Housing Violence in the Post-welfare Context

Päivi Rannila

Published online: 10 May 2021.

Submit your article to this journal 🗗

Article views: 224

View related articles 🗗

View Crossmark data 🗗

Housing Violence in the Post-welfare Context

Päivi Rannila (ORCID)

Department of Geography and Geology, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

Housing transformation creates conditions or situations that may be experienced as "everyday violence", which is present in mundane life but may not necessarily be recognized as violence. This article argues that post-welfare housing violence differs from other housing violence while being affected by the society's welfare state ideologies. Violence may develop slowly or manifest itself in subtle ways when the rights to own, use, and develop housing estates are debated. By analysing activists' struggle against the privatization of a Swedish suburb, the article elaborates on the forms of post-welfare housing violence, and the ways in which violence is made visible and contested. The analysis reveals how post-welfare housing violence is normalized and slow violence, and how the by-product of the welfare state history is the effort to invisibilise violence in situations that were earlier public responsibility.

Introduction

Housing transformation in a post-welfare context may create conditions that are experienced as "everyday violence" – violence that appears in mundane life and is regarded as a normal part of urban development. I recently became interested in the housing transformation of a Swedish suburb after I heard about activists who resisted the neighbourhood's privatization. Following the lead of many other residential areas in Stockholm, a significant share of the suburb's public housing stock was sold. Such transformations have been characterized as violent by both housing activists and scholars (e.g. Baeten et al. 2017; Polanska and Richard 2019) criticizing the neoliberal housing politics of Sweden.

This article concerns the forms of violence in the post-welfare housing transformation in a Swedish suburb. I argue that post-welfare housing violence differs from other forms of housing violence while being affected by the society's welfare state ideologies. Thus, violence may develop slowly or manifests itself in rather subtle ways when the rights to own, use, and develop housing estates are debated. The paper has two main research questions: first, what discreet forms of housing violence have been reported in the discourses and narratives of the housing activists? Secondly, how do the activists struggle against housing violence?

By addressing these issues, this paper continues the earlier discussions on the Swedish housing transformation (Baeten et al. 2017; Sernhede, Thörn, and Thörn 2016; Baeten and Listerborn 2016; Christophers 2013; Franzén, Hertting, and Thörn 2016; Hedin et al. 2012; Polanska and Richard 2019; Westin 2011, 2012). While some of the previous studies (e.g. Baeten et al. 2017; Polanska and Richard 2019; Pull and Richard 2019) have investigated violence carried out by housing companies and as experienced by tenants, this paper focuses on the more restricted reading emphasizing the discreet forms of housing violence as presented by the housing activists. I adopt the definition of post-welfare from Baeten, Berg, and Lund Hansen (2015, 209) who state:

> the post in post-welfare does not signal any complete break with welfare state policies, but rather it signals a shift of state policy priorities away from the Nordic Welfare State Model [. . .]. Post-welfare state does not mean the end of the welfare state but decentralization of welfare provision to lower government echelons [. . .] and to the private market.

Violence – whether threatened or implied – is one means by which the law acts in the world (Blomley 2003, 130), but whether a law can be labelled violent is dependent on the context of the law's implementation and enforcement. As Blomley states:

> Clearly, we must be cautious about reducing everything to violence [. . .] violence needs to be differentiated: the implied violence embedded in everyday land ownership, for example, is not the same as the actual violence of say, imprisonment. However, it is also vital to uncover the ways in which violence is not only encoded in our geographies, but perhaps integral to the very foundation, reproduction, and legitimation of [. . .] spaces. (Blomley 2000, 105)

This article's first section presents Sweden's housing context and justifies its significance in addressing post-welfare housing violence. The second part introduces two starting points for understanding post-welfare housing violence: how it is about the "doings" of property, and how its justification by urban development creates legalized violence. The third part concentrates on the results of the theory-oriented textual analysis that aimed to investigate the less spectacular forms of violence that can easily remain unnoticed. In addition to this, the activists' actions in resisting housing violence are under scrutiny. Relying on the analysis and its interpretations, the discussion and conclusion argue that in order to understand the specificities of post-welfare housing violence, it needs to be regarded as processual, slow violence that occurs more in discourses, conditions and invisibilisations than in the direct acts of violence.

The Post-welfare Context

Sweden's housing transformation follows the shift to neoliberal modes of governance that since the 1990s have transformed urban governance and policing, turning them into a complex mix of public and private actors, obscured responsibilities, and an increasing emphasis on market strategies (Atkinson and Millington 2019, 136; Dikeç 2007, 24–27; Palmer and Warren 2013, 79–80). Compared with other countries, the transformation began later or took less rigid forms in the Nordic welfare states; yet, Sweden is a good example of the rapid entry of market logic into the housing sector (about the transformation of the Swedish welfare state: Larsson, Letell, and Thörn 2012). From 1965 to 1974, the "Million Programme" was the Swedish government's response to the housing shortage, and it led to the construction of one million dwellings, based on the factors of equality

and affordability. The programme was linked with the "Sanitation Programme", within which working-class dwellings were demolished in the central parts of the city. Due to this, a significant share of the population had to move to the Million Programme dwellings in the outskirts of the city (Sernhede, Thörn, and Thörn 2016, 155). Later on, the same housing estates served as residences for the growing number of immigrants.

A significant change occurred at the beginning of the 1990's when municipalities began to sell off their public housing stock either to private landlords or tenants in the aftermath of the centre-right coalition winning the election. Public housing companies were expected to act in a business-like manner, and in 2011, this "entrepreneur-urbanism" was advanced with law reforms (in detail: see e.g. Baeten et al. 2017, 636–640; Baeten, Berg, and Lund Hansen 2015, 256–257; Christophers 2013, 891–893; Franzén, Hertting, and Thörn 2016, 29). The old dwelling stock, and the previous adjournment of maintenance and responsibilities led to vast renovations of suburban housing and in some occasions to "renoviction" ("*renovräckning*" = evictions resulting from renovations and the following rent increases) (Westin 2011, 2012; Baeten et al. 2017; Polanska, Degerhammar, and Richard 2019; Polanska and Richard 2019).

Today's housing transformation in Sweden provides an excellent opportunity to explore the specificities of housing violence in the post-welfare context. The United Nations (2017, 8) has named Stockholm one of the six global "hedge cities" where housing prices have "increased by over 50 percent since 2011, thus creating vast amounts of increased assets for the wealthy while making housing unaffordable for most households". Housing transformation has complicated the realization of affordable and adequate housing, with "adequate meaning the right to a secure place to live without threat of eviction" (United Nations 2016). As the maintenance of the Million Programme dwellings has largely been neglected, their condition has deteriorated to the point that technical and ecological renovations are needed. In some cases, this has led to social renovations that could be implemented in the guise of physical renovations. Instead of solving social problems with affordable housing and a diverse social fabric, as previously, physical renovation and the resulting rent increases may circumvent the legal tenant protections and improve areas with "more suitable" populations (Westin 2011, 2012; Baeten et al. 2017, 632–637; Baeten, Berg, and Lund Hansen 2015, 255–259). However, as Pull and Richard (2019) note, in many cases this process should not be confused with gentrification as the process lacks the hallmarks of gentrification: the middle- and upper class households still remain absent, and there are no signs of increased services or diverse shops and restaurants, for instance.

Housing is still heavily regulated in Sweden and the rights of tenants are considerable in comparison with many other countries. The housing situation has developed into a "complex hybrid" of neoliberalisation and regulation (Christophers 2013, 887) where property owners may exploit laws and policies created to protect tenants (Baeten et al. 2017, 637). For instance, property owners may use state subsidies as a justification for increasing rents as they assume that low-income tenants can still pay their rents because of the housing allowance they are entitled to. Polanska and Richard (2019, 19) state that the feeling of being violated has its origin partly "in the Swedish emotional regime, characterized by a [...] high trust towards the state and its institutions, and confidence in the welfare system". This originates from laws and regulations that emphasize the right to housing. The Swedish Constitution (Act 2) states that "public institutions shall secure

the right to employment, housing and education, and shall promote social care and social security, as well as favourable conditions for good health" (Riksdag 2016, 65). Sweden has also ratified the Revised European Social Charter, including, "Article 31 – The right to housing", which requires measures designed "to promote access to housing of an adequate standard" and "to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources" (Council of Europe 1996). According to the Swedish Land Code (Riksdag 2016; see, e.g. SABO 2013), rents need to be justified (e.g. with renovations) and collectively negotiated between the organizations of property owners and tenants.

Formation of Housing Violence

The Doings of Property

The emerging field of geographies of violence (Doel 2017; Gregory and Pred 2007; Springer and Le Billon 2016) has paid attention to the "ways in which violence is woven through our daily lives, our encounters with institutions, and the various structures that shape our social organization" (Springer and Le Billon 2016, 2). Housing is a perfect context for understanding how violence may be tied to global processes and values yet experienced in bodies and places. Housing violence creates, removes and transforms places (Springer 2011, 91–93), which, however, does not mean that housing violence is locatable and unchanging. Instead, attention should be paid to relational connections between different expressions of violence (Springer and Le Billon 2016, 2), and to the spatially distinctive forms of violence (see also Graham 2011, 16). Sweden's post-welfare housing violence is thus not comparable to violence related to evictions in, for example, the United States (Desmond 2016), Sri Lanka (Collyer, Amirthalingam, and Jayatilaka 2017), China (Zhang 2017), and Cambodia (Springer 2013). Nevertheless, around the world, housing transformation is socially selective and accumulates in poor neighbourhoods and with individuals, families, and communities lacking the social and economic capital to resist changes (Blomley 2003, 133; Desmond 2016, 296; Nixon 2011, 4; Porteous and Smith 2001, 190).

Housing transformation is closely related to the question of property, with regard to the processes of exclusion/inclusion, who has the right to decide on the uses of space, and, more widely, the various relations concerning property (Blomley 2016, 246, 227). Property is not only a matter of ownership, but rather of all relations to property rights, land, apartments, business premises, public spaces, or transformation process. Property rights manifest themselves in particular homes, neighbourhoods, and lived experiences.

The violence of property is often regarded as impersonal, objective, inevitable, and apolitical – as if it guaranteed the proper "order of things" (Blomley 2003, 134; see also Žižek 2008, 1–2). Whether this order itself is justified or could be experienced as violent is a different question (Coutin 1995, 518). As previous studies show, property rights are complex and occur in relation to the usage of land, social ordering and power, and an individual's political and moral worth/worthlessness as a property owner or as someone excluded from the land (Blomley 2003, 121–122; Correia 2013, 7; Langegger 2016, 645–646).

Blomley (2003, 121, 130) argues that violence has "an integral role in the legitimation, foundation, and operation of a regime of private property", as property can act or be

enforced "in potentially and actually violent ways" (see also Springer 2013, 611). Property's violence is often based on legally defined and state-enforced relationships between individuals (Blomley 2003, 126–130; Correia 2013, 7). Legal power is exercised by multiple actors and institutions (Blomley 2000, 91, 101; Villanueva 2018), due to which residents' solidarity and the questioning of the enactment of property rights can sometimes lead to changes. Neighbourhoods without solidarity or active citizens are more disadvantaged as violent actions related to housing transformation are not actively resisted or brought to public awareness.

When addressing housing violence, the notion of property as an active deed enacted materially, symbolically, corporeally, or discursively is essential (Blomley 2003; Rose 1994). The right to property is enacted with tangible boundaries and discursively in representations, narratives, and imaginations, which construct meanings and are used in justifying violence (Blomley 2003, 123, 135). The difference between the material and the discursive is still not distinct because laws have material outcomes, and the material or corporeal are themselves discursive, acquiring meanings in social relations and contexts (Blomley 2000).

The Violence of Urban Development

The doings of property discussed in this article, occur in an urban context and as part of urban development. As Correia (2013, 14) notes, the terms "urban development" and "renewal" often support market logic and rational planning, while simultaneously replacing discussions about rights or social justice in land use. Urban development may "just happen", be of "public interest", or be for the "common good", leading, at worst, to the eviction, dislocation, or relocation of "people in the way" (Baeten and Listerborn 2016; Porteous and Smith 2001, 12). Urban renewal can then be experienced as domicide, a process by which "powerful people destroy the homes of the less powerful, which happen to be in the way of corporate, political, or bureaucratic projects" (Porteous and Smith 2001, ix). Regardless of location, economic and social inequalities often explain why some people consider certain actions "uplifting" while others experience them as violent (Porteous and Smith 2001, 149, 189). Although inequalities can be levelled out with high taxes and allowances, as traditionally done in Nordic welfare states, this does not prevent drastic differences in people's housing.

Evictions are a form of housing violence, with such diverse causes as rent arrears and damage to a property that is part of an urban development. Springer (2013) criticizes the tendency to consider evictions forced only if the eviction is not legal. Although evictions in the name of progress may be legal, they have drastic consequences, advancing crisis urbanism, urban marginality, social inequalities, housing insecurity, and prolonged struggles over property (Baeten et al. 2017, 640; Brickell, Fernández Arrigoitia, and Vasudevan 2017, 1–2, 11; Porteous and Smith 2001, 191; Vasudevan 2017, 193–194). The UN defines development-based evictions (associated with urban renewal, housing renovation, or city beautification) as "planned or conducted under the pretext of serving the 'public good'" (United Nations 2007, 4). At the same time, the UN is worried about using housing as "a means of accumulating wealth", and disconnecting housing "from its social function of providing a place to live in security and dignity", arguing that these actions undermine "the realization of housing as a human right" (United Nations 2017, 3).

The line between actual violence and the threat of violence in urban renewal is very thin, as the possibility of violence makes its realization unnecessary (Blomley 2003, 130). Housing transformation may include strategies where residents are expected to prove their loyalty to the property owner; where the property owner may exercise discreet forms of violence; or where the eviction of a single family becomes a spectacle that functions as a warning (Zhang 2017, 108–115). Dramatizing and making violence public (see also Arendt 1970, 79) may frighten residents and create reactions (e.g. resistance or bargaining) that may change the practices of property owners, eviction enforcement agencies, or others using their spatial power in such situations (see also Baker 2017 147, 157–158).

Material and Methods

The suburb used as a case in this article faced the greatest change in property ownership in 2012 when 1,200 apartments were sold to a real estate company that nowadays also owns a significant share of public spaces. Although the research material is mostly publicly available, the suburb is here anonymized in order to make individuals less recognizable. Moreover, as the housing transformation is very similar in various Swedish suburbs (see Polanska, Degerhammar, and Richard 2019, 16), details about the neighbourhood are not relevant to the overall understanding of housing violence.

The primary research material consists of the social media material that was gathered from June 2016 until the end of 2018. It consisted of the posts by housing activists who used social media to spread information about the grievances related to the evictions, renovations, rent increases, ownership changes, and the wider housing transformation. The posts were open to the public, including articles and video clips, invitations to events, general information, and the followers' comments. The posts and comments gathered during the data collection period consist of 142 pages of text. As the activists also shared content from other media, the material serves as a sample of significant occurrences the activists have regarded as violent or otherwise questionable. The deductive, theory-guided textual analysis of the material concentrated on how housing transformation is construed as a form of violence by making the subtler modes of violence visible. The conceptual emphasis is on indirect or delicate forms of violence that are distinctive to the post-welfare housing context. The activists' stories were not taken as truths, but rather considered as the expressions of subjective or collective views that might also include strategic uses of language.

The primary material is accompanied by supplementary material that increased my understanding of why the seemingly safe housing system of Sweden was regarded as violent. The supplementary material consisted of official documents (laws, planning documents), in addition to which I visited the neighbourhood frequently in June and July of 2017 in order to familiarize myself with the housing situation. I had conversations with residents, activists, and representatives of the property owners and attended some meetings as an observer. Twenty-five residents answered the open-ended items of a questionnaire concerning housing transformation. I recorded and transcribed certain conversations and took notes on a wide spectrum of matters: on the area's characteristics, transformation, and conflicts, but equally on everyday urban life and other small details.

The supplementary material is insufficiently broad to stand on its own, but it has been utilized to understand, support, or contest the views in the primary material.

Many stereotypes of Stockholm's current suburbs do not apply to this neighbourhood as the proportion of residents with Swedish origins is rather high, and a subway connection increases the attractiveness of the neighbourhood. The apartment blocks, land, marketplace, and shopping centre are privately owned. Because of ownership changes and the resulting transformations, the "doings" of property are clearly present. "Doings" in this case do not refer merely to the actions of property owners, but to the interplay between different actors, institutions, and laws. Many such doings of property are narratives that aim to justify actions, raise emotions, increase awareness and make housing transformation public.

While gathering and analyzing material I was surprised how soon the material reached the saturation point as the activists, residents, and property owners repeated the same discourses and narratives although from different perspectives. This indicates how acute the housing question was in the area, and also the success of the activists in spreading information and enhancing discussion. Next, I will present the results of the analysis by concentrating (1) on the manifestations of the subtle forms of housing violence as presented by the activists (Table 1), and (2) on the actions through which the activists responded to these forms of housing violence (Table 2). Both aspects are included as they cannot fully be distinguished from each other: the subtle, invisible and normalized forms of violence first need to be made visible in order to be recognized as violence. The activists' actions are significant in that process. Understanding this double nature of the naturalized, legal violence is essential to the understanding of the specificities of post-welfare housing violence. Since most of the actions, conditions, narratives and discourses are reiterated several or even dozens of times in the material, the results do not include references to the specific dates of publication or discussion of the material. This decision also enhances the anonymity of the activists.

Housing Violence: Forms and Actions

Visibilising Normalized Violence

The Swedish transformation of housing includes legalized and normalized violence that occurs in accordance with the law and is easily considered a part of "progress". Therefore, violence may become visible only after it has altered particular places, affected individual residents, or actively made visible, as in our case. As Fraser (1991, 1328) argues, it is important to understand this kind of masked violence that is difficult to recognize compared with the violence of criminals, armies, or law enforcement. Violence, thus, should not be reduced to something we can see (Springer 2011, 92) or witness (Nixon 2011, 16), but more sensitivity is needed to understand its more invisible or silent forms (Watts 2013).

The activists aimed at making the normalized and invisibilised forms of housing violence visible by actions that included squatting, and organizing events, campaigns, protest days, and demonstrations (e.g. "Do not sell our homes", "Against violence", "Do not throw people onto the streets", "Reduce my rent"); distributing flyers; publishing articles; and otherwise making a spectacle of the housing problem. The local organization

Table 1. The subtle forms of post-welfare housing violence.

Form of violence	Definition	Examples from the research material
Invisible, normalized violence	Legal, invisible, everyday violence that is the 'normal' state of things (Žižek 2008) and "as natural as the air around us" (Galtung 1969). Shows up as unequal power and unequal life chances (Galtung 1969). Includes the impossibility of assigning responsibility and holding anybody accountable (Arendt 1970).	Development projects, 'progress', renovations, rent increases, evictions. Changing permanent tenant rights to short-term contracts. (*"There's also language issue in some cases where people haven't spoken Swedish for many years and they get [. . .] tricked into signing a contract where they say they cannot appeal to their rights."*) Justifying rent increases (e.g. 30–63 %) with housing allowances and renovations. Worsening housing situation and the lack of affordable housing.
Slow violence	"Occurs gradually and out of sight" and is "violence of delayed destruction [. . .] that is typically not viewed as violence" (Nixon 2011). "Violence can slowly alter subjects and extend to other people, groups, or generations" (Laurie and Shaw 2018).	Law reforms and political decisions whose consequences individuals or neighbourhoods face decades later. "This whole psychological thing where people are behaving in different ways in order to appease him. [. . .] They think they are living there under the mercy of him and they don't want to lose. They think that he's been nice to provide them a place to live because it's difficult to get an apartment in Stockholm."
Violence as conditions	"That which increases the distance between the potential and the actual [. . .] between what could have been and what is" (Galtung 1969).	Inadequate maintenance and its results (*"The bathrooms are musty and there are leaking pipes and water damage"; "There is a huge sewage problem cause there's major problems with our pipes."*). "Excessive", "luxurious" and "unnecessary" renovations. Precarious housing condition; lack of evacuation apartments; homelessness. (*"Short-term contracts [. . .] keep people in a risky and unstable position"; "59 of 78 households do not have a right for evacuation apartments, and neither can they trust that they can move back to their apartments after renovation."*) Uncertainty; stress; poverty; psychological breakdowns; suicides. (*"I sit in a kitchen with M. Her neighbour killed herself because she did not bare the fight with the property owner anymore. 'She said one day that she does not bare anymore. [. . .] Two days later she was found. [. . .] Later I heard that last year there had been five suicides that could be connected with the housing situation'."*)

of residents and activists created collective strength that makes it harder for property owners to carry out actions. The activists mention that the goal of many actions was to strategise against private property owners, slow down renovation plans, and fight "racist and fascistic housing politics". The material clearly revealed that the housing grievances were legal and thus normalized ("the laws are not on tenants' side"), and that it was necessary for people to "organize themselves and be argumentative, put on spectacles, expose the landlords' abuse and make life miserable for the landlords and the politicians".

A common tactic of the activists to visibilize violence is to name and personify not only the responsible property owners but also the residents who have suffered from housing violence. This turns objective, invisible violence into subjective, visible violence that is

Table 2. The activists' actions in struggling housing violence and making it visible.

Categories	Actions	Examples from the research material
Direct action	Squatting. Direct contact to neighbours. Organizing events, campaigns, protest days and demonstrations. Distributing flyers and stickers. Writing and publishing articles and updates.	*"We occupied this place that was abandoned [. . .] It gave a lot of publicity. The same day there were Swedish radio, DN, all the big media channels."* *"We've been knocking on doors, talking to people. We've tried to make clear that nobody has any choice when they're signing new contracts."* The campaigns and/or demonstrations e.g. *"Do not sell our homes"; "Against violence", "Do not throw people onto the streets"; "Reduce my rent".* *"We affixed stickers and posters about meetings and they took everything down right away."* *"We were writing articles all the time and there was so much media around."*
Discourses	Post-welfare memory, solidarity, privatization, gentrification. Housing as social right, not as profit-making activity. Lack of rights, democracy and affordable housing. Contradictions between activists and property owners.	*"Along with the aggressive privatization of available housing, we are facing a simultaneous privatization of public services [. . .] as well as rapid privatization of public spaces."* *"Sharing the understanding that privatization of our suburb and the violent process of gentrification is just one symptom in a larger systemic oppression."* *"The overall ambition [. . .] is to raise property value, which means clearing out current unwanted elements from the residential population."* *"Do we live in a neighbourhood, or in a company?"* *"Everything that is nearby the subway station is to be regarded as major commodity. [. . .] He's already changed so many of the apartments into smaller units where he can take more than double rent per square metre. [. . .] It's an issue of capitalizing on the property values."* *"He has a very few people left with any rights and that means that he can just get rid of people in order to have new tenants who do not question that there's a rent increase of thousands."* *"The property owners have colonized this area [. . .] Demonstrations [. . .] against their domination have taken place in their territory and as a response to this, they have forcefully removed or threatened individuals. "*
Narratives	Naming and smearing property owners, their relatives and/or companies. Sharing stories of the victims of housing violence.	*"People have to be argumentative, put on spectacles, expose the landlords' abuse and make life miserable for the landlords and the politicians."* *"Solveig, 82, Astrid, 80, and Gunilla, 61,* (names changed) *have lived many, many years in their rented apartments. [. . .] Now they don't know if they can stay. The landlord wants to renovate their apartments unnecessarily. [. . .] How can someone do that to them? [. . .] Solveig is afraid because of her 63 % rent increase. [. . .] 'They say that they relocate those who cannot afford to stay. Where? That they don't tell'."*

performed by an identifiable agent (see Žižek 2008, 1–2; Galtung 1969, 170–173), or experienced by a recognizable neighbour. Significant for the understanding of normalized violence is Galtung's (1969) question: "Can we talk about violence when nobody is committing direct violence [. . .]?" Galtung distinguished between personal or direct violence where an actor commits the violence, and structural or indirect violence that cannot be traced back to any person but "shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances". The activists are struggling against this kind of violence that is "as natural as the air around us" (Galtung 1969, 170–173).

One of the most problematic aspects of the invisible housing violence is the impossibility of assigning responsibility and, thus, of holding anybody accountable (see Arendt 1970, 39). Naming people adds awareness of the experienced violence and makes it easier to

emotionally relate to the problems. In the primary research material, certain property owners, their representatives, or their families are mentioned by name and slandered. Additionally, the stories of some residents are related to the public, one such resident being 82-year-old Solveig (name changed) whose experiences with rent increases and renovation plans were presented in articles, updates, and in the film. Solveig related her story and reciprocally supported the activists when they protested against the privatization of the suburb.

Experiences of injustice remain easily invisible. The activists talked about the unequal treatment of the residents and claim tenants have been tricked into exchanging their permanent tenant rights for short-term contracts. The sentiment among the tenants is characterized as the result of "post-welfare psychology":

> People say these things when they're in this post-welfare psychology [. . .] I mean, still a lot of people can't really agree that it's okay that you be tricked from having a permanent contract to suddenly signing a contract [. . .] that says that you no longer have that permanent right. [. . .] The saddest thing of all is the acceptance [. . .] You're signing away your rights. It's your problem, then. [. . .] the person who signed maybe knew their rights but they didn't have a choice because they're desperate for a home. And so, it becomes a competitive environment, everyone for themselves.

Some tenants were told that "all their neighbours had already signed", which "attempted to keep tenants isolated in their decisions and afraid of individual losses". There is also "the psychological internalization of blame" that leads to "a tendency to assume the problem is connected to individual choices and a lack of effort to position oneself on the market".

It is also mentioned how some non-Swedish speaking tenants had to communicate with their landlords without interpreters, how tenants who could not afford to stay were relocated, how activists' flyers were removed from public spaces, and how residents were expected to apply for housing allowances to cover rent increases. Some of the actions were discussed by the property owners as well, though from the opposite perspective: how people had been told about the possibilities for housing allowances, how new apartments could be sought if a person could not afford to stay, or how the activists' stickers defaced the walls when they were not fixed to noticeboards.

Slow Violence and Violence as Conditions

Violent conditions may develop in housing for years or decades before being recognized. Slow violence and violence as a condition are both strongly related to time and temporality. Violence as a condition can be understood as "that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual [. . .] between what could have been and what is" (Galtung 1969, 168). Galtung (1990, 291–294) emphasizes how different forms of violence have temporally different features ; direct violence (e.g. a spectacular eviction) can be characterized as an event, structural violence (e.g. lack of affordable housing) as a process, and cultural violence (e.g. feeling of injustice) as something that persists unchanged for a long time. Relying partly on Galtung, Laurie and Shaw (2018, 12) have explicated how time transforms violence and how violence may become routine with time and repetition.

It can slowly alter subjects as well as extend to other people, groups, or even generations (Laurie and Shaw 2018, 9).

The understanding of violence as a condition has many points of resemblance to the conception of slow violence. According to Nixon (2011, 2–6), slow violence "occurs gradually and out of sight" and is essentially "violence of delayed destruction [. . .] that is typically not viewed as violence". Nixon suggests abandoning the assumptions of violence as visible, spectacular, sensational, time-bound, or body-bound. He instead suggests thinking of violence as invisible, incremental, and a matter of unspectacular time, and recognizing the gradual change resulting not only from violence itself (Nixon 2011, 11), but also from its long duration, and the difficulty to recognize it as violence (Doel 2017, 58).

In housing violence, it is relevant to acknowledge that slow violence may be experienced differently on different scales (see also O'Lear 2016, 5). Urban renewal or renovations, for instance, may appear sensible on a national or global scale, but they can generate violent effects in particular places or for particular individuals. These effects remain unseen on a wider scale, unless brought to the public's attention by e.g. narrating individual experiences (see also Nixon 2011, 15) or offering alternative stories.

From some viewpoints, the Swedish suburban transformation seems justified as the poor housing conditions themselves may be violent and cause detriment. Many of the houses are 60 years old, in poor condition, and should have been renovated decades ago. Their previous owners provided inadequate maintenance and consequently sold the rundown houses to the current owners. The research material reveals several problems related to housing conditions: technical issues concerning heating or ventilation or maintenance issues with laundry rooms, gardens, and storage spaces. In one instance, a person recalled sending 15 service requests in five years. The renovations are, therefore, also appreciated, and some residents like to live in a suburban apartment that is modern, clean, and up to current standards. This perspective is shared with the property owners who acknowledge their responsibility. They speak about the paradoxical situation:

> Rent increases are high. But it is our responsibility as a property owner to ensure that the apartments are in good condition. In a 60-year-old building, it is not at all unreasonable to change [. . .] electricity and waterproofing in the bathroom.

> On the one hand, the apartments are worn. The bathrooms are musty and there are leaking pipes and water damage. On the other hand, rents are low. Whatever we do is wrong. If we do not renovate, we do not do our duty as property owners.

From another perspective, however, the renovations are regarded as violent. The activists characterize renovations as "excessive", "luxurious", or "unnecessary" and undertaken to justify increased rents. They suggest that people should be permitted to decide for themselves whether and to what extent they want their apartments to be renovated. Solveig and her friends' rent increases are estimated to be 56 % – 63 % although they would have preferred, for instance, to keep their old stoves, which were better suited to their old pots and pans. Kasper (name changed), for his part, had a 30% rent increase for renovations that he did not want. The activists also point out that some households are not offered evacuation apartments, and some do not trust that they will be allowed to return home after a renovation.

These are signals of the formation of precarious housing situations that the activists report to have led to severe socioeconomic consequences and to homelessness, stress, psychological breakdowns, poverty, and even suicides. Whether being experienced because of poor conditions or renovations, violent conditions have developed slowly, during the decades-long lack of maintenance, as a part of suburban renewal, and most of all due to the political decisions carried out decades ago. They represent violence that is not easily recognized until the situation has grown and become actualized in the case of a particular neighbourhood, home, group or individual.

Post-welfare Memory and Other Discourses

The post-welfare context is clearly present in the discussions on housing transformation. Regardless of who is speaking or acting, the ways of rationalizing and contesting the situation eventually return to the common memory of the welfare state model, including the shared feelings of responsibility, the hopes for the continuation of trust, and taking care of the community. The activists' arguments include the discourses of privatization, gentrification, controversy, and lack of rights and democracy. Private housing companies or property owners are considered guilty of causing the neighbourhood's situation as they concentrate on profits with the law's support, instead of showing consideration for democracy or people's rights. Both privatization and gentrification are considered violent processes that result in public spaces being lost and the neighbourhood being cleared from unwanted elements:

> Likewise, the overall ambition with their whole turf is to raise property value, which effectively means clearing out current unwanted elements from the residential population. The method is simple: make it economically impossible to stay.

The activists ask: "Do we live in a neighbourhood, or in a company?" The question refers to the strong mental and visual presence of the property owners in the neighbourhood. The activists argue that property owners

> have colonised this area [. . .] Their property includes everything from walkways and bulletin boards to the cafés, the library, and even the local tenant union's meeting space. Demonstrations and social gatherings against their domination have taken place in their territory and as a response to this, they have forcefully removed or threatened individuals or groups who challenge their domination.

The activists' discourses maintain the contradictions between residents and property owners, whereas property owners' discourses tend to emphasize good relations with the residents.

The discourse on privatization is related to citizens' roles as taxpayers, how public investments should not be sold out, how housing should be considered a social right rather than a profit-making activity, and the need for common spaces with fewer restrictions for political activities. The answers to the questionnaire, however, revealed more varied views among the residents. In particular, property owners' investments in working with the youth were appreciated, such as the organizing of free children's hobby clubs and the hiring of unemployed young people as trainees in order for them to gain work experience. A representative of one property owner reported that they considered it

important to maintain the "safety net" and to take responsibility for some of the societal work "that the state used to do".

Discussion: Understanding Post-welfare Housing Violence

Power in housing questions is exercised by multiple actors; not only by public or private property owners, or by the state and the city. This study shows the significance of the residents' activism and solidarity towards each other, especially in visibilizing the masked forms of housing violence. As the UN's nomination for a hedge city indicates, there is serious lack of affordable housing in Stockholm. Even though activism and solidarity cannot change this, they can raise awareness of the drastic effects of property's doings on individuals and neighbourhoods. Activism initiates discussion as the doings of property are criticized and justified publicly.

Depending on the context, the same act – including doing nothing – can be considered either violent or non-violent (O'Lear 2016, 10; Žižek 2008, 213). Housing violence may be direct, physical, and visible, as studies on forced evictions and other housing violence have shown (Brickell 2016; Desmond 2016; Springer 2013; Zhang 2017). After the decades-long traditions of affordable housing, equality, and tenants' rights, there appears to be an inherent endeavour to avoid extraordinary conflict. It seems that a by-product of the welfare state history is the effort to invisibilise violence in contexts that had previously been the responsibility of the state or city. This makes housing violence harder to recognize than the more spectacular forms of violence.

Some elements of the housing transformation can be understood as *normalized*, legal violence that originates from long-term political efforts to change the direction of the housing system. As this change is related to law reforms and wider alterations in the welfare state model, the actions that may seem morally dubious can be legally justified. The decades-long status quo in the housing situation, trust in affordable housing, and lack of access to property and economic power may increase the chances of experiencing a violent situation.

Second, the violent housing *conditions* "increases the distance [. . .] between what could have been and what is" (Galtung 1969, 168). Violent conditions are various and change over time. Before the renovations, leaking pipes or mould created unhealthy conditions. During the planning and renovations, housing insecurity increased, and harsh conditions developed regardless of whether tenants were evacuated or continued to live in the middle of the renovation work. After the renovations, increased rents and changes in common spaces altered the housing conditions. Time is essential here, as violence does not occur suddenly, but over long periods of time. This seems to be typical in the post-welfare context, where the tradition of housing security and state regulation makes spectacular housing violence unlikely.

Post-welfare housing violence follows Nixon's (2011) thoughts on *slow violence*, which occurs gradually, out of sight, and is a violence of delayed destruction. Both violence's development and results are gradual. With time, occurrences may become routine, subjects may change, and the effects may extend to other people (see also Laurie and Shaw 2018). An example of this is what one resident called post-welfare violence, referring to a situation where the lack of affordable housing and the threat of renovations create a competitive environment where people become desperate, start to advance their own

interests, and lose solidarity with each other. Nevertheless, the effects of slow violence may vary considerably according to the people, places, and scales involved. What is considered equitable in one place might develop into slow violence in another place (see also O'Lear 2016, 5). For instance, unhealthy apartments, a new property owner, renovations, and increased rents create anxiety if affordable housing in a certain location is one's priority. At the same time, the situation may benefit a person who enjoys modernized apartments, can afford higher rents, and can jump the tenant queue because of an ownership change. Experiences of housing transformation are thus personal, and the experiences of housing violence accumulate for those without ownership status or economic power.

As post-welfare housing violence is mostly slow and invisibilised, it easily seems objective, indirect, and to follow societal changes, rather than being directed by any particular person. The analysis, however, shows that violence is not stagnant, but may transform from objective, indirect, and invisible into a (more) subjective, direct, and visible form. Zhang (2017) describes a situation in China where a property owner visibilised violence by making a spectacle of one person's eviction in order to warn others. Such actions are unlikely in the post-welfare context, and displays are initiated by activists who make problems visible. Local organization, squatting, demonstrations, media campaigns, residents' stories, and naming or smearing the responsible persons turn the understanding of violence into one that is more direct and subjective.

Conclusion

Although each neighbourhood and situation is unique, the subtle features of post-welfare housing violence deserve closer attention. This would increase the understanding that housing transformation or urban renewal does not "just happen", but there are always people "in the way". Based on the analysis presented in this article, I argue for an understanding of post-welfare housing violence as slow violence that develops in time and space and is eventually realized in everyday spatial contexts. The possibly violent effects of the transformation are not fully recognized until they begin to be seen in the lives of individuals or neighbourhoods. Slow violence is selective: While some effects of housing transformation are positive for some residents (e.g. because of renovated apartments that comply with health standards), they may turn out to be violent at a personal level (e.g. because of rent increase, stress, housing insecurity, or eviction). Still, the effects of slow violence should not be considered only as a problem for the individual, but a wider societal question of the future of affordable and secure housing.

This paper's case shows that the power of discourses and narratives is impressive in creating collective strength and in making problems visible. Stories of individual experiences turn invisible, indirect, and objective violence into more visible, direct, and subjective violence. When some of the victims and responsible persons can be identified, violence becomes more understandable and real. Discursive tactics aim at collective strength and work mostly by emphasizing opposites and the dualistic understanding of the situation. The power of discourses is apparent when thinking about how the different actors discussed the housing situation by reiterating the same issues the activists exposed from a different perspective. Much of these debates concentrate on the actions of property owners who are identified as responsible for housing violence. While being

effective in pointing out the instances capable of influencing acute situations in a certain neighbourhood, dualistic argumentation, at the same time, depoliticizes the wider transformation of housing. For instance, the political decisions that led to the situation and the previous owners' inadequate maintenance of the apartments were not given much attention.

There is a definite need to scrutinize how violence occurs in the name of urban development and post-welfare housing change. In the post-welfare context, there seems to be a "double legitimation" of housing violence as both urban development and the changing welfare state model are used as legal justifications for changes. The by-product of welfare state history is the effort to invisibilise violence in situations that have earlier been the public's responsibility. It still does not mean that everything should be understood as violence. However, what needs to be addressed further is how housing violence may develop slowly and out of sight.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

ORCID

Päivi Rannila 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7911-2838

References

Arendt, H. 1970. *On Violence*. Orlando: A Harvest Book.
Atkinson, R., and G. Millington. 2019. *Urban Criminology: The City, Disorder, Harm and Social Control*. London: Routledge.
Baeten, G., L. D. Berg, and A. Lund Hansen. 2015. "Introduction: Neoliberalism and Post-welfare Nordic States in Transition." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 97 (3): 209–212. doi:10.1111/geob.12075.
Baeten, G., and C. Listerborn. 2016. "Renewing Urban Renewal in Landskrona, Sweden: Pursuing Displacement through Housing Policies." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 97 (3): 249–261. doi:10.1111/geob.12079.
Baeten, G., S. Westin, E. Pull, and I. Molina. 2017. "Pressure and Violence: Housing Renovation and Displacement in Sweden." *Environment and Planning A* 49 (3): 631–651. doi:10.1177/0308518X16676271.

Baker, A. G. 2017. "Bailiffs at the Door: Work, Power, and Resistance in Eviction Enforcement." In *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, edited by K. Brickell, M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan, 145–166. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blomley, N. 2003. "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (1): 121–141. doi:10.1111/1467-8306.93109.

Blomley, N. 2016. "The Boundaries of Property: Complexity, Relationality, and Spatiality." *Law & Society Review* 50 (1): 224–255. doi:10.1111/lasr.12182.

Blomley, N. K. 2000. "'Acts,' 'Deeds,' and the Violences of Property." *Historical Geography* 28: 86–107.

Brickell, K. 2016. "Gendered Violences and Rule Of/by Law in Cambodia." *Dialogues in Human Geography* 6 (2): 182–185. doi:10.1177/2043820616655017.

Brickell, K., M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan. 2017. "Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance." In *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, edited by K. Brickell, M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan, 1–23. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Christophers, B. 2013. "A Monstrous Hybrid: The Political Economy of Housing in Early Twenty-first Century Sweden." *New Political Economy* 18 (6): 885–911. doi:10.1080/13563467.2012.753521.

Collyer, M., K. Amirthalingam, and D. Jayatilaka. 2017. "The Right to Adequate Housing following Forced Evictions in Post-conflict Colombo, Sri Lanka." In *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, edited by K. Brickell, M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan, 47–69. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Correia, D. 2013. *Properties of Violence: Law and Land Grant Struggle in Northern New Mexico*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Council of Europe. 1996. "European Social Charter (Revised)." European Treaty Series No. 163. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Coutin, S. 1995. "Ethnographies of Violence: Law, Dissidence, and the State." *Law & Society Review* 29 (3): 517–540. doi:10.2307/3053976.

Desmond, M. 2016. *Eviceted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. New York: Broadway Books.

Dikeç, M. 2007. *Badlands of the Republic: Space, Politics, and Urban Policy*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Doel, M. 2017. *Geographies of Violence: Killing Space, Killing Time*. London: SAGE Publications.

Franzén, M., N. Hertting, and C. Thörn. 2016. *Stad till Salu. Entreprenörsurbanismen och det offentliga rummets värde*. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Fraser, N. 1991. "The Force of Law: Metaphysical or Political?" *Cardozo Law Review* 13: 1325–1331.

Galtung, J. 1969. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3): 167–191. doi:10.1177/002234336900600301.

Galtung, J. 1990. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 27 (3): 291–305. doi:10.1177/0022343390027003005.

Graham, N. 2011. *Lawscape: Property, Environment, Law*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Gregory, D., and A. Pred. 2007. *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence*. New York: Routledge.

Hedin, K., E. Clark, E. Lundholm, and G. Malmberg. 2012. "Neoliberalization of Housing in Sweden: Gentrification, Filtering, and Social Polarization." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102 (2): 443–463. doi:10.1080/00045608.2011.620508.

Langegger, S. 2016. "After the Ban: The Moral Economy of Property." *Antipode* 48 (3): 645–664. doi:10.1111/anti.12204.

Larsson, B., M. Letell, and H. Thörn. 2012. *Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State. From Social Engineering to Governance?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Laurie, E. W., and I. G. R. Shaw. 2018. "Violent Conditions: The Injustices of Being." *Political Geography* 65: 8–16. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.03.005.

Nixon, R. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

O'Lear, S. 2016. "Climate Science and Slow Violence: A View from Political Geography and STS on Mobilizing Technoscientific Ontologies of Climate Change." *Political Geography* 52: 4–13. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.01.004.

Palmer, D., and I. Warren. 2013. "Zonal Banning and Public Order in Urban Australia." In *Policing Cities: Urban Securitization and Regulation in a Twenty-first Century World*, edited by R. K. Lippert and K. Walby, 79–96. New York: Routledge.

Polanska, D., S. L. Degerhammar, and Å. Richard. 2019. *Renovräkt! Hyresvärdars makt(spel) och hur du tar striden*. Nørhaven: Verbal.

Polanska, D. V., and Å. Richard. 2019. "Narratives of a Fractured Trust in the Swedish Model: Tenants' Emotions of Renovation." *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 11 (1): 141–164. doi:10.3384/cu.2000.1525.2019111141.

Porteous, J. D., and S. E. Smith. 2001. *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Pull, E., and Å. Richard. 2019. "Domicide: Dis*place*ment and dispossession in Uppsala, Sweden." *Social & Cultural Geography* 1–20. doi:10.1080/14649365.2019.1601245.

Riksdag, S. 2016. *The Constitution of Sweden: The Fundamental Laws and the Riksdag Act*. Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag.

Rose, C. M. 1994. *Property and Persuasion: Essays on the History, Theory, and Rhetoric of Ownership*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

SABO (Sveriges Allmännyttiga Bostadsföretag). 2013. *Rent Setting in Sweden*. Stockholm: SABO.

Sernhede, O., C. Thörn, and H. Thörn. 2016. "The Stockholm Uprising in Context: Urban Social Movements in the Rise and Demise of the Swedish Welfare-State City." In *Urban Uprisings. Challenging Neoliberal Urbanism in Europe*, edited by M. Mayer, C. Thörn, and H. Thörn, 149–173. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Springer, S. 2011. "Violence Sits in Places? Cultural Practice, Neoliberal Rationalism, and Virulent Imaginative Geographies." *Political Geography* 30 (2): 90–98. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.01.004.

Springer, S. 2013. "Violent Accumulation: A Postanarchist Critique of Property, Dispossession, and the State of Exception in Neoliberalizing Cambodia." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103 (3): 608–626. doi:10.1080/00045608.2011.628259.

Springer, S., and P. Le Billon. 2016. "Violence and Space: An Introduction to the Geographies of Violence." *Political Geography* 52: 1–3. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.03.003.

United Nations. 2007. "*Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement*." A/HRC/4/18.

United Nations. 2016. "*Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living*." A/71/310.

United Nations. 2017. "*Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, and on the Right to Non-discrimination in This Context*." A/HRC/34/51.

Vasudevan, A. 2017. "*Zwangsräumungen* in Berlin: Towards an Historical Geography of Dispossession." In *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, edited by K. Brickell, M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan, 191–213. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Villanueva, J. 2018. "Pathways of Confinement: The Legal Constitution of Carceral Spaces in France's Social Housing Estates." *Social & Cultural Geography* 19 (8): 963–983.

Watts, J. 2013. *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Westin, S. 2011. " . . . *men vart ska ni då ta vägen?" Ombyggnation ur hyresgästernas perspektiv*. Forskningsrapport, Institutet för bostads- och urbanforskning, Uppsala universitet, Uppsala.

Westin, S. 2012. "Affärsmässigt Boende." *Ordfront Magasin* 3: 24–25.

Zhang, Y. 2017. "'It Felt like You Were at War': State of Exception and Wounded Life in the Shanghai Expo-Induced Domicide." In *Geographies of Forced Eviction: Dispossession, Violence, Resistance*, edited by K. Brickell, M. Fernández Arrigoitia, and A. Vasudevan, 97–119. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Žižek, S. 2008. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador.