

# Structures of feeling: the affective economies of private renting in the Majority World



## Adriana M Soaita

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, University of Bucharest  
Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow



**AFFECTIVE-PRS**

**URBAN STUDIES SEMINAR, OCTOBER, 2023, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW**

- What “**structures of feeling**” can be encountered across the “**affective economies**” of private renting in different contexts? How/why do they differ from context to context?



A Critical  
Interpretative  
Synthesis (CIS) of  
renting in the  
“Majority World”



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## Ahmed's (2004, 2014) Affective Economies

- *Economies are social and material, as well as psychic. Emotions:*
  - ✓ *Investments in social norms (not just psychological dispositions)*
  - ✓ *Involve subjects, objects, without residing within them*
  - ✓ *Produced as an effect of circulation of signs*
- Economies of **hate** (refugees), **fear** (racism), **disgust**, **shame** (national apology), **love** (welfare), **discomfort** (queer), **anger** (feminism)

## Richard and Rudnyckyj's (2009) Economies of affect

- *A zone for the production of certain types of subjects and practices... as a means of conducting conduct*

PRS economies as a zone structured by and structuring affects/(emotions)... in pre-individual, collectively shared ways



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## Williams' (1977a,b) structures of feeling (SoF):

- *A sense of a shared affective quality through which the present is rendered sensible and apprehended... it is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activity... In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period/[group]*
- *Social experiences in solution, distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available [world-view, ideology]*
- *Not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought ["practical consciousness"]*
- **Analysis of literary work:** *Meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, at once interlocking and in tension.*
- **(Pre)emergent, dominant, residual as co-existing**



## Reenergized within the “affective turn” (Clough and Halley 2007)

- *The ‘affective present’ consists of multiple, co-existing, structures of feeling **that enter into loose relation, rather than tight homology...** there is not and cannot be a single typically ‘neoliberal’ structure of feeling (Anderson 2014, 2016)*
- *A collective experience that **mostly goes without saying...** ‘the present’ emerges through activities of disturbance, debate, remediation, and extension that constitute structures of feeling (Berlant 2015)*
- Inscribed through materiality (atmospheres, scenes, bodies, things) and soft power (moods, discourse, morality, common sense)
- A sense of inevitability, permacrisis, entitlement, waithood, distrust



- **Greed/exploitation** (Marxist thought, Engels 1872): antagonistic interests of haves/have-nots (emotions: *excess, selfishness*; but also *exhaustion, distrust, anger, hopelessness, revolutionary hope*)
- **Ethics of care** (Gibson-Graham 2008): diverse economies of mutual interests, e.g. welfare states, commons (emotions: *love, altruism, generosity, sentimentality, kindness*; but also implicitly *othering, suspicion*)
- **Cruel optimism** (Berlant 2011:1): “*when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing*”, holding fantasies which no longer can be achieved, attachments that hurt (emotions: *hopeless hope, disappointment, frustration, boredom, waitness, distrust*)

- A bundle of affective experiences, at once interlocking and in tension...
- Descriptive and analytical tools, not ethical judgments



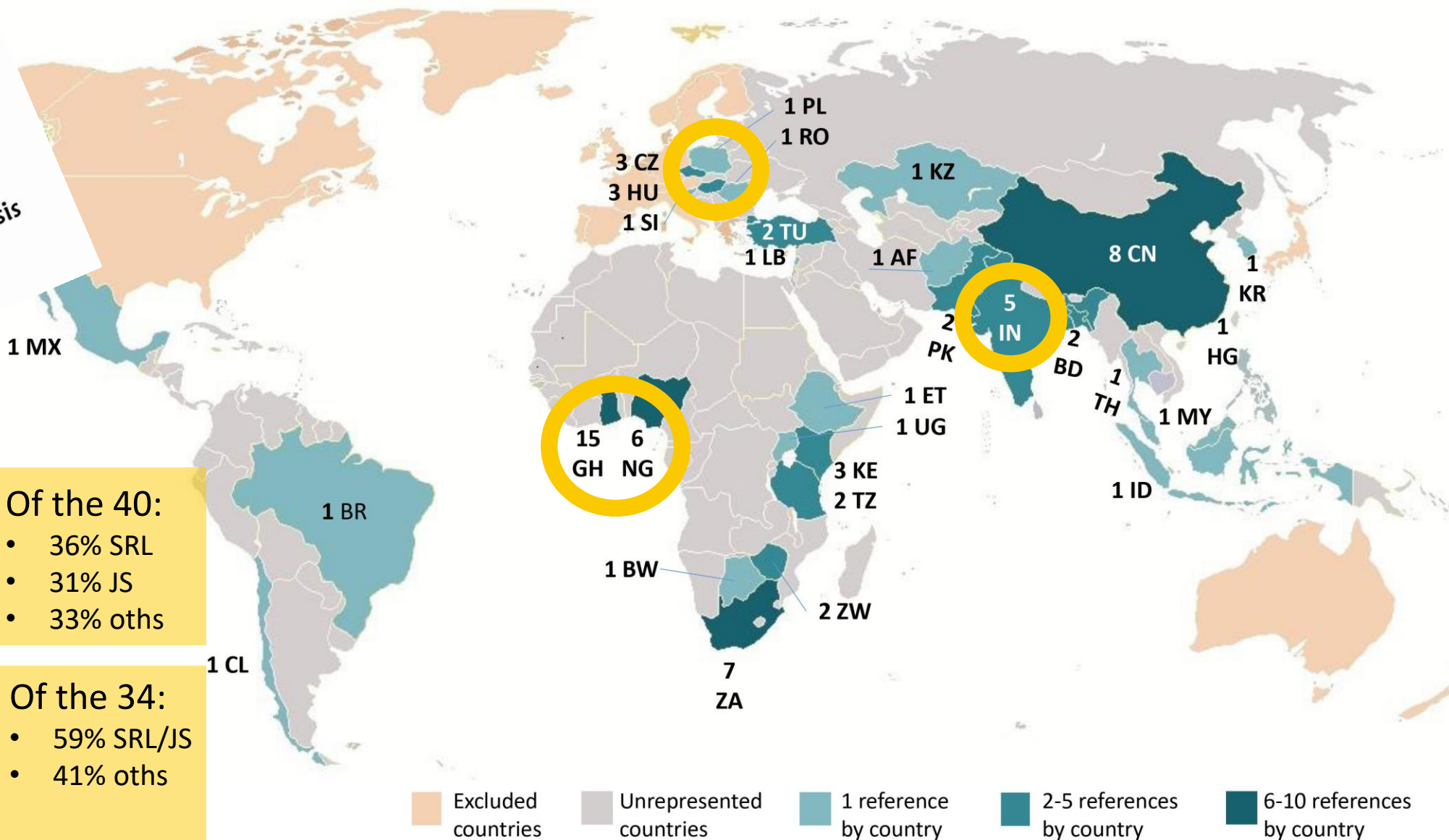
AFFECTIVE-PRS

# METHODS: CIS & EC

Horizon Europe  
Project 101059188



**Briefing Paper 1**  
Critical Interpretative Synthesis  
Process Protocol: Locating  
Publications for Reviewing



## 40 of 78 PRS (QUAL)

- 9 EE (3/3/1/1/1)
- 21 GH-NG (15/6)
- 10 IN-BD-PK (5/3/2)

Of the 40:

- 36% SRL
- 31% JS
- 33% oths

## 34 of 76 CONTEXT

- 5 EE
- 17 GH-NG (8/9)
- 12 IN-BD-PK (8/2/2)

Of the 34:

- 59% SRL/JS
- 41% oths

- **CIS: Critical Interpretative Synthesis** (Gough et al 2012)
  - **Critical**: findings vs. authors' choice of theory
  - **Interpretative**: a theory contribution
- **EC: Experimental comparison** (Lancione & McFarlane 2016)
  - *Radically different contexts, less well trodden terrains of comparison... but a narrow focus*
  - *Learning from the specificity of each case... to seek out resonances ... and generalisations that orient critical thinking in relation to context*

## 39 of 78 PRS (QUAL)

- 9 EE (3/3/1/1/1)
- 21 GH-NG (15/6)
- 9 IN-BD-PK (5/2/2)

## 34 of 76 CONTEXT

- 5 EE
- 17 GH-NG (8/9)
- 12 IN-BD-PK (8/2/2)



AFFECTIVE-PRS



## EXPLOITATION

### By the state

- Property restitution
- Slum demolition

### By the market

- Advance Rent
- The Poverty Business

## ETHICS OF CARE

### By the market

- Caring markets
- Prejudiced markets
- LL/TE 'symbiosis'

### By communities

- Caring migrant communities
- Kin (free) renting

## CRUEL OPTIMISM

### Big dreams

- The city 'good life'
- Struggle to own

### (Hopeless) desires

- Social housing
- Very basic housing quality



AFFECTIVE-PRS

A bundle of affects privileging a certain view of what 'fair' might be said to be

## Property restitution (“legal robbery”)

- **Context:** nationalized buildings restituted to prior-owners then sold to investors... who decided to evict (Lancione 2019)
  - **POL:** *“It hurts me very much up to today. I cannot deal with it ... We became someone’s purchase”* (Łuczak and Ławrynowicz 2021)
- **SoF:** historic justice, anticommunist and pro-market moods

## Slum demolition/resettlement (“criminalization of the poor”)

- **Context:** squatting on public land; Tenants’ experiences: *unrecognized*
  - **BGD:** *“Findings suggest that officials categorize slum dwellers as encroachers and criminals, who pose a direct threat to an orderly, clean and green city. Hence, they cannot be allowed to exist in the city”* (Lata 2020)
- **SoF:** disgust towards the poor, privileging capital greed & elite belonging



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## The illegal 2-to-5-years Advance Rent in GHA

- **Context:** Rent Control and huge housing shortages
  - *“Unlawful, greedy, abusive, injustice, fraudulent, unfair, stressful, soul destroying makes me really sick, home is like a living in hell”* (Luginaah et al. 2010).
- **SoF of LL power:** **economics** (low-rents in high-inflation), **tenant care** (security, paying pause), **family care** (make a living, school fees), **collective care** (contribute new supply when expanding one’s portfolio)

## The “Poverty Business” in CZE

- **Context:** Welfare support in a regime of conditionality policed by LL
  - *“LL systematically exploited their tenants by providing substandard housing and utilities at exaggerated prices, financed via housing benefits. The building generated €15,000 pm”* (Kupka et al 2021)
- **SoF:** historical othering of Roma by the state and society



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## The exceptional caring markets of SLV (Sendi, Mali 2015)

- **Context:** balanced supply/demand, relative affluence, small social distance between landlords/tenants → *“satisfaction on both sides”*
- **SoF** of historic equality and mutual interest

## Prejudiced ‘caring markets’ (Ahmed & Salam 2022, Hegedus et al 2014)

- **Context:** ambiguous legislation within a **SoF** of widespread distrust/fear
  - ❑ **HUN:** *“LL rent... to people within their personal network at a below-market rent level, and often under the guise of rent-free”*
  - ❑ **PAK:** *“...people do not want to give their properties on rent to tenants whom they are unfamiliar with”*

## Landlord/tenant ‘symbiosis’ (NGA & IND, PAK, BGD)

- **Context:** poor landlords/tenants in compound houses
  - ❑ **NGA:** *“I have to improve the house because I live here. I want it to look nice because I am living in it” (Ulame 2021).*
- **SoF** of shared fate, mutual dependency (but also tension was reported)



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## Caring slum communities

- **Context:** filtering of new rural-migrant tenants by communities of origin, ethnicity, religion (issue: group homophily)
- **BGD:** *“Kin groups and fellow villagers show hospitality in terms of food, rented accommodation, even some monetary loans as well as finding a job and providing knowledge about the city in the initial stage”* (Huq-Hussain 1996)
- **SoF** of collective belonging

## Kin (free) renting

- **Context:** dominant in GHA and NGA; co-existing with emerging feelings of individualism and self-reliance
- **GHA:** *“I did not want to rent a house anymore because I wanted to save towards completing my house. This compelled my family and I to put up with a relation”* (Asante et al 2022)... also in tension with landlordism
- **SoF** of family love and duty



AFFECTIVE-PRS

*“...in most Indian cities, there was no such edenic past to lose; there is only a more egalitarian world to gain” (Chattaraj et al 2017)*

## The promise of the ‘good life’ in cities

- **PAK:** *“migration to big cities is accompanied with hope to get better livelihood. The idea... is complemented with provision of all basic infrastructure with permanent source of earning in a healthy environment. However, it is very disappointing that most end up in informal settlements for the rest of their lives” (Malik et al 2020)*

## The struggle to own when renting

- **GHA:** *“The brighter side is that the bad treatments we receive is a motivating factor for our attempt at homeownership”... “I have decided to commit 90% of my salary into building my house” (Adu-Gyamfi et al. 2020)*



AFFECTIVE-PRS

## Social housing (EE)

- **POL:** *“Suddenly, I received a phone call. Somebody from City Hall told me that I was supposed to report to the Department. I wasn’t informed that I got a dwelling, but that I was to present myself there. I didn’t even ask if it was about a dwelling, I simply went”* (Łuczak & Ławrynowicz 2021)

## Very basic housing quality: cruel pessimism (BGD, NGA, PAK)

- **BGD:** *“Municipalities are responsible for providing basic services, but lack the funds and capability... The costs are enormous... The situation will grow even more critical in the near future”* (UN report in Huq-Hussain 1996)



## Reading PRS experiences in terms of the three SoF proposed:

- Shows that the lived experience of private renting is not only shaped by economic and political structures but also by structures of feeling through which those other structures are both reproduced/questioned
- Brings to the fore silenced fantasies (social housing; self-building; city life) and illuminates the cruel choices required to maybe achieve them and attain social mobility
- Reminds that markets are embedded in weak/strong social bonds, hence we can problematize 'tenure' as fluid arrangements

**Policy details matter** but so do the politically-constructed structures of 'fundamentals':

- Huge housing shortages require state action
- Rent control is not a substitute for social housing
- Discrimination expose supportive policies to exploitation



**AFFECTIVE-PRS**



1. **Adu-Gyamfi A, Poku-Boansi M & Cobbinah PB** (2020) Homeownership aspirations: drawing on the experiences of renters and landlords in a deregulated private rental sector. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 20(3), 417-46.
2. **Ahmed S** (2014) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3. **Ahmed S** (2004) Affective Economies. *Social Text*, 22(2 (79)), 117-39.
4. **Ahmed S & Salam M** (2022) Rental housing policies and associated legal covers: Case of middle income formal housing in Karachi. *Journal of Urban Management*, 11(4), 488-99.
5. **Anderson B** (2016) Neoliberal affects. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(6), 734-53.
6. **Anderson B** (2014) *Encountering Affect Capacities, Apparatuses, Conditions*, Farnham.
7. **Berlant LG** (2011) *Cruel optimism*, Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press.
8. **Clough PT & Halley J** (2007) *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. City: Duke University Press.
9. **Engels F (1872)** *The Housing Question*, Leipzig: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers.
10. **Gibson-Graham JK** (2008) Diverse economies: performative practices for 'other worlds'. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(5), 613-32.
11. **Gough D, Thomas J & Oliver S** (2012) Clarifying Differences between Review Designs and Methods. *Systematic Reviews*, 21:28.
12. **Hegedüs J, Horváth V & Tosics N** (2014) Economic and legal conflicts between landlords and tenants in the Hungarian private rental sector. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 14(2), 141-63.
13. **Huq-Hussain S** (1996) Female migrants in an urban setting--the dimensions of spatial/physical adaptation: The case of Dhaka. *Habitat International*, 20(1), 93-107.
14. **Kupka P, Walach V & Brendzová A** (2021) The poverty business: landlords, illicit practices and reproduction of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Czechia. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 24(2), 227-45.
15. **Lancione M** (2019) The politics of embodied urban precarity: Roma people and the fight for housing in Bucharest, Romania. *Geoforum*, 101(5), 182-91
16. **Lancione M & McFarlane C** (2016) Life at the urban margins: Sanitation infra-making and the potential of experimental comparison. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 48(12), 2402-21.
17. **Lata LN** (2020) Neoliberal Urbanity and the Right to Housing of the Urban Poor in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Environment and Urbanization ASIA*, 11(2), 218-30
18. **Łuczak P & Ławrynowicz M** (2021) How did the great transformation shape housing pathways? The case of older women living alone. *Housing Studies*, 1-18.
19. **Luginaah I, Arku G & Baiden P** (2010) Housing and health in Ghana: the psychosocial impacts of renting a home. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 7(2), 528-45
20. **Malik S, Roosli R & Tariq F** (2020) Investigation of informal housing challenges and issues: experiences from slum and squatter of Lahore. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 35(1), 143-70.
21. **Sendi R & Mali BČ** (2015) Surviving in limbo: an insight into Slovenia's informal private rented housing sector. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 10(4), 19-39.
22. **Richard A & Rudnyckyj D** (2009) Economies of affect. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(1), 57-77.
23. **Uleme CM** (2021) *Slum Upgrading and the Rental Housing Sector: A study of landlord-tenant relationship in a Lagos (Nigeria) slum*.
24. **Williams R (1977a)** Dominant, residual, and emergent, in R Williams, *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 121-127.
25. **Williams R (1977b)** Structures of feeling", in R Williams, *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 128-135.