Neoliberal Welfare, Minorities and Tenancy Support

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Under post-welfarist realignments in neoliberal democracies, the provision of welfare is increasingly conditional on claimants fulfilling certain (behavioural) obligations. Under these shifts, an increased focus on the cultural dimensions of conduct and belonging redefines the basis for citizenship and extends the risk of subversion to include incivility or cultural difference. Critically, this recasting of the state-citizen social contract occurs with potentially exclusionary effects by legitimising ethnic and culturalist explanations that attribute blame to individuals/groups based on their perceived failure to follow normative models of social and spatial integration. The significance of these neoliberal welfare shifts for many of those most at risk of exclusion—black and minority ethnics (BME) and indigenous populations—has received little attention. Responding to this gap from within housing studies, this article reports on qualitative research on the fulfillment of government responsibilities for tenancy support provision under reforms to Indigenous housing welfare in Australia. Based on interviews with Indigenous housing stakeholders, it identifies programmatic, organisational and operational issues hampering tenant support provision that challenge how the ideal of 'fair reciprocity' was satisfied at the outset of the reforms. Given contemporary policy discourse on community cohesion and integration, the ways in which current programmatic oversights signal this neoliberal programme and its attempts to reinforce perceptions and constructions of cultural difference to politicise and pathologise the behaviours of particular individuals and communities is significant. Key questions arise about how the needs of minority groups might inform the types of 'opportunities' required to achieve the conditions for fair reciprocity within the contractual welfare state.

Keywords: Housing welfare, conditionality, Indigenous, tenancy support, minority.

Introduction

Under post-welfarist realignments in neoliberal democracies, the provision of welfare is increasingly conditional on claimants fulfilling certain (behavioural) obligations. Sociologist, Nikolas Rose (1999), described these shifts as a new politics of behaviour (or 'ethopolitics') under which government attention is redirected from rational administration towards questions of morality and ethics. This new agenda is based on concepts of citizenship, conditionality and rights and responsibilities, as well as greater recognition of the role of individual choices, lifestyle and culture in accounts of citizen deprivation and exclusion (*ibid.*). Under these shifts, an increased focus on the 'cultural dimensions of conduct and belonging' redefines the basis for citizenship and extends the risk of subversion to include incivility or cultural difference (Flint, 2009: 92). Critically, this recasting of the state–citizen social contract towards a more conditional form of

citizenship occurs with potentially exclusionary effects. This agenda legitimises ethnic and culturalist explanations that attribute blame to individuals/groups based on their perceived failure to follow normative models of social and spatial integration, notwithstanding inequalities in power and status (for example in Australia, Pearson, 2000; Stanford and Taylor, 2013, and in the UK, Phillips, 2010). Surprisingly, the significance of these neoliberal welfare shifts for many of those most at risk of exclusion – black and minority ethnics (BME) and indigenous populations – remains neglected, despite strong academic interest in conditional welfare.

In housing studies, inadequate consideration of BME and Indigenous groups (hereafter: minority groups)[1] under these new welfare settings is troublesome. Radical welfare restructuring provides a far more minimal safety net that is increasingly restricted to those most vulnerable and at risk (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2014). These are cohorts that may challenge the underlying assumption of conditional welfare, namely that citizens are able and willing to adjust to new obligations (Flint, 2014). Meanwhile, the neoliberal rhetoric of mutual responsibility (*quid pro quo)* also emphasises and distributes rights and responsibilities to governments (not just tenants). However, although this provides some tacit state acknowledgement of the principles of 'fair reciprocity', based on theories of distributive justice, little is known about how these are fulfilled in practice, nor how they might meet the needs of minority groups.

This article contributes to emerging debates about minority groups in conditional neoliberal housing welfare settings, by examining how government responsibilities for tenancy support are fulfilled in the Indigenous Australian housing welfare context. Substantive recent changes to Indigenous housing welfare have followed neoliberal trends for the tightening of the conditions under which welfare is distributed (FaHCSIA, 2009). In 2008, as part of a raft of reforms across Indigenous affairs, the newly elected Labor government signed a ten-year National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) with the aim of addressing significant overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in Indigenous remote and town camp communities. Central to this is the repositioning of housing delivery and management under the mainstream public housing model, and the subsequent provision of standardised tenancy agreements to 'promote personal responsibility, engagement and behaviours consistent with positive social norms' within these communities (COAG, 2008a: 6). NPARIH also stipulated tenancy induction and support programmes to assist tenants' transitions to these new arrangements. This support is likely to be critical given concerns about tenancy compliance, which stem from the imposition of regulations with limited adjustment for Indigenous culture, in settings where the demographic, geographic and cultural profile of Indigenous Australians informs a unique set of housing needs (Milligan *et al.*, 2011).

This is the third in a series of articles that report on these housing reforms, based on qualitative case study research in Indigenous town camps communities. Both preceding articles concerned the implementation of mainstream public housing management and illustrated respectively how housing professionals interpreted and implemented new welfare conditionalities (Nethercote, 2014), and how tenants understood and experienced these (Nethercote, 2015). The first highlighted the potential for inconsistent tenancy management resulting from discretionary management practices; the second identified a range of structural and socio-cultural barriers to tenancy compliance. This article extends this earlier work by shifting the focus to the fulfilment of government responsibilities

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for tenancy support provision. It identifies programmatic, organisational and operational issues hampering its provision that challenge how the ideal of 'fair reciprocity' was satisfied at the outset of the reforms. It concludes by considering how support provision might better assist tenants in counteracting previously identified structural and socio-cultural barriers to tenancy compliance so as to satisfy the mutual responsibilities of government in these settings. In so doing, this article further contributes to the comparative understanding of the local circumstances under which conditional welfare policy is delivered in neoliberal democracies.

This article is organised in four sections. The first highlights the experience of minority groups under the tightening of welfare conditionalities, including attempts to regulate tenant conduct through a dominant moral discourse of responsible behaviour (ethopolitics). The discussion is positioned within broader contemporary debates on integration and citizenship, and briefly identifies support mechanisms and approaches that may diminish any adverse effects upon these groups. This is followed by an overview of neoliberal shifts within Australian Indigenous Affairs and recent reforms to housing welfare, and a brief review of the research methods, before a discussion of the empirical data from the study.

Ethopolitics, minorities and tenancy support

This discussion is contextualised within contemporary debates about 'super diversity' (in Australia, Colic-Peisker and Farquharson, 2011) and ideologies and policies of 'post-multiculturalism' (in the UK, McGhee, 2008). Especially in the UK and Europe, the contemporary conflation of notions of integration and assimilation by politicians and policy-makers has motivated policy responses based on 'one-way' processes of minority ethnic acculturation (Phillips, 2010). Meanwhile within the settler societies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, the local politics of diversity is shaped by the acknowledgement of the distinct characteristics of 'super diversity' (for example, colonised indigenous people alongside other national/ethnic minorities). This is coupled with policy assurances that the 'one-way expectation of European forms of "muscular liberalism" will be moderated within a two-way model of integration within settler super diversity' (Spoonley, 2015: 658). Notwithstanding this, in Australia, for example, there remain 'contemporary limitations to "minority groups" inclusion in [Australian] state and local institutions, and limits to power sharing and tolerance' (Spoonley, 2015: 658). Indeed, a neoliberal tendency to 'see culture as a characteristic of individuals' prevails across all these jurisdictions, despite policy differences (van Krieken, 2012; Stanford and Taylor, 2013; Spoonley, 2015: 658).

Minority groups have largely been overlooked in discussions on conditional welfare reforms. In housing studies, a UK interest in crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in social control discourses has encouraged a focus on the 'usual suspects' of ASB – youths and 'problem families' – under a range of disciplinary mechanisms deployed by landlords (for example, anti-social behaviour orders, Flint and Nixon, 2006; Flint, 2009; tenancy agreements, Lister, 2006; Family Intervention Projects, Batty and Flint, 2012). The oversight of minority groups may reflect a lack of official data for any such analysis (for example, in the UK, Isal, 2006), yet it remains notable given BME over-representation in criminal justice systems, accusations of (racial) discrimination in policing and the discursive construction of some minority groups as 'problematic' (Prior, 2010).

It is also surprising given noted contemporary public and policy discourse on issues of race, ethnicity and religion within wider debates about integration, citizenship and social cohesion under 'post multicultural' policies.

Nonetheless, within this ASB literature, several UK studies consider how discourses of ASB intersect with discourses of citizenship (Hughes, 2007; Flint, 2009). Focusing on BME communities, these draw attention to the potentially harmful effects on these cohorts of welfare settings under which legal sanctions provide the ground rules for successful integration and inclusion (Prior and Spalek, 2008; Prior, 2010). Nixon and Prior (2010), and other contributors to their 'Disciplining Difference' themed section within this journal, explore issues of diversity and cultural difference in definitions and experiences of ASB. They underscore a potential twofold misuse of ASB legislation against ethnic, cultural and religious minorities that stems from the elasticity and subjectivity of definitions of ASB (Prior and Spalek, 2008; Prior, 2010). First, behavioural differences may be problematised by practitioners, prompting the uneven and disproportionate application of ASB powers to regulate and penalise individuals whose behaviours are perceived as 'different'. Prior and Spalek (2008), for example, describe service providers' conscious decisions to tailor ASB approaches in settled minority ethnic communities based on professional cultures, professionals' perceptions of prevailing social and cultural norms and patterns of behaviour, and their judgements about the acceptability of interventions to particular communities.

Second, assumptions about the existence of a singular shared perspective on ASB are at odds with its open-ended definition. Prior (2010) identifies variation between different communities' tolerance for specific behaviours (for example, noise) and their expectations about community and authority responses to these. Prior found, for instance, that settled minority communities shared understandings about 'criminal' and 'antisocial' behaviour, but differed in their willingness and capacity to respond to it. Prior (2010) then described how this 'self-disciplining' behaviour could ascribe a conflicting identity to these communities: on one hand, they act 'responsibly' to resolve issues using community resources and capacity, but they may be deemed 'irresponsible' for their failure to engage with authorities. Hughes (2011) also illustrates how the discursive positioning of ASB as an extension of concerns with crime and victimisation can lend power to an active majority by legitimising their growing intolerance towards the behaviours of 'the other', even when these are neither distressing nor harmful. Such findings specify broader claims about conditional housing welfare's potential for discriminatory, marginalising and exclusionary effects upon those most in need of support.

Two mechanisms potentially limit any such harm to minority individuals/groups. First, the capacity to identify and operationalise 'shared values' between housing agencies and communities in the governance of social housing bolsters the local legitimacy of conditionalities. With reference to the Australian Indigenous policy context, Habibis and colleagues (2013: 4) distinguish between 'normalising conditionalities' that are based on mainstream (*status quo*) behavioural norms, from 'adaptive conditionalities' that are 'mediated by elements of cultural recognition' and inclusive of 'Indigenous lifeworlds and forms of social organisation'. Yet while community engagement and partnership can provide the foundations for effective dialogue between authorities and communities, difficulties surround engagement with socially excluded and hard-to-reach groups. Addressing this requires settings and supports through which minority communities can

become 'full participants in the responsible governance of the area' (Prior, 2010: 142; and in the Indigenous context, Habibis *et al.*, 2013: 5, 49–59).

Second, intensive and holistic approaches are instrumental in providing vulnerable groups with assistance to meet their obligations (Dobson, 2011). Mounting evidence strengthens a case for coupling disciplinary strategies with therapeutic or caring approaches (for example, in the European context, welfare responses to the homeless, Dobson, 2011; or single mothers, Tonkens and Verplanke, 2013). Implicit in tailored and flexible approaches is an acknowledgement of the role of culture in shaping particular housing needs and aspirations. Within these approaches, long-term relationships between tenants and housing staff (based on professional tolerance, compassion and flexibility) are paramount, especially for hard-to-reach groups (for example, for Indigenous Australians, Habibis *et al.*, 2007; Flatau *et al.*, 2009). However, positive intervention approaches are overlooked in the privileging of discourses of blame, concerns for public protection and community safety (Nixon and Parr, 2006) and assumptions about welfare recipients' motivation to comply with welfare conditions.

Reciprocity in reforms to Indigenous housing welfare

The demographic, geographic and cultural profile of Indigenous Australians informs a unique set of housing needs. Indigenous Australians suffer severe social and economic disadvantage, especially those living in remote communities. On many health and well-being indicators, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is even more pronounced than in Canada, New Zealand and the USA. Indigenous Australians also face on-going housing exclusion: 50 per cent of houses are overcrowded due to housing shortages (Productivity Commission, 2009). They also demonstrate strong cultural norms of mutual reciprocity that create obligations to their kin and community. Additionally, Indigenous Australians have high levels of population mobility (partly due to its role in maintaining cultural identity and kinship ties), an attachment to rural communities and living arrangements featuring extended family groups (Habibis *et al.*, 2011).

The ideological principles underpinning government approaches to these Indigenous needs have shifted dramatically in recent years in response to heightened Indigenous–government tensions and worsening Indigenous inequalities. Amongst various frames deployed to explain contemporary Indigenous Affairs policy, a neoliberal lens illustrates how a new state project re-specifies citizen–market–state relationships that circumscribe the conditions of citizenship (for example, Altman, 2010), albeit those markets may be 'miniscule or non-existent' in the Indigenous context (Altman, 2014: 122).[2] Altman (2014) describes the slow infiltration of the longstanding neoliberal 'Canberra Consensus' into Indigenous Affairs, beginning in Howard's term (especially *circa* 2005), and gaining momentum after the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and the 2007 Labor election. Post-election, NTER not only continued, but many of its features were implemented nationally through a series of National Partnership Agreements. This 'neoliberal turn' was then embedded by the endorsement of the 2009 National Indigenous Reform Agenda (NIRA), which underpins Indigenous policy and is based 'unambiguously' on the neoliberal principles of 'economic deregulation, welfare state retreat, and a cultural trope of individual responsibility' (ibid.: 262, 268).

What distinguishes the current policy paradigm, variously termed the 'new' mainstreaming, integration, normalisation and Closing the Gap (Altman, 2014: 118), is the founding belief that a 'development approach' that embeds neoliberal norms and values in remote Indigenous people represents an antidote to Indigenous disadvantage (ibid.: 123). Critically, alongside its political and economic dimensions, this neoliberal project comprises a 'culturalist' programme (ibid.: 124). The culturalist programme aims to undermine and overwrite pre-existing non-neoliberal norms and values and replace these with 'new norms and social institutions like individualism, self-interest, choice, wealth accumulation, and new forms of consumption' (ibid.: 122). In Indigenous Australia, it seeks to fundamentally remould kin-based societies into market-based individualistic societies (Altman, 2010: 269) by 'freeing' Indigenous people from 'a relational ontology that emphasizes commitment to family and kin, ties to place and obligations to ceremony' (Altman, 2014: 124). This approach is legitimated by the view that Indigenous culture was 'maladapted to late modernity and created a socially destructive cocktail when mixed with equitable access to social security' (ibid.: 123).

This neoliberal project delineates the terms of 'mutual responsibility' as a key principle; it distributes responsibilities to government to ensure the provision of 'mainstream' programmes and services, while requiring Indigenous people to take increased responsibility for themselves and their communities. The emphasis on the instrumentality of the individual follows the broader realignment of the social contract in Australian public policy. However, in the Indigenous setting, the culturalist dimension underpins a new 'biopolitical focus [ethopolitics] on the Indigenous family and the individual' (Altman, 2014: 122), where it provides a case for ignoring the rubric of Indigenous culture and placing new demands on citizens (Kowal, 2008: 342). Subsequently, government seeks to 'promote personal responsibility, engagement and behaviours consistent with positive social norms' (COAG, 2008a: 6) through contractual forms of welfare that 'emphasize human capital development and personal change for the individual' (Martin, 2006: 7).

Reforms to Indigenous housing

In Indigenous housing, approaches have shifted markedly in response to these changing government rationales. In 2008, a mainstream public housing model was implemented in Indigenous communities to replace the previously endorsed community housing approach. Under the NPARIH, state housing agencies must implement standardised housing management to ensure rent collection, asset protection and governance arrangements consistent with mainstream public housing, in addition to securing government leases over Indigenous land and undertaking capital works (COAG, 2008b: 5). Standardised residential tenancy agreements, signed by 'head' tenants, require that tenants demonstrate 'increased personal responsibility for their houses' consistent with (mainstream) social norms and behaviour; they must pay appropriate rent on time, cover the cost of property damage and not disturb the peace of their neighbours (FaHCSIA, 2009: 20).

The first article in this series highlighted how housing professionals reconciled policy tensions between a federal mainstreaming agenda and state-level discourses of local responsiveness. It identified how professionals' own understandings and interpretations of Indigenous communities, as well as structural barriers to mainstream approaches, could

encourage inconsistencies in tenancy management practices (including leniency towards tenants). A second article, focused on tenants' experience of the reforms, argued that policy goals to 'responsibilise' tenants could be undermined by the failure of mainstream public housing to account for differences in Indigenous lifestyle and values. It identified that tenants were sometimes confused and/or sceptical about changes to their housing welfare. And it identified that they faced structural barriers (for example, inadequate housing maintenance services) and socio-cultural barriers (such as, precedence given to cultural obligations over legal duties) to tenancy compliance that could encourage unintentional and intentional tenancy breaches. These findings highlighted the need for tenancy supports that could address these barriers to compliance.

To examine how reciprocity is satisfied in practice within Indigenous housing welfare requires, *inter alia*, scrutiny of the local provision of tenancy supports to these Indigenous communities. Before describing the study designed to address this, the new tenancy support arrangements are detailed.

NPARIH stipulates a tenant induction programme to be delivered at the beginning of each tenancy to inform tenants of their rights and responsibilities, and to provide education on housing infrastructure and its basic care (for example, drains, lights, cleaning and rubbish removal, pest control, and so on). Motivated by the heightened risk of tenancy failure and its social and financial costs in these settings, this government support was proposed alongside ongoing, informal support, including community education strategies and some case management support, albeit the details of these were not clearly stipulated.

At the outset of the reforms, tenant support programmes and strategies were varyingly established: the Remote Housing Tenant Support Framework (RHTSF) specified the Northern Territory's approach, whilst parallel frameworks in Western Australia remained under development in the state housing agency and the Department of Commerce. Conversely, arrangements for programme delivery differed: in Alice Springs (Northern Territory), an Indigenous organisation (Tangentyere Family and Youth Services, TFYS) was contracted to supply tenancy support services, whereas in Halls Creek (Western Australia), staff from the town's small urban public housing unit's Supported Housing Accommodation Programme were to provide support to town camp tenants.

The research

This article examines the provision of tenancy supports to Indigenous tenants by housing professionals and tenancy support staff as part of the fulfilment of government responsibilities to these tenants under current housing welfare reforms. All three articles in this series are circumscribed by the empirical investigation being limited to a small number of town camps in two sites in Western Australia and the Northern Territory during the early days of policy implementation.

Western Australia and Northern Territory were selected based on their contrasting jurisdictional approach to the administration of welfare reforms (detailed in Nethercote, 2014) and the local presence of research partners (details in the acknowledgements). Case sites were then chosen from those identified by government as 'priority' communities (from a total of twenty-nine communities) on the assumption that policy implementation would be most advanced during fieldwork. Halls Creek was selected first, as one of only three 'priority communities' in Western Australia. Alice Springs (Northern Territory) was then
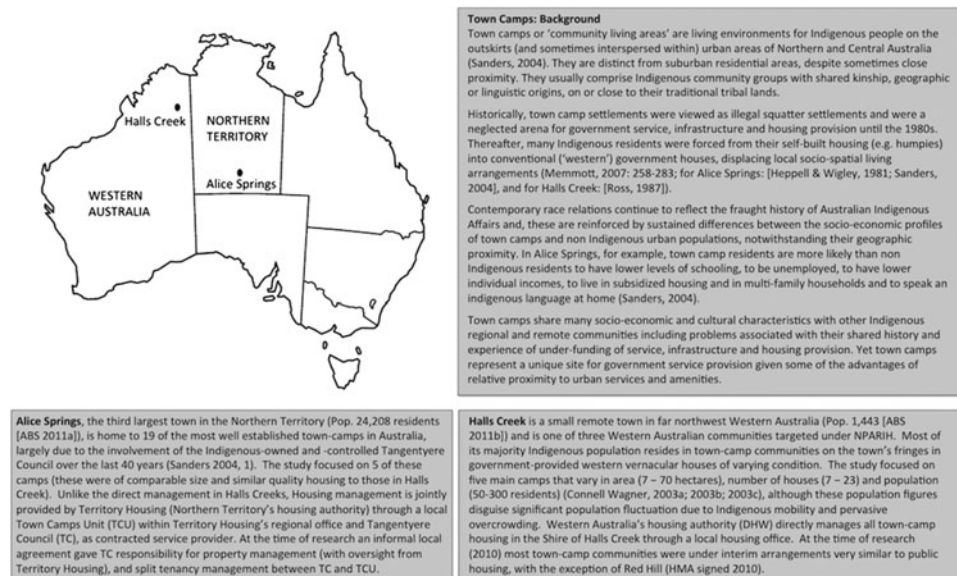
Town Camps: Background

Town camps or 'community living areas' are living environments for Indigenous people on the outskirts (and sometimes interspersed within) urban areas of Northern and Central Australia (Sanders, 2004). They are distinct from suburban residential areas, despite sometimes close proximity. They usually comprise Indigenous community groups with shared kinship, geographic or linguistic origins, on or close to their traditional tribal lands.

Historically, town camp settlements were viewed as illegal squatter settlements and were a neglected arena for government service, infrastructure and housing provision until the 1980s. Thereafter, many Indigenous residents were forced from their self-built housing (e.g. humpies) into conventional ('western') government houses, displacing local socio-spatial living arrangements (Memmott, 2007: 258-283; for Alice Springs: [Heppell & Wigley, 1981; Sanders, 2004], and for Halls Creek: [Ross, 1987]).

Contemporary race relations continue to reflect the fraught history of Australian Indigenous Affairs and, these are reinforced by sustained differences between the socio-economic profiles of town camps and non Indigenous urban populations, notwithstanding their geographic proximity. In Alice Springs, for example, town camp residents are more likely than non Indigenous residents to have lower levels of schooling, to be unemployed, to have lower individual incomes, to live in subsidized housing and in multi-family households and to speak an indigenous language at home (Sanders, 2004).

Town camps share many socio-economic and cultural characteristics with other Indigenous regional and remote communities including problems associated with their shared history and experience of under-funding of service, infrastructure and housing provision. Yet town camps represent a unique site for government service provision given some of the advantages of relative proximity to urban services and amenities.

Alice Springs, the third largest town in the Northern Territory (Pop. 24,208 residents [ABS 2011a]), is home to 19 of the most well established town-camps in Australia, largely due to the involvement of the Indigenous-owned and -controlled Tangentyere Council over the last 40 years (Sanders 2004, 1). The study focused on 5 of these camps (these were of comparable size and similar quality housing to those in Halls Creek). Unlike the direct management in Halls Creeks, Housing management is jointly provided by Territory Housing (Northern Territory's housing authority) through a local Town Camps Unit (TCU) within Territory Housing's regional office and Tangentyere Council (TC), as contracted service provider. At the time of research an informal local agreement gave TC responsibility for property management (with oversight from Territory Housing), and split tenancy management between TC and TCU.

Halls Creek is a small remote town in far northwest Western Australia (Pop. 1,443 [ABS 2011b]) and is one of three Western Australian communities targeted under NPARIH. Most of its majority Indigenous population resides in town-camp communities on the town's fringes in government-provided western vernacular houses of varying condition. The study focused on five main camps that vary in area (7 – 70 hectares), number of houses (7 – 23) and population (50-300 residents) (Connell Wagner, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c), although these population figures disguise significant population fluctuation due to Indigenous mobility and pervasive overcrowding. Western Australia's housing authority (DHW) directly manages all town-camp housing in the Shire of Halls Creek through a local housing office. At the time of research (2010) most town-camp communities were under interim arrangements very similar to public housing, with the exception of Red Hill (HMA signed 2010).

Figure 1 Indigenous Town Camps and Housing Provision: Background and Case Study Sites

selected based on the roughly comparable profile of its town camps. Figure 1 provides a brief background to the town camps and further details on these case sites.

Fieldwork was undertaken throughout 2010 to coincide with the early stages of the reforms and endeavoured to actualise best practice for ethical Indigenous sector research, including the importance of Indigenous voices in these endeavours (AIATSIS, 2002; NHMRC, 2003; NHMRC and ARC, 2007). Ethics approval was provided by RMIT University. The study involved observations and semi-structured interviews with local housing stakeholders in both study sites, complemented by key document analysis and semi-structured interviews with regional and state-level stakeholders. During several town camp visits, tenants were recruited with the assistance of either an Indigenous/non-Indigenous government housing professional or contracted housing service provider employee (for example, a tenant support worker). Recruitment of tenants was random (for example, tenants were approached during town camp visits) and targeted (i.e. tenants were known to the professional assisting in recruitment and specifically approached). Housing professionals with state, regional and local-level involvement in Indigenous housing were recruited following chains of recommendation, beginning with research project partners within state government and contacts provided by academic research partners, to incorporate insights from strategic, middle-management and frontline positions within government (dominant at state/regional levels) and within Indigenous contracted service providers for housing management or tenant support (predominantly local level). Housing professionals were predominantly non-Indigenous, especially at the regional and state level.

In total, fifty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with tenants (twenty interviews), frontline, regional and state-level housing professionals (thirty-two interviews) working across Indigenous public housing (all interviews were recorded and transcribed

then reviewed by participants) and a range of federal and state policy documents were analysed. Given the size of the Indigenous housing sector, all housing and tenant support staff are similarly referred to as 'professionals' to protect their anonymity. Other identifying information has also been removed from participants' comments and references.

Supporting town camps tenants

The interviews revealed that the provision of support to tenants in the town camps of Halls Creek and Alice Springs at the outset of the reforms was *ad hoc* and potentially ineffective. In both jurisdictions, delivery of the mandated housing induction programme was unsystematic. In Western Australia, where formal tenant support programmes were still under development, accounts by frontline staff captured discretionary approaches to support.

> We think we need to tighten up on tenancy support provision because it has been a bit 'fly by the seat of your pants'. (Professional 06WA)

In the Northern Territory, support provision was similarly problematic, albeit overall capacity (especially for case management) exceeded Halls Creek's. In both jurisdictions, tenants corroborated inadequacies and inconsistencies in support; their accounts illustrate variances in information, education and assistance provided at the outset of their tenancy. Below, a series of interrelated programmatic, organisational and operational issues are shown to impinge upon the scope and quality of support provided by housing staff and tenant support workers in the town camps.

Programmatic issues: untailored and ill-suited

A common concern amongst professionals was the mismatch between the complexity and diversity of tenants' needs and the narrow housing infrastructure focus of the mandated tenant induction programme. Over two-thirds of professionals considered its 'tick-the-box' approach inappropriate and overly simplistic, arguing that this poorly accommodated the spectrum of tenant need which ranged from low needs tenants to high needs tenants who faced complex issues including alcoholism, domestic violence, serious health issues and housing-related issues (for example, overcrowding), often in combination. Accordingly, they suggested the programme was unwarranted for some, yet inadequate for others.

> When I first read the NPARIH, I was quite taken a back that the intention, the underlying intention, that all prospective tenants be offered the Living Skills . . . Almost like if we do, this then our problems will be solved . . . But the reality is, it is not a light switch! So we've done the new Living Skills . . . And what? Everyone is just going to adhere to the RTA?! (Professional 06WA)

> Life Skills is all about education, teaching these people to live in these houses . . . But you get to the point where they know the stuff, but that there are underlying reasons why they are not doing it in their houses. (Professional 07NT)

Of these professionals, most also identified the importance of flexible and supportive housing management approaches and intensive and long-term support programs and

case management. The majority of professionals also commented that they believed frontline staff adopted a more flexible and lenient approach to support provision. This was corroborated by all frontline staff.

> That is one really different thing from the urban [public housing] model . . . like if people don't engage after three sessions, then they are off the programme [in urban]. If we did that, then we'd have no clients! You really need to take the time to get to know people . . . It might involve doing things that aren't part of the programme to build that trust. (Professional 05NT)

> I think we have a softer approach here. We don't immediately progress to a Notice to Remedy, or to legal action. (Professional 07NT)

This aligns with earlier findings of tenancy management leniency (Nethercote, 2014), as well as findings from other studies of Indigenous public policy implementation that have highlighted the discretionary practices of frontline staff and the significance of their political and moral understandings of what is appropriate and possible in these settings in determining their approach (for example, in health research, Lea, 2008).

Yet while flexible and supportive approaches are known contributors to positive tenancy outcomes in these settings (for example, Flatau *et al.*, 2009; Milligan *et al.*, 2010), the discussion that follows illustrates how organisational and operational issues surrounding tenancy support could impinge on the provision of these approaches. Further, a small number of non-local professionals challenged the limits of housing agencies' supportive role, indirectly referencing the ongoing struggle to reconcile policy agendas of anti-social behaviour and community care within social housing.

> [W]hilst it is true that people can't sustain their tenancy whilst they have got alcohol, domestic abuse, etc. problems, while those problems certainly need to be dealt with . . . But, as a landlord, where do you draw the line? (Professional 09NT)

The majority of local professionals suggested that the head tenant model, which absolved all but one householder of contractual tenancy obligations yet expected compliance from all, created specific support needs to mitigate both unmanageable pressures on head tenants (the 'house boss') and the disengagement of other householders.

> Eight new houses were handed over to tenants. By the time I returned in the afternoon, each of the bedrooms in that house was occupied by a family. So with the education, you really can't just go to the head tenant. (Professional 09WA)

> There is still a lot of pressure on the house boss, the head tenant. So that is one thing that we do a lot of work around, is helping people in the house to realise that yes, this is the house boss, but everyone needs to take responsibility for the house . . . But then some house bosses will say, only talk to me, I don't want you talking to anyone else. (Professional 05NT)

Failure to adequately anticipate and address these issues from the outset led professionals to refer to this as the reform's 'breaking point'; one professional commented: 'this is going to bring this programme down' (Professional 09WA).

Organisational issues: under-resourced and under pressure

Substantive resourcing issues also compromised the capacity to establish supportive, compassionate and pedagogical relationships between tenants and professionals. In Western Australia, support services were severely strained, with two tenant support staff from Halls Creek's urban public housing providing support 'where they had time' (Professional 01WA). In the Northern Territory, professionals were also over-stretched, notwithstanding higher overall capacity. In both jurisdictions, further resourcing pressures were anticipated when tenancies requiring more intensive supports were allocated, after the first round of judicious housing allocations to 'low needs' tenants:

> [E]ven though they can't take on any more!! . . . they [TFYS] are up to their capacity, and they can't deliver more, and that is why they are asking for more funding. (Professional 04NT)

> It is going to get harder for Territory Housing and us [TFYS] to keep across it all . . . to do all the educational stuff. We really need someone to focus on that . . . or actually we just need a lot more workers. (Professional 11NT)

These pressures, in turn, contributed to staff burnout and subsequent high staff turnover rates:

> This [support] programme is so unfunded. You're just going to get staff who get fed up, run down, sick, or who leave. (Professional 07NT)

These resourcing issues jeopardised professionals' capacity to forge strong relationships with tenants.

> That process is all about trust. To have a white lady like me come in and tell them what to do . . . you need to build that trust, that relationship, informally, getting their acceptance gradually. (Professional 06WA)

In Alice Springs, resourcing issues also undermined some of the potential benefits of service provision through an established local Indigenous service provider. In the town camps, where the professional–tenant relationship is complicated by the fraught history of government intervention and ongoing power imbalances, Flatau *et al.* (2009: 5) have argued that the impacts of such shortcomings are likely to be particularly pronounced.

High staff turnover undermined (especially non-Indigenous) staff's local knowledge and capacity for cultural sensitivity in their dealings with tenants. This is significant, as these are also recognised contributors to successful tenancy outcomes (for example, Flatau *et al.*, 2009: 5). As one professional commented:

> New people get the run around. For the tenancy stuff, local knowledge is so essential. (Professional 04NT)

Meanwhile, although Indigenous staff benefited from superior local knowledge, all local tenant support professionals identified that they faced other challenges to which non-Indigenous professionals were largely immune. These professionals detailed how tenants did not always welcome Indigenous professionals' position of power, and two Indigenous professionals indicated this sentiment could be mutual; they described their unwillingness

to 'step beyond the front door and go and tell my "aunty" how to look after her house', claiming 'it is too personal' (Identifier removed). Flint's (2012: 831) account of the critical 'fictive' kin relationship between support staff and tenants in UK housing research found that similarities (for example, shared social class and place of origin) between tenant and support staff act to mediate power relations and productive engagement within family-based tenancy support programmes in social housing. By contrast, these perspectives suggest that shared cultural heritage may not always facilitate support provision in these particular welfare settings.

Operational issues: inconsistent and ineffective

This final section shows operational issues also jeopardised the provision of tenancy support. Tenancy management inconsistencies identified in earlier work (Nethercote, 2014) were shown to convey mixed messages to tenants about the new conditions of their tenancy, heightening tenant confusion (Nethercote, 2015). In the context of tenancy support provision, most local professionals suggested these inconsistencies and mixed messages could undermine professionals' attempts to educate tenants about changes to their housing welfare conditions. Tenant support workers commented:

> So I've got one tenant that I've been working with ... trying to let them know about the new arrangements. But they've heard all these different stories about what Territory Housing is expecting, like whether they can have visitors or what happens if something gets damaged. All these mixed messages ... it's no surprise they don't know what to do! (Professional 07NT)

> At the moment, all we can do is go by whatever decisions the [housing department] make and we work in the background around the repercussions of those decisions. (Professional 05NT)

There were also structural barriers impeding support provision. Public housing management is premised on tenant access to adequate and well-maintained housing, including, for instance, functional health hardware conducive to good personal and domestic hygiene and healthy living practices. As Indigenous researchers Lea and Pholeros (2010: 192) identify when they speak of the 'nonhouse' of Indigenous housing reforms, these living environments are often not forthcoming in practice. They identify the provision of cheap, poorly constructed houses with minimal utilities and intermittent routine maintenance, but note these issues are disguised by the political and media imagery of the provision of standard suburban houses. In turn, these living conditions have been shown to complicate tenancy compliance (for example, Nethercote, 2015), and the quick deterioration of these houses also reinforces enduring myths about the incapacities of the Indigenous householder (Lea and Pholeros, 2010). However, the interviews from this study add to understandings about the consequences of these poor living environments by suggesting these may also compromise professionals' capacity to provide education and support to tenants.

> Like we'll be trying to teach the tenant about how to keep their kitchen hygienic ... How to clean the bench tops, keep the floors clean, and the sink unblocked ... But then they've got an issue with a cockroach infestation or a leaking tap ... well that doesn't help us! (Professional 03NT)

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> You are going out there to promote a standard of housing – a clean, safe healthy environment – but you've got housing below standard. (Professional 06 WA)

As a result of poor living environments, support provision was often reactive: half of local professionals described their role to 'step in and start picking up the pieces' (Professional 09WA). Finally, Nethercote (2015) also identified how issues such as poor maintenance and repairs services encouraged tenant scepticism of government commitment to their responsibilities to tenants, and that this in turn could discourage tenant adherence to their own responsibilities. In terms of tenant support provision, this tenant scepticism posed an additional barrier to tenancy compliance that professionals had to address.

Over half of all professionals anticipated that inadequate tenant support could have significant repercussions.

> You can't just give them all these new houses without the education, the programmes ... without making sure there is understanding about the new expectations, their responsibilities. The consequences will be disastrous! (Professional 01WA)

> In some ways, building houses exacerbates the problem. What you've done is built these 'you beaut' houses with quite significant structural and service problems. (Professional 09WA)

Overall, this series of programmatic, organisational and operational issues highlight the potentially problematic structuring and delivery of mutual obligations under current reforms to Indigenous housing. These findings suggest failings in the translation of the contemporary rhetoric of mutual responsibility in practice in the town camps of Alice Springs and Halls Creek at the outset of the reforms. These issues include one-size-fits-all, infrastructure-focused tenant support programmes that are ill equipped to meet the diversity of tenant needs, and a series of resourcing and housing management issues that impinge on the quality and efficacy of communication, education and supports which might otherwise have assisted tenants in meeting their new tenancy obligations. Together these shortcomings may reduce the role of tenancy supports in addressing previously identified barriers to tenancy compliance (Nethercote, 2014, 2015). These findings further reinforce existing concerns about likely tenancy outcomes from Indigenous public housing (for example, Nethercote, 2014, 2015; but also Christie and Campbell, 2013), but extend current understandings by identifying other important causes for these.

Conclusion

This article heeds political theorist White's (2000: 521) call for 'a more explicit consideration' of the conditions of 'fair reciprocity'. It finds that despite some tacit acknowledgement of the principles of 'fair reciprocity' under contemporary neoliberal welfare shifts, these may have been applied 'imperfectly' in some town camp communities in the early days of the Indigenous housing reforms. The organisational and operational issues identified here signal government struggles to fulfil their responsibilities to Indigenous tenants in these locations at that time. Remedying these issues may be straightforward in principle (for example, increased funding allocation, more staff). By contrast, the identification of programmatic issues highlights more significant tensions in

the implementation of neoliberal housing welfare in these settings, which raise concerns about how future supports can assist in addressing socio-cultural barriers to tenancy compliance.

First, neoliberal conditional welfare increases tenant responsibility based on individual agency and accountability (Flint, 2004). The funding of a tick-the-box approach ignores that benefits accrue from appropriately designed and funded intensive support strategies and programmes that can address known issues to tenancy non-compliance. More generally, this reflects the oversight of 'opportunity' under narrow neoliberal models of autonomous market subjects. In particular, (flawed) notions of a direct stimulus–response relationship between welfare conditionalities and behaviour enable the complexity of citizens' everyday lives and the socio-structural inequalities they face to remain neatly obscured from the policy gaze (King, 2006). Meanwhile, additional intensive support programmes may reduce unintended tenancy breaches (for example, by improving tenant understanding of tenancy regulations and thus their capacity to comply), but these alone cannot overcome known structural barriers to tenancy compliance (for example, substandard housing quality and maintenance). Yet implementing conditionalities when they are untenable not only undermines the legitimacy of contractual welfare, but also activates dynamics of social exclusion (for example, positioning tenants as 'free-riders', lacking in personal responsibility).

Second, neoliberal conditional welfare extends tenants' responsibilities based on 'moral communitarian duty' (for example, participation, Flint, 2004: 895). State-level community governance mechanisms call for tenant support strategies that promote and support tenant participation in these. This is especially critical as these represent a primary avenue to establish workable conditionalities that allow socio-cultural barriers to tenancy compliance to be addressed within tenancy management. Yet the culturalist dimension of these neoliberal reforms, which provides a case for ignoring government obligations towards Indigenous subjects as 'special citizens' (First People) and instead focuses narrowly on their obligations as citizens, explains in part why such opportunities may not be forthcoming. Given contemporary policy discourse on community cohesion and integration, the ways in which these programmatic oversights signal this neoliberal programme and its attempts to reinforce perceptions and constructions of cultural difference to politicise and pathologise the behaviours of particular individuals and communities is significant.

As White (2000: 521) has argued: 'Moves in the direction of welfare contractualism are just to the extent that they form part of a broader package of policies that together work to satisfy the conditions of fair reciprocity.' Key questions arise from the identification of programmatic issues about how much equality of opportunity 'fair reciprocity' requires (see White, 2000), and about the nature of these opportunities *vis-à-vis* minority communities. Ultimately, any imbalance between tenant responsibilities and tenant support/opportunities in the operation of Indigenous public housing threatens fairness, social cohesion and reciprocity – all central goals of welfare (Sage, 2012). It is this failure to deliver these 'threshold distributional conditions' by providing adequate opportunity that also undermines an argument that welfare contractualism can serve distributional justice and remain compatible with a Marshallian philosophy of social rights and social citizenship (White, 2000: 515). Finally, the suggestion that the conditions of fair reciprocity may require an uneven or differentiated provision of opportunities to accommodate for difference requires further consideration. Under the current mainstreaming agenda in

Indigenous housing there appears little risk that the provision of any such opportunities would provide a rationale for a wholly segregated and distinctive response, however, caution is needed to mitigate increased stigma and segregation arising from such responses.

Especially in the context of shifting public attitudes towards welfare claimant responsibility (for example, in the UK, Sage, 2012), robust consideration of the local circumstances under which minority tenants experience tightening housing welfare conditionalities is timely. This is important not simply to redirect political and policy focus from behaviour to structural deficiencies, including (material) circumstances and support environments (Taylor-Gooby, 2013), and to stem further pathologisation and stigmatisation of these individuals/groups, but to better grasp how new responsibilities might be matched by the provision of adequate opportunities/supports to work towards achieving a fairer reciprocity. As a start, this requires, in the Indigenous Australian context, strategies to secure better data on tenancy support outcomes, given known difficulties in confirming the efficacy of tenant support programs through the increasing use of econometric assessments. Further, while 'fair reciprocity' was raised here in the context of public housing, its operation within social housing, where the social contract is dispersed from the state, also deserves attention.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 The term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) group/individuals is commonly used in the UK to refer to non-Caucasian population groups. On the basis of this journal's provenance and my engagement with the British literature, I adopt this usage here, whilst also noting its various usages including occasions where BME is inclusive of Indigenous groups/individuals. However, to distinguish (and acknowledge) the unique historical background of indigenous peoples based on cultural difference and diversity and their history of trauma, neglect and marginalisation, I use the term 'Indigenous' (Australian) in this article to specify these individuals/communities. Finally, the term 'minority' community/individual is used here as a broad identifier to refer to both BME and indigenous individuals/communities. These terminologies are adopted with recognition of the difficulties and contestation surrounding categorisations of minority households via ethnic designations. They are also adopted with acute awareness of problematic assumptions of homogeneity (and the existence of 'difference within difference'), of oversimplifications of the notion of culture within these (Phillips, 2011), and that 'cultural particularisms are not fixed but constantly reproduced' (Colic-Peisker and Farquharson, 2011: 581; Markkanen and Harrison, 2013).

2 These neoliberal accounts acknowledge both the contested nature of the term, not least in these settings where the 'market fix' is unknown, and fracturing within the bureaucracy that ensures the now subordinate social democratic notions of equity and justice persist (Altman, 2014).

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