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Just housing: Transdisciplinary perspectives from theology and the built environment

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In cities worldwide, housing is precarious. Local socio-economic environments can exacerbate existing social differences and exclusions, but can also contribute to alleviate these differences, and to foster high levels of social inclusion. This article introduces a special collection of articles asking how theology should contribute theologically to address the challenges of housing and human settlements. It derives from an assertion that theology and reflection on the built environment should engage each other, made concrete in this collection through exploring issues of housing justice. We explore the question of housing justice with reference to four related questions: (1) How can *urban planning interventions* enhance affordable, sustainable and aesthetically appealing housing for all? (2) What are the *political, economic and legal conditions* impacting on housing justice, and how can theologians engage in these spaces? (3) How can *exclusionary or precarious conditions* be addressed architecturally to contribute to ecological sustainability, aesthetics and affordability? (4) What are the *dominant social imaginaries* that mediate housing and settlement development, and how can theologians help foster inclusive and just social imaginaries? Examples from different countries, cities and socio-cultural contexts are introduced and reflected upon, seeking to identify conditions that enable affordable, sustainable and aesthetically attractive housing in an unequal and precarious world.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article points out the relevance of a theological perspective on the housing problem. At the same time, the implications for architecture, urban planning and politics are addressed.

Keywords: housing justice; sacred architecture; private homes; power; accessibility.

Background

The UN Habitat (2005) estimates that 100 million people worldwide are homeless, while 1 billion people live in informal settlements or urban slums (UN Habitat 2016). Millions more are finding themselves in housing that is precarious, overcrowded, detrimental to people's health and without secure tenure. Internal and transnational migration, the reality of refugees and asylum-seekers, the restrictive cost of housing and the inability of governments to keep up with the housing demand, all contribute to housing precariousness. This, coupled with poor governance, and unjust socio-economic arrangements that favour a few over the masses, create severe and chronic housing challenges, which should not be ignored theologically and ethically.

As part of the work of the Global Network of Public Theology, a small research cohort was formed, titled 'Just housing: affordable, sustainable, aesthetically appealing?'. Papers were presented in Curitiba, Brazil in October 2022, and we invited participants to contribute to a special collection, to centre a concern with housing justice, theologically.

The challenge of housing justice is not confined to the global south but is increasingly a challenge in wealthier northern countries. Whereas 62% of African urban dwellers live in informal settlements, and large favelas depict the urban landscapes of cities in Latin America, cities in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are facing severe housing shortages today, generally; but this is especially true for low-income people, people living off social welfare and transnational migrants. The reflections in this collection focus on South Africa, Germany and Brazil, representing three continents and realities from both the global south and north.

Whereas this collection focuses on housing contestations in these three countries, they merely represent a small sample of the global housing challenge. From Khartoum to Rafah, urban

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populations face devastation as cities are razed to the ground. The prophet Isaiah's vision of God's people as 'repairers of broken walls and restorers of streets with dwellings in them' (Is 58:12) is as relevant today, as when it was sounded in the post-exilic community of his time.

This collection is asserting housing – and housing justice – as a theological concern, and it is an expression of doing theology in relation to the built environment. In both respects, concerns of public theology (the context in which this cooperation originated) are brought into focus.

Housing as a theological concern

Public theology and the built environment

In recent debates on public theology in the German speaking context (for an overview, see Wabel 2019), the task of religion within society has been described in a threefold way:

- Religion is supposed to provide spiritual orientation for its members.
- It is one of the tasks of religious assemblies and their leaders to publicly address topics of public relevance, such as social issues, political ethics or environmental questions.
- Churches and other religious congregations provide a spiritual home for their adherents. In their activities, their social organisation and their institutional structure, religious communities become visible and identifiable within society.

On all three levels – individual, societal, ecclesiological – the built environment plays a role. Yet, in most approaches, a dimension of (architecturally shaped) public space is only present metaphorically. 'The public' as the point of reference in theories of society is often construed according to the imagery of the public square as an element of urban architecture (Gerhardt 2012:248; Habermas 1997:437; Williams 2012), but this reference to the urban built environment is rarely made a topic of. Likewise, theology and architecture are normally regarded independently of one another. At least in Protestantism, following Martin Luther's 1544 inaugural sermon for the Torgau church, architecture is thought to have an ancillary function: the worshipper is expected to focus on the preached Word of God alone. Thus, questions of dogmatics and of social ethics are normally treated independently from architectural functionality (which follows the limitations and needs of the *embodied* human being) or from an aesthetic dimension. Recently, however, it has been argued to integrate the dimension of culture, bodily existence and aesthetics into dogmatics (Buntfuß 2016; Huizing 2015; Moxter 2000; Wabel 2010) and into ethical reflection (eds. Barth & Zarnow 2015; Nussbaum 2013; eds. Schlag, Klie & Kunz 2007; eds. Wabel, Stamer & Weider 2018; eds. Wulf, Kamper & Gumbrecht 2016), thereby also bringing out the theological relevance of architectural aspects (Beuttler 2010; De Beer 2024; Erne 2017; eds. Erne & Schüz 2010; Rae 2017). Moreover, dogmatic and ethical aspects of doing religion in cities have been examined, aiming at 'religious topographies' (eds. Stückelberger & Seyffer 2022) and their implications for the development of settlements (Bär 2020; eds. Zarnow, Klostermeier & Sachau 2018).

The contributions in this volume pursue the direction of these approaches by examining anthropological and ecclesiological aspects of the relationship between human building and dwelling and its reflection in a Christian-religious perspective.

Theology and human settlements

In order to follow this agenda, we are drawing on recent insights from a sociology of space. German sociologist Martina Löw develops a notion of space as derived from human interaction (Löw 2001, 2017). Spatial structures of society – public space, places of public memory, places occupied by (religious) groups, different neighbourhoods, among others – are understood as socially constructed. Following Pierre Bourdieu's ground-breaking work (Bourdieu 2016), Löw understands social position and spatial positioning as closely interrelated. Her approach has been taken up and modified in related fields such as sociology of architecture (Delitz 2009, 2010; Steets 2015) and urban planning (Steets 2008), but also in theology (Schneider 2012; Zarnow 2015).

If one applies this approach to theology and social ethics, it becomes obvious that the spatial organisation of religious activity is essential for a conception of religiosity. A consideration of built space brings out the anthropological, societal and spiritual dimension of religion in a paradigmatic way. Not only is it relevant in terms of fundamental theology (cf. Beuttler 2010; Wüthrich 2015), it also has consequences for social ethics.

Thus, both religion and architecture are interrelated to society. Architecture is not just an expression of society; rather, it is constitutive for the self-awareness of society (Delitz 2005, 2010). Architecture, as a means of shaping the space where humans live, is relevant for Christian social ethics in conjunction with a theology of the built environment in at least four dimensions. While some of the aspects these dimensions carry with them are relevant for most, if not all, societies, others are clearly context-bound. We try to highlight this, where applicable, by referring to the German or the South African context.

Public space and its accessibility

Garret Hardin (1968) lamented the tragedy of the commons as the process that increasingly depleted shared, accessible and public spaces, meant for the common use of all urban dwellers. The commons are often overtaken by the commodification of space, and public spaces increasingly become privatised, securitised and militarised. This is true of parks, pavements, roads and even the spaces of public universities. In societies that are increasingly unequal, such

as South Africa, such commodification of public spaces is often used as a means to exclude 'the other', or of securing the private.

Public space is not cast in stone, but made and remade over time. Whereas it can be the object of privatisation, someone like Makakavhule (2021:3), in stark contrast, argues for what she calls 'democratising public spaces', using 'democratising' as a verb, indicating the 'continued process of democratising space through conflict and contest'. In her view, public spaces should be seen as spaces for democratic agency, or public citizenship, to be practised, contributing thereby to the evolution, accessibility and public ownership of such spaces.

What is also important is to assert that housing does not exist in a vacuum, but is shaped and shapes the broader environment in which it is located. Good public spaces contribute to the quality of human settlements, human and ecological interaction and sustainable habitation.

Sacred architecture and the built environment

The fact that Christian church buildings in Western European societies are usually located in the centre of the village or town has a number of implications that affect the coexistence of people in settlements. One of these is the function of religious buildings as a counter-place. In his seminal essay *Other Spaces*, Michel Foucault describes *heterotopias* as counter-places to places occupied in society (Foucault 2005). As 'places outside all places', they play an important role in developing a sense of possibility for societal development.

Often enough, however, the positioning of churches in the urban environment was also an expression of church-sanctioned power relations. Missionary settlements in the colonies of European states were laid out according to a city plan that provided for a clear centre based on the Christian history of salvation and the ecclesiastical order (Delitz 2023:34–50).

Finally, from an interreligious perspective, the positioning of Christian churches in a place is also linked to a strategic positioning vis-à-vis other religious communities. Here, one can observe strategies of *place keeping* and *place finding* – when, for example, in processes of religious pluralisation, Islamic communities gather in provisional mosques in industrial areas, whereas the city centre is still dominated by Christian churches, regardless of their dwindling attendance (Becci 2018).

Such dwindling is, of course, only one expression of the Christian church in changing cities. In response to socio-spatial landscapes, the Christian landscape is also evolving, and in South African cities such as Johannesburg and Pretoria (Tshwane), city centre and inner city communities now face a plethora of churches of different shapes and sizes, not necessarily located at the centre, but fused into the landscape in shopfronts, houses, schools and shared church spaces – a development described as *place making* (Becci 2018; Zarnow 2015:5). Churches do not hold the same kind of geographical or political power necessarily, but emerge organically in response to migratory and settlement patterns. Christopher Baker (2011), for example, suggests a 'rhizomatic' framework for understanding churches in post-secular (or, post-colonial) cities, shifting from hierarchical structures to an organic emergence from within and from below.

Institutions and power

The (religious) legitimisation of existing power relations becomes relevant here – as does their deconstruction. Cornelius Castoriadis, in his *Imaginary Institution of Society*, asks for an element of the imaginary that accompanies all instances of societal order (Castoriadis 1984). Drawing on the role of imagination in Kant's Third Critique, he arrives at a theory of institutions as embedded in a symbolic net, comprising also the buildings in which a society presents itself. Following Castoriadis, deconstruction, reconstruction and new construction of buildings can be described as transformations of the symbolic in the horizon of the imaginary, opening up new processes of self-understanding of and within society. A typical case in point is the centre of a city in which the town hall can be found right across from the church, often invoking its architectural elements. As can be seen from this example, city space has been shaped as a meaningful pattern of order which is constantly being reshaped and instantiated in its use (Moos & Zarnow 2023:97; Schroer 2006). Again, the multiple ways in which these relationships are reshaped today, from megachurches to house churches and faith-based social movements, raise important issues for theological enquiry around ecclesial institutions, power and the unfolding of human and urban settlements.

Private homes

Last but not least, questions of the design of one's own individual living environment are also affected by elements of religious architecture. Even though there are clear aesthetic criteria by means of which, in religious buildings, the sphere of the sacred is demarcated from ordinary dwellings – for example by a choir screen to exclude the sacred place, by emphasising it through a dynamic of transcending, as in Gothic cathedrals, by exaggerating the dimensions of sacred buildings in relation to their structural surroundings, or by using particularly noble building materials (Düchs & Wabel 2024:84f) – there has always also been a mutual interplay with the architectural elements of people's homes. Today, in Germany, in the interior designs of their private homes, people sometimes strive for an effect of soberness, simplicity and concentration connected with the plainness of some religious buildings, or one can find shrine-like showcases displaying memorabilia or other objects of particular importance (Mädler 2006).

In the fast-growing informal settlements of the global south, the notion of private home, of course, is textured very differently: sharing of often precarious and limited ablution and water points, congested spaces that allow little privacy and insecure tenure that often exists at the behest of those with

political and economic power, raise different sets of questions. In such contexts, churches often adopt similar self-help techniques in constructing structures for worship; sometimes manage to develop slightly improved infrastructure that becomes the only communal space for social and spiritual exchange; but often share in the marginality and vulnerability of the periphery.

Thus, as can be seen from these considerations, there are interrelations between religious and secular architecture in a number of dimensions and on several levels. In this, the layout of a village or city reveals something about the political, social and economic realities to be found in a settlement. This also touches on questions of social – and spatial – justice, which are reflected in the respective housing situations. And yet, the 'spatial turn' (cf. Soja 1989; Baker 2011), that has occurred in a number of disciplines including jurisprudence, is only slowly embraced, with all its consequences, theologically. Theology and spatial formation, and how this plays itself out in the evolvement of the built environment, need much more attentive interrogation. We will now turn to these questions in more specific contexts.

Theology and housing justice

As indicated before, recent approaches in sociology of space have pointed out that space is not just the medium within which society unfolds (Löw 2016):

> Spaces generate distributions which, in a hierarchically organised society, are generally unequal distributions or distributions that favour different groups of people. For this reason, spaces are often the object of social conflicts. (p. 233, *authors translation*)

Not only private property, but also public space, is bound up with regulations of accessibility (Meireis 2018). Hence, spatial representation is intrinsically connected with questions of justice – justice of access, justice of participation and capability justice (Wabel, Eberlein-Braun & Stamer 2022:6).

We can hardly foster an imaginary of just housing, without first considering the reality of social injustices, spatially expressed. Housing justice, more specifically, is an expression of spatial justice, in a broader sense. Spatial justice concerns the complete structure and organisation of available space, distribution of space and the accessibility to and affordability of space. It considers that which occurs in space, which includes public transport, spatial uses, urban densification or urban sprawl, the valorisation, de-valorisation and over-valorisation of land and other economic processes (Sassen 1996) and the implications of poorly managed spatial relationships and arrangements for poorer communities and the earth.

Theology, housing and intersectional engagements

In applied ethics, interestingly, the literal and the figurative use of spatial terminology often coincide: those who are marginalised in society are often pushed to the margins of the built environment (eds. Bourdieu & Accardo 1997), as the problems connected with the *banlieues* in France show. Similarly, in figures of speech, someone is 'staking their claim,' or someone 'gives way to' somebody else and lets them occupy a place they would have liked to take for themselves. This observation has a twofold consequence. Not only is it worth the time to follow the implications of such metaphors in developing the concepts of theological ethics (Wabel et al. 2022:7). The theological relevance of space metaphors also shows that reflection in theological ethics can have repercussions on the ways space is used in societies. For example, an ethics of 'giving space', as it has recently been advocated as a prerogative for a Christian ethics (Wirth 2020:373f), can acquire a direct and vital connotation to the context of migration (Jansen 2016), but also in light of the worldwide housing crisis, for urban planning and for ethics in architecture (ed. Berr 2017; Düchs 2013; eds. Fischer & Delitz 2009; ed. Führ 2017; Harries 1997; Jansen2019; Sennett 2019), to name but a few.

The contestations between space as commodity (for sale to the highest bidder) and space as a gift (to be shared), 'inherited space' (privilege), 'giving space' (hospitality) or 'claiming space' (political action) also need to be considered. Various forms of agency exist, often representing competing interests, and therefore the ethics of spatial distribution needs concrete embodiments as it engages in local spaces. The relationships between space and class, race or gender, are some of the intersectional sensitivities to be cultivated, if we are to accompany just housing imaginaries for the future of our planet. Speaking of spatial or housing justice today without considering land or climate justice, or the reality of climate (and other) refugees traversing borders and continents to find safe dwelling, would be intellectually wasteful. This, obviously, requires transdisciplinary engagements.

Urban planning – Question, concern, examples

Recently, the challenges connected with the interrelation of theology and societal arrangement of space have been taken up by theologies oriented towards *social space* (eds. Hübner et al. 2023; Renneberg & Rebenstorf 2023). The concept of social space combines social work and community development, focussing on citizens' needs, resources, initiatives and networking structures within a given neighbourhood or community (Hinte 2020; eds. Kessl & Reutlinger 2008). One field of application in this is the *logic of centre and margin* in the formation of cities, as indicated earlier in the text. Structures of social injustice tend to reproduce in dynamics of centralisation (Moos & Zarnow 2023:115–118).

Religious communities sometimes attempt to bridge different social strata and milieus, both in their activities and in the places they choose for their work. However, as empirical studies show, such attempts can also have contrary effects. Creating a space 'for all' can lead to dynamics of usurpation and displacement, when the attempt to bridge social gaps leads to the hardening of perceived barriers between groups (Moos & Zarnow 2023:116f). Thus, 'doing centrality' in a

positive sense needs to combine centripetal elements with those of regulating centripetal forces (Moos & Zarnow 2023:121).

Whatever the strategies are in the balancing of forces that are trying to shape human settlements, the claim that religion is a central element of human life and self-understanding will unspokenly be present in the attempts to uncover and reshape existing patterns of power. Whereas the church was rather central in the formation of historical cities in the global north, especially in Europe, the United States and in some of the colonial reproductions such as urban South Africa, theologians or religious leaders are not necessarily seen as critical partners in the process of planning urban settlements today, nor is the notion of faith considered a substantive category that might contribute to good or hopeful cities. And yet, in some instances like Enugu in Nigeria, it is urban planners that acknowledge the potential of religious capital to contribute to city-making processes, while the church considers itself as detached from the 'secular' city (cf. Nnorom 2020). In South African cities, theology provided the ethical frameworks that allowed for the construction of apartheid cities and separate development, while urban planning provides the technical framework and expertise to build such cities. These were not always deliberate collaborations, but flowed from the shared ideological framework that apartheid provided. In undoing the apartheid city and its death-dealing consequences, theology and urban planning need to consider collaborative ways of fostering alternative imaginaries, and the technical and practical competencies to translate such imaginaries practically, and sustainably.

Political, economic and legal conditions – Question, concern and examples

Space is not neutral nor is the formation of human settlements or housing. The politics of space or housing development, and the political priorities given to some over others, are theological and ethical issues, as it concerns the dignity of all, the distribution of limited resources and the ways in which societies organise themselves in the interest of all who live in it, or, at the expense of certain populations, based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, nationality or particular vulnerabilities.

The politics and economics of land in certain contexts deem some 'unhouseable' in spite of the UN Charter that binds member states, or the constitutional or policy obligations that are articulated in the documents and laws of many national governments and local authorities, concerning a right to appropriate housing. There is often an incongruence between official aspirations and lived practices, rendering large numbers of people very precarious. Land values get a life of its own, and although land does not have inherent monetary value, the construction of such value often contributes to spatial and housing inequalities, which, without political, planning or legal intervention, might contribute to perpetual marginalisation of certain socio-economic groups.

In many contexts across the globe, the urban poor are relegated to the fringes of cities, or to ghetto-like urban neighbourhoods that are stigmatised and often not sharing in the same kinds of socio-economic, educational and health infrastructure of their suburban or central urban counterparts. Interference with land values or market forces is often what social, urban or housing activists call for, insisting on cities that resemble greater social integration and cohesion in how they are shaped and developed. Many examples exist in post-apartheid South Africa, of public interest lawyers, social activists and local communities, working for inclusive cities through protest, litigation and occupation, demanding socio-spatial integration of formerly disenfranchised groups closer to the concentration of socio-economic opportunity and centres of political power.

Cape Town is a case in point, as land and housing activists have done creative work over the past two decades, to advocate for social housing in the central parts of the city, through availing public land and property that is state-owned, not to private developers, but for the social good. Tafelberg is an old, disused school in a prime suburb of Cape Town, close to the centre of town (cf. Sinxo 2024). Standing vacant for more than a decade, it is argued that the school lends itself to a social housing project that can accommodate domestic workers and other low-income workers in the Sea Point area. That would reduce their cost of public transport, allow them proximity to work and good-quality education and health care for them and their families and help break the texture of the segregated, apartheid city.

Some legal practitioners are focusing on doing litigation that contributes to jurisprudence around spatial, land and housing justice, that will help foster inclusive environments, breaking cycles of perpetual exclusion and marginalisation.

Architecture – Question, concern, examples

Norwegian architect Christian Norberg-Schultz spoke of the 'genius loci' or the 'spirit of place' (Norberg-Schulz 1982). Architects by virtue of their vocation are concerned with discerning, preserving and advancing the spirit of a place, which is at once a technical and spiritual intervention. Theologians and communities of faith would do well, as part of an ongoing spatial shift, to pay closer attention to the idea of the 'genius loci', as an ethical or spiritual impact, discerning the well-being and character of a space, through its history, narratives and aspirations and exploring the possible contribution of theology, as part of transdisciplinary engagements, towards the preservation and advancement of spaces that are life-affirming in the fullest sense of the word. The project of constructing a skyscraper and a protestant church in a joint planning process, involving real estate developers and church representatives, right in Frankfurt's financial district (Schilling 2023) might turn out to be a remarkable case in point.

The emergence of eco-theologies is often concentrating on the larger eco-systems that involve the degradation of the planet, climate change and its devastating effects on all of life. Whereas the accents of various eco-theologies are crucial correctives to the anthropocentric imaginaries of dominant (colonial) theologies, such theologies would do well to locate themselves in concrete ways in local places, to investigate not only the potential role of architecture and city-building to climate change and devastating earth practices, but also the potential redemptive or liberatory roles that the built environment sciences can play, in conjunction with theology.

If the formation of space and human settlements is not ethically neutral, it is an ethical obligation to interrogate architectural and design practices, with a view of asking in how far such practices contribute to the preservation of the earth, the dignity of all of life in urban settlements, the inclusion and even prioritisation of the city's most vulnerable and the innovations required to overcome precariousness in some of the world's most death-dealing urban settlements. Just as theology could contribute ethically and conceptually to the ways in which architecture engages life, so can architecture contribute to theology in terms of its appreciation of spatial integrity, the sacredness of all spaces and the ability to design humane, equitable and sustainable spaces, not only for those who can afford to access such.

Social imaginaries – Question, concern and examples

A joint contribution of theology and architecture to an amelioration of housing conditions presupposes shared ideas about what is regarded as the good life. Such an unspoken ensemble of shared ideas and values within a society, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls 'social imaginaries' (Taylor 2007). Social imaginaries vary from utopian archetypes such as Soleri's arcologies (Soleri 1977) and the imaginary African city of Wakanda (Bambara-Abban 2022), to the reality of apartheid and colonial urban imaginaries whose legacies remain deeply divisive and destructive across the globe. Osman (2019) speaks of the fact that South Africans have not yet discerned an urban imagination as powerful in its simplicity as the apartheid urban imaginary, which is what prevents more substantive socio-spatial transformation of South African cities.

Theologies that concern themselves with human settlements in general, and with just practices and expressions of housing in particular, will be intentional in how they collaborate with built environment disciplines, social sciences, activist and artist communities and local community organisations that engage with issues of housing and land, to participate in the construction of social imaginaries that are life-giving, inclusionary and just. They will be deliberate about guiding processes of religious and theological disentanglement from oppressive forms of city-making, settlement development or housing production, able to discern and name practices that are not on the side of life, people and planet and particularly the poor.

A concrete way for theological engagement with housing justice in local places would be to gather think-tanks, City Labs or incubators, that will document expressions of housing (in)justice, while participating in the incubation of possible alternatives. Prototypes that point in the direction of more inclusive, just and sustainable forms of housing and city-making, are yearned for across the world, and particularly in the global south. A theological agenda for housing justice would do well to help tease out, discern, articulate and document such imaginaries or prototypes.

Opening up global conversations: Retrieving and appreciating contestations and good practices

The four questions related to the housing challenge and outlined earlier in the text, are engaged in this collection from the perspectives of theology, the built environment or from a transdisciplinary angle.

Three of the articles provide broader conceptual frameworks as ethical, spatial and theological tools for reflection. In 'The garden city as a commons. Social-ethical perspectives on the new housing question', German protestant theologians *Torsten Meireis* and *Lukas Johrendt* (2024) provide an ethical framework to consider the challenge of housing as a challenge of the commons. And *Martina Bär* (2024), who teaches catholic theology in Austria, explores the reality, contributions and problematics of the neo-Pentecostalism movement as a vibrant contemporary Christian expression, in 'Neo-Pentecostalism in Latin American slums'. In his article 'Urban land ownership and the housing question in Germany: Insights from Catholic social ethics', *Julian Degan* (2024), from Germany, combines insights from economics and Catholic social ethics.

Two of the articles consider emerging or alternative urban or socio-spatial imaginaries. *Thomas Wabel* (2024) (protestant theology, Germany) reflects on a movement that is gaining ground in the global north, in 'The social, the ecological, and the cultural. Tiny houses and the role of social imaginaries'. And Church of Scotland theologian *Graham McGeoch* (2024) appreciates the potential gift of often invalidated spaces, in a contribution titled, 'Decolonial Cities: considering the potential of the periphery in Rio de Janeiro'.

Finally, three articles, all by South African theologians, provide a specific local lens of how housing justice becomes a local ecclesial, congregational or faith-based challenge. *Stephan de Beer* (2024) describes an unfolding faith-based housing agenda in South Africa's capital city, in 'Just housing – constructing a theological praxis-agenda in a (South) African city', suggesting its potential use in other African cities as well; while *Caroline Powell* (2024) reflects on the question of coloniality, church land and housing justice in the city of Cape Town. *Lukwikilu Credo Mangayi* (2024) describes the challenge of housing to a local faith community, in his article, 'Mobilisation of Berea Baptist Mission Church's assets in a globalised Johannesburg inner city: An oiko-missiological study'.

Conclusion

In this opening article, we have tried to frame housing justice as a theological concern and imperative, while at the same time arguing for a close interrelation with questions of architecture and of urban planning. With the collection of articles presented here, we are not only suggesting the urgency for global conversations that will both retrieve and appreciate contemporary housing contestations, but we also hope to trigger good practices that seek to contribute to healthy, inclusive and just housing conditions for as many people as possible.

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