



Michele Lancione, *For a Liberatory Politics of Home*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-4780-2530-6 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4780-2052-3 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-4780-2742-3 (ebook)

As housing crises persist and the violence of housing injustices worsen, it can often seem as though the goal of hegemonic responses to crisis is to pursue a singular solution that will solve the “housing problem”. As critical housing scholars will attest, such a solution does not exist within the current system nor within our current housing conceptualizations. Moreover, too often these “solutions” are focused on the individual: rooted in statistics of how many people experience housing precarity, how many units of housing are being built, how many households are in receipt of first-time homeowner tax incentives. As inequitable housing conditions continue to worsen across geographic contexts, of great value is considering how we might revise the very foundations of how we understand housing. What radical notions of inhabitation can be imagined if we approach housing with intentions of collectivity and care, rather than individualism and profit?

To wrestle with such complex and weighty questions, Michele Lancione’s *For a Liberatory Politics of Home* offers valuable provocations and insights as they develop a “nonbinary study of homelessness and home” (p.48). In this book, Lancione suggests that mainstream ideas about inhabitation are bound by dominant notions of home and homelessness, which work together to create those who are “less” and therefore made expendable through expulsion and extraction. Due to limitations of binary thinking, “less” remains rooted in a world of opposites: you have or you do not, you own or you do not, you are or are not. Lancione begins with a goal of challenging such a limited understanding of “less”, instead “reading lessness as an entire world of its own: a world populated with binaries rather than a binary itself” (p.3).

For a Liberatory Politics of Home is comprised of seven substantive chapters. The empirical heart of the book relies on ethnographic work in Italy (primarily Turin). Throughout the book, Lancione mobilizes the concept of *ritornello* to bring a musicality to their analysis (*ritornello* in music describes a recurring section or passage). Lancione conceptually offers *ritornello* as a means of capturing the behaviours of dominant discourse that operate as a “violent

refrain” to shape logics of home and homelessness (p.46). Chapters 1 and 2 develop the theoretical infrastructure for the book, tracing lineages of home and homelessness and demonstrating how home/homelessness is reproduced through the expulsion of the other and extraction of value from expulsion to gain a sense of security and belonging. Expulsion “creates a normative assemblage via selectively deciding what belongs and what is made to fit” and extraction takes the moves from expulsion and creates value. The result “includes a broad set of social, cultural, and economic assets that are made to count as valuable” (p.46-47). Expulsion and extraction are “operationalized across the land of lessness to maintain and reproduce home in its current fashion” (p.47). Together, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 employ the theoretical framework developed in the preceding chapters to draw important connections between the governance of homelessness and of home. Chapter 3 analyzes *ritornellos* of home in Italy where ideas and norms of what home is, who can access it, and under what conditions are shaped by patriarchy, nationalism, and racial capitalism. Chapters 4 and 5 then interpret how these logics of home have been used to manage, regulate, and exclude the “others of home” (such as those without housing) within Italy and beyond. Importantly, Lancione demonstrates that there are already ongoing ways of inhabiting the world that are reaching beyond the home(lessness) binary. Chapter 6 invites us to think beyond home(lessness), through collective and radical approaches that attend to how everyday experiences of housing precarity are already political. In Chapter 7, Lancione details possible waypoints for a liberatory assemblage of inhabitation, through deinstitution, reinstitution, and institution, and their strategies of “striking, caring, and affirming” (p.220).

By honing in on the relationship between home and current definitions of homelessness, Lancione conceptualizes home(lessness): where home and homelessness are “not opposed—one the solution/negation to the other—but are conniving: part of the same affective and political economy” (p.234). As he asks in the preface: “What if the solution to *homelessness* is not *home*?” (p.vii). While being cautious not to dismiss the violence and trauma that occur through housing injustice, he argues that thinking beyond the binary of home and homelessness means liberating home itself, where “securing housing for all is still a crucial goal, but it must be strategically linked up to an approach that is sensitive to a differential kind of inhabitation, or dwelling, of and for the world” (p.225). Through this carefully developed argument and

engaging feminist, queer, and Black scholarship and organizing on housing, home, and housing justice, Lancione shows us that addressing injustices of a structurally unequal system can often mean needing to challenge and demolish the concepts of the system itself because the system will often take away “the desire for a different becoming” (p.122).

Lancione explores this “differential kind of inhabitation” by allocating time within the book to actually examine what something different or radical might look like (such as the shelter system), rather than gesturing to an alternative without spending time alongside the reader to explore the complexities of the proposed critiques and their radical possibilities. Lancione is careful not to be prescriptive in his intervention (he emphasizes the book is a “proposition, not a dogmatic operation” [p.197]), but rather offers an invitation to travel with him as he navigates a meticulous path in his interrogation of home and homelessness, examining what he identifies as a need to take “the problem of lessness seriously” (p.3). While there is much to think with in this monograph, there are two themes in particular to which I now want to turn.

The first theme I want to focus on is the notion of “embodiment of housing precarity” that Lancione develops in the book by offering empirical cases that highlight mundane, everyday interactions in complex and violent structures. For example, in Chapter 4, he reflects on an interaction that he had at a shelter while handing out expired butter, where he interacted with a woman who pointed out that the butter was expired and asked if there was another. Eventually the butter was still taken, and Lancione analyzes this brief moment to illuminate how models of charity and normative care are deployed to create a manageable “poor subject” who deserves only certain types of care in limited contexts. Within this mundane stick of butter are a set of power relationships that are experienced through the binaries of “home” and “lessness”. Lancione writes: “It is because of violent processes crafted at home that one seemingly becomes its other—the homeless, the foreign, the one to be jailed and cared for. One might say that the processes pushing people in precarious housing and living conditions are matters of larger structural inequalities, reaching far beyond what we usually define as home ... Where is the boundary between a gendered society and a gendered household?” (p.100). The interrogation of embodiment and processes of housing injustice struck me as a particularly valuable model for other housing justice scholars to reflect on in analyses of an unequal and complex housing

system that is at once intimate, violent, structural, mundane, and embodied, as well as how the body is shaped by, and shapes, these relations of everyday life.

The second theme I want to reflect on is the role of care structures in both reproducing and resisting home(lessness). Care can be traced through the book in different iterations, from paternalistic care relations in homeless shelters and charities to organizing in housing movements. In this analysis, Lancione reminds us that care is not inherently a liberatory act: as in the case of charities, care can provide value while simultaneously helping to reproduce the systems that make this type of care necessary. As they argue, institutional “love and its care are never unconditional” (p.130). In the last section of the book, Lancione takes up care in everyday relations—the “mundane acts of resistance and care” (p.17). In doing so he illuminates how these acts contribute to “caring otherwise” or “radical care” as a “strategy of affirmative survival” (p.212). Lancione asserts that “radical caring takes place on the side. It is not mainstream, and it does not want to be” (p.212). Positioning the goal of radical caring in such a way strikes me as particularly poignant as we experience an upswing in hegemonic care discourses from the state and elsewhere that aim to flatten care into a single, simple category. Lancione writes of radical caring as a “maintenance of collective struggle” (p. 213). I believe in this way he reminds us of the radical possibilities of care and how it can be an essential tool of collective protection and survival.

For a Liberatory Politics of Home illuminates the necessity of intimate and collective thinking when writing about housing in order to reckon with the violence of housing systems and imagining, and fighting for, radical and just housing futures. The book itself embodies this approach: throughout each chapter, Lancione engages intentionally and deeply with those he is thinking with, enacting collectivity in citational practice. *For a Liberatory Politics of Home* offers gentle guidance and care as we wrestle with questions that are difficult and can cause us to wonder if the housing futures that we dream of are indeed possible. I suspect that for me and many others, this monograph will become a consistent bookshelf companion that we return to time and time again.

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Samantha Thompson

School of Public Health and Social Policy

University of Victoria

spthomps@uvic.ca

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