing on the work of the community kitchens, the communal vegetable garden and the Security and Safety Task Team beyond their strictly material contribution to the life in the occupation. Instead, I reflect on the implicit and explicit narratives that emerge from these communal projects and discuss them in relation to debates on insurgent planning and prefigurative politics.

5.3 Insurgent practices at CGH: prefiguring alternative urban futures

The work of place-making and repair conducted by residents at CGH with the coordination of Leaders and Monitors provides important insights to expand debates around insurgent citizenship (Holston, 1995, 1998, 2008; Miraftab, & Wills, 2005) and insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2004, 2009). Alongside the spectacular act of occupying an abandoned building for housing purposes and the constant work of the Monitors Meeting, communal projects such as the kitchens, the vegetable garden and the SSTT, as described in the previous chapter, appear to be ‘purposeful actions that aim to disrupt domineering relationships of oppressors to the oppressed, and to destabilize such a status quo through consciousness of the past and imagination of an alternative future’ (Miraftab, 2009: 44).

The practices and discourses elaborated through the structures and projects in place at CGH do not only contribute to the improvement of social and material life conditions in the occupation, they also gesture towards alternative ways of intending the use of communal spaces and social relations among the members of a community. For instance, the joint work of community kitchens and the gardening team addresses basic material needs but it also reasserts the fact that the struggle to access decent food is a common one and ought not to be left to the individual ability of residents to provide food for their families. By tackling the issue of food insecurity, these projects also contribute to reinforce sentiments of solidarity and mutual care among the community of residents – and to a degree in the neighbourhood – turning food into an agent for cohesion and integration in the face of the dividing effects of historical forms of displacement and dispossession.

The emancipatory function of food production and transformation is rendered even more explicit by the provision of meals by the main Communal Kitchen for political workshops and events, where food serves the purpose of supporting processes of political education and cooperation with members of other occupations, NGOs and collectives. Furthermore, these projects advance claims to sustainable self-sustenance and food sovereignty by experimenting with forms of small-scale food production and circular organic processes that connect composting of organic waste, fertilization of soil, farming, harvesting, and cooking food. The richness of such initiatives also consists in

the possibility they offer residents to take part in these processes and acquire or share knowledge around organic farming, permaculture, cuisine and recycling, turning the kitchen and the garden into spaces of encounter and mutual learning.

A common thread that connects the more-than-material functions of communal projects and spaces at CGH is their embodiment of alternative futures, which is a central theme in the literature on insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2009). In this respect, the concept of prefiguration helps to describe practices and discourses that ‘anticipate or enact some feature of an ‘alternative world’ in the present, as though it has already been achieved’ (Yates, 2015: 4) and does so by combining ‘the experimental creating of “alternatives” within either mobilisation-related or everyday activities, with attempts to ensure their future political relevance’ (*Ibidem*: 13). This type of practices has been observed among social movements in relation to the articulation of radical democratic practices and institutions, which in the case of CGH could be retraced in the organizational structure of the occupation and more specifically in the modes of participation adopted by the Monitors Meeting.

However, prefigurative politics have recently been studied in relation to their impact on processes of urbanization (Minuchin, 2021) and, on a smaller scale, place-making (Dussault, 2022), showing how the interconnection between individual and collective dimensions of spatial agency feeds into the imagination of post-capitalist futures (*Ibidem*: 4). The concept of prefiguration has been also deployed in the study of housing occupations where the imagination of alternative futures is combined with acts of ‘resisting’ injustice and ‘reclaiming’ abandoned spaces (Paterniani, 2018), which speaks closely to the case of Cissie Gool House. In line with Scheba, who looks at prefiguration in relations to practices of repair (2022), I contend that the concept of prefiguration is useful to reflect on insurgent communal practices of self-organization and direct action observed at Cissie Gool House and that it is worth developing further the uses of this concept within the field of urban studies.

The framework of insurgent planning, in turn, is helpful to locate prefigurative politics within a southern, post-colonial perspective and expand the range of political actions and meanings we regard as prefigurative, as in gesturing towards emancipatory alternative futures. In this respect, proponents of theories on insurgent planning, (Miraftab, 2009; Meth 2010) have reflected on the importance of situating insurgent

practices geographically and historically in order to assess their emancipatory -or oppressive- effects. In the following section I focus on the work of the Security and Safety Task Team, which offers interesting insights on the potentially problematic politics of insurgent security actions.

5.4 Insurgency beyond mere celebration: the SSTT and the issue of security

While it is generally unproblematic to celebrate the emancipatory potential of insurgent planning practices that aim to achieve goals such as food sovereignty or greater democratic participation, things become more complex when the insurgent practice under scrutiny is related to policing, enforcement of rules and security and safety provision. In post-Apartheid South Africa, the legacy of racist prejudices and definitions of security on the one hand and the inability -and unwillingness- of state police forces to attend to security needs of people who live in underserved areas (Lemanski, 2004, 2012) has resulted in the expansion of the private security industry (Diphorn, 2015) and the proliferation of community-based security initiatives across the country, with a greater incidence and deployment of resources among predominantly white and middle class areas (Lemanski, 2006; Bénit-Gbaffou, Didier & Morange, 2008; Mosselson, 2019).

The quest for security in wealthier neighbourhoods is disproportionate to the actual numbers of crimes affecting these areas. In fact, most of the violent crime occurs in poor neighbourhoods and affects working-class communities (Lemanski, 2012: 104). The Cissie Gool House community is no exception to this trend and, as presented above, deals with various forms of violent and harmful behaviours. Due to the illegal status of the occupation, the police tend not to intervene to protect its residents and, instead, adopt a violent and criminalizing approach towards them. As a result, the Leadership and the Monitors created the SSTT to address internal issues of safety and security, to oversee the respect of the House rules and to protect the community from violent police raids.

I contend that the work of the SSTT should be interpreted as an emancipatory insurgent practice because of its attempt to address the historical deprivation of black communities of their right to safety and security and because of the manners and political ideals underpinning such an attempt. However, I wish to discuss this in relation

to Meth's article on vigilante groups of poor black women in Durban, in which she shows how emancipatory and reactionary practices are mutually constitutive of what she terms 'paradoxical insurgency' (Meth, 2010: 247).

As I argued in my literature review Meth's choice of definitions of insurgency and vigilantism lay the ground to retrace ambiguity in the insurgent practices she observed, however my analysis of the data which grounds this paper responds to her urgent, if uncomfortable, call to avoid a naïve celebration of insurgency. In this respect, I find that, alongside adopting a politically more explicit definition of insurgency, looking into the features of the SSTT's work and the context in which it takes place can support the contention that its practices gesture towards alternative emancipatory futures. Meth herself calls for a more situated study of insurgency (*Ibidem*: 260), resonating with Miraftab's contention that

[t]o emphasize [counter-hegemonic] values is not, however, to naively celebrate any and all disrupting and oppositional actions, but rather to be guided by an historicized understanding. Critical planning must rely on contextualizing planning – that is, recognizing the power struggle within which it is practised' (Miraftab, 2009: 43)

In this respect it is crucial that, in the face of a history of brutal violence at the hands of the Apartheid police, which to some degree continues in the post-Apartheid period, the SSTT adopted a weapon free and non-violent approach to policing and conflict resolution. This choice stems from a collective awareness of the role of violence in reproducing trauma. Furthermore, the decisions around which behaviours to police and the modes of intervention are informed by radical political values such as antiracism, feminism and class solidarity. Specific cases are also brought to the attention of Leaders and Monitors who discuss collectively how to intervene in the case of harmful behaviours. Collective discussions held at the Monitors Meeting as well as the presence of the Disciplinary Committee and the House Constitution pose a substantial limit to the initiative of the SSTT members, which helps to prevent issues such as forms of power abuse or careless engagements with victims and perpetrators.

Enforcement of rules at CGH does involve, in extreme cases, the use of symbolical violence such as the expulsion of people from the House. The ambiguity of this type of actions is well captured by one of the House Leaders:

Because look, we're a movement that's against evictions. Now, how will it look if we evict people, but if you've got grounds like that, in fact, the police told us that is what we must do. So, two warnings, third one you're out. Because we've already evicted some people from here, from this building. People that stole, vandalized, and the one we caught smuggling drugs. (Boeta Haruun, CGH House Leader, 2021)

While this excerpt speaks of the problematic nature of evicting a person from a housing occupation, it also shows that this is not done light-heartedly or in inhumane ways. Residents – who sign the House rules when they join the occupation – are engaged repeatedly when found breaking the rules before being removed from the House. While it can be puzzling to observe resemblances between the SSTT's and the state police's enforcement methods, I contend, with Miraftab, that actions of this kind need not to be abstracted from the context and 'power struggles' (2009: 43) within which they occur. In the case of CGH, rules enforcement is a necessary tool to assert the right to security and safety of a historically dispossessed community and therefore constitutes an unappealing, yet crucial part of the emancipatory insurgent practices performed by CGH residents in their struggle for decent housing.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation is concerned with the issue of spatial injustice in South Africa and it looks at how the occupation of vacant buildings for housing purposes in Cape Town inner-city poses challenges to the racial and economic segregation that is typical of South African metropolises. By focussing on the communal practices of place-making performed by the residents of the Cissie Gool House occupation in Woodstock, this study aims to investigate the role played by the junctures between individual and collective spatial practices in the prefiguration of alternative futures, within contexts of popular urbanization. More specifically, it explored how CGH residents navigate individual and collective dimensions of place-making practices and how communal spatial agency sustains, embodies and articulates imaginaries of alternative futures.

Conceptually, this work aligns with recent developments in scholarship on housing in South Africa which looks at material and symbolical practices of place-making in housing occupations (Cirolia et al. 2021; Scheba, 2022). Building on this, a focus on reparative work (Bhan, 2020) performed by occupiers at CGH enabled to observe the forms of material and social maintenance of the occupation and its community of residents (Scheba, 2022). Locating my case study within debates on peripheral (Caldeira, 2017) and popular (Streule et al., 2021) urbanization processes, allowed me to investigate the interconnections between individual and collective dimensions of place-making. The literature on insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2004, 2009; Miraftab & Wills, 2005) instead, foregrounds the role of place-making practices in challenging historical forms of oppression by articulating imaginaries of alternative futures. Moreover, in order to avoid a simplistic celebration of insurgency, I engaged contributions that reflect on vigilantism (Meth, 2010) as an example of reactionary insurgent planning practice.

The research was conducted following a Participatory Action Research framework. It revolved around a workshop on storytelling where focus groups and in-depth interviews were used to prompt CGH residents to share stories about their involvement in communal projects and organizational structures of the occupation and the meanings they associate with it. I also employed a set of complementary methods, such as participant observation, ethnographic fieldnotes and photography, and deep

hanging out. These techniques enabled me to appreciate how the communal projects are articulated through structures of collective organization and how they contribute to address historical forms of spatial injustice by prefiguring alternative urban futures. The data was analysed through a combination of thematic and narrative analysis. The first enabled a systematic categorization of the findings through themes, whereas the second enabled a contextualization of such themes through a more holistic engagement with residents' stories.

A selection of themes emerging from my findings was presented in three sections focussing respectively on the work of a) the Monitors Meeting, b) the communal kitchens and vegetable garden, and c) the Security and Safety Task Team. The first stresses the role of structures of communal organization in connecting individual and collective dimensions of spatial agency in processes of popular urbanization (Streule et al., 2020). The second and third show how communal projects and modes of democratic participation embody and sustain the prefiguration (Yates, 2015; Paterniani, 2018) of more just urban futures by purposefully attempting to redress the forms of oppression and trauma experienced by black working-class people in South Africa. Furthermore, the section on the work of the SSTT responds to the call for a problematization of the value of insurgent planning practices (Meth, 2010) by highlighting the significance of the political underpinnings of such practices (Miraftab, 2009). All three sections provide insights on the types of reparative actions (Bhan, 2019; Scheba, 2022) performed by Monitors and Leaders within the occupation's organizational structures that sustain the community of residents.

This work posed a challenge to the conceptual dualism between individual and collective dimensions of spatial agency which emerged from debates around peripheral (Caldeira, 2017) and popular urbanization (Streule et al. 2020). It did so by showing how the Monitors Meeting serves as a juncture between the resident's individual experience and the collective organizational structures of CGH and RTC. I therefore advance the concept of 'communal place-making' to describe the set of practices performed by CGH residents through the framework of the Monitors Meeting, the Task Teams, and the communal projects which involve sharing responsibilities and duties, but also cooperating towards common needs and desires. Evidence of this is found in the connection between the Monitors' past history and the types of communal projects they are involved in.

The second conceptual contribution made by this research relates to the forms of repair (Bhan, 2019) performed by CGH residents beyond strictly material ones (Scheba, 2022). I put forward the concept of 'repair as healing' to describe residents' actions that aim to address the community's intergenerational trauma caused by historical and current forms of displacement and dispossession. In addition, I contend that such forms of reparative work are favoured by the practices of communal place-making that exist at CGH, in that these enable the sharing of the burden of dealing with personal and collective trauma. This is proved by the forms of responsibility taken by residents who became Monitors.

Working within the framework of insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2004, 2009; Miraftab & Wills, 2005) this study has shown how, in addition to their material contribution to the House, communal projects, embody and articulate imaginaries of alternative futures. They do so by addressing past and present forms of oppression as demonstrated by the work around food by the communal kitchens and the vegetable garden team. I introduce the concept of prefiguration (Yates, 2015; Paterniani, 2018) to better describe the articulation of alternative futures as part of insurgent planning practices. On the other hand, I suggest to locate the concept of prefiguration within a Southern, postcolonial perspective (Miraftab, 2009) so to make it more suitable for research in cities of the Global South.

Lastly, this work engaged with a problematization of insurgency as inherently progressive. Cases of brutal violence among women vigilante groups in Durban (Meth, 2010) warned against the coexistence of reactionary and emancipatory practices among the same community. Looking at the work of the Security and Safety Task Team at CGH revealed the centrality of its political values, such as antiracism, class solidarity and feminism, in determining its modes of intervention in the occupation. I contend that adopting a definition of insurgent planning that makes explicit reference to the politics of insurgent practices (Miraftab, 2009) and interpreting such practices in relation to the 'power struggle' (*Ibidem*) within which they occur can prevent naïve celebration of reactionary actions. A sound historical and geographical contextualization of insurgent planning actions is therefore needed to detect their emancipatory potential.

In conclusion, the study of place-making practices at CGH revealed the importance of connecting individual life trajectories and collective struggles through communal spaces of engagement and organization. It also highlighted the potential such

practices hold in addressing trauma and prefiguring alternative urban futures. In a context of neoliberal rule, marked by stark spatial injustice and lack of decent housing, practices and discourses that radically challenge the legacy of colonial and Apartheid spatial planning, are of fundamental importance. As this research has shown, engaging urbanites and social movements to support and learn from their struggles for more just cities can prompt urban researchers and planners to develop innovative and radical tools to describe and transform the cities they inhabit.

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Appendixes

A – Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS	The following set of codes contributes to the analysis of the interview transcripts by exploring how stories are told and their location/interaction in relation to the CGH community and its surroundings. The question that drives this mode of analysis is not 'what do stories tell us?' but 'how are stories told and which purpose do they serve?'	0	0
Perception of stories	How do interviewees talk and reflect about the stories they tell both individually and as a group?	10	27
Social context of stories	How do stories told by research participants locate themselves in relation to the occupation, the neighbourhood, the city and the country? What are the connections both explicit and implicit between storytelling at CGH and the broader political struggle the occupation is part of?	10	28
Structure of stories	This subset of nodes tries to retrace patterns in the structure of participants' stories.	7	30
Role of personal stories in working across the individual^collective dualism	Can people's personal stories help us to understand how movement between individual and collective action occurs?	11	20
Role of stories in social struggles for housing	How can telling stories be useful in the struggle for housing? #Storytelling #Social struggle #Right to housing	13	36
Role of storytelling in insurgent planning practices	? What role do stories play in processes of insurgent planning? #Telling your own story #Reclaiming stories #Insurgent Planning #Co-design Workshop	12	31
THEMATIC ANALYSIS		0	0
Communal spatial practices - Imaginaries of alternative	In what ways do communal spatial practices carried out by CGH residents	0	0

Name	Description	Files	References
futures	embody and articulate imaginaries of alternative and more just urban futures? How do communal spaces such as the garden or the kitchen represent the making of a different type of city? This question aims to contribute to debates on insurgent planning by exploring how and if people who engage in housing occupations elaborate narrative links between their history of oppression and imaginaries of alternative future.		
Education and political formation		6	10
Internal Constitution and enforcement		6	16
Kitchens		6	13
Maintenance contribution		6	12
Security and safety task team		6	7
Vegetable Garden		3	10
Welfare task team (healthcare - GBV - domestic violence - social work)		4	5
Youth - Childcare - Library - Madrassa		8	20
Peripheral ^ Popular urbanization	How do people engage in communal practices of place-making within processes of peripheral/popular urbanization? Can the focus on storytelling unsettle neat distinctions between these modes of urbanization? This question is aimed at exploring the differences between peripheral and popular urbanization by looking at the ways in which people move across collective and individual actions of spatial production, possibly blurring the apparently neat distinction between the two.	0	0
Collective^Individual Home-making	Making a home at CGH is a result of individual and collective actions. How do CGH residents move between the two?	0	0

Name	Description	Files	References
	What does this tell us about the difference between peripheral and popular urbanization?		
Individual dimension of collective practices		14	42
Leadership - Monitors - Task teams		12	40
Mass Meetings		2	2
Self-organization and neighbours cooperation		8	20
Role of narrative practices in connecting past oppression and future alternatives	What type of stories do residents tell about the communal projects they are part of? Do these stories trace connections between their past and future? #Histories of oppression #Telling stories #Connecting past and future	0	0
Connections between past and present oppression		6	17
Oppressive ideas of alternative futures		3	5
Radical ideas of alternative futures		9	24
Rejection of current and historical forms of oppression		10	17

B - Informed consent form

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Informed Voluntary Consent to Participate in Research Study

Project Title: Taking what we need: stories of insurgent and communal practices of place-making from Cissie Gool House

Invitation to participate, and benefits: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted with inhabitants of Cissie Gool House. The study aim is to explore practices of place-making in the context of housing occupations through the lens of storytelling. I believe that your experience would be a valuable source of information, and hope that by participating you may gain useful knowledge.

Procedures: During this study, you will be asked to take part in a workshops on storytelling during which the participants will reflect on the role of storytelling and will improve their skills in producing stories about themselves and their reality. In addition to the workshops some participants will be asked to give interviews or to have informal conversations in order to further explore and develop their stories.

Recording: We may take photographs and/or record audio/video as part of the study. These will be used in collaboration with the research participants to build narratives of people's everyday actions and communal place-making practices at Cissie Gool House. If you object to this, please indicate below. The use of photos that identify you will be dependent upon your explicit permission, beyond the generic consent you are expressing in this form. In case such permission will not be given, your face and any other element in the picture that might identify you will be blurred.

Risks: The harmful risks to you, related to your participation in this study, may be exposure of personal information you might not want to disclose. In order to prevent this from happening, your consent to the use of the information you provided will be verified multiple times throughout the research process and in particular before any publication that includes such information.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the research activities might entail risks for the health of participants should the safety measures not be observed at all times by all participants. In addition to the harm caused by the disease itself, the participation in group activities in the context of a pandemic could generate forms of stress and anxiety. Taking part in the research is precluded to vulnerable individuals (people over 55 years old, people with pre-existing medical conditions), for whom taking part in the research process might pose unnecessary and serious risks.

Feedback: You will receive feedback about the results of this research in the following manner: personal communication via telephone/ e-mail. If the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic will allow it, conclusive meetings with the research participants will be held in order to share the analysis of data and the research outputs.

Disclaimer/Withdrawal: Your participation is completely voluntary; you may refuse to participate, and you may withdraw at any time without having to state a reason and without any prejudice or penalty against you. Should you choose to withdraw, the researcher commits not to use any of the information you have provided without your signed consent. Note that the researcher may also withdraw you from the study at

any time in case your participation in the research activities exposes yourself or other participants to unnecessary risks or harm.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this study will be kept private in that you will not be identified by name or by affiliation to an institution. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained as pseudonyms will be used. Your actual name will only be attached to your personal information if explicitly required by you and after an in-depth discussion of the reasons for such choice as well as assessment of potential risks involved.

What signing this form means: By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in this research study. The aim, procedures to be used, as well as the potential risks and benefits of your participation have been explained verbally to you in detail, using this form. Refusal to participate in or withdrawal from this study at any time will have no effect on you in any way. You are free to contact me, to ask questions or request further information, at any time during this research.

I agree to participate in this research (tick one box) Yes No _____ (Initials)

I agree to be photographed Yes No _____ (Initials)

I agree to be audio-recorded Yes No _____ (Initials)

I agree to be video-recorded Yes No _____ (Initials)

I agree to the use of properly anonymized photographs/audio recordings/videos in the following way: use of materials for analysis and elaboration of research results; generation of research outputs (academic articles and non-academic pamphlets). [Note that further consent will be sought from you before the inclusion in the research outputs of any information or material provided by you or that identify you in any way]

Yes No _____ (Initials)

Initials of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date