New nomads: the dispossession of the consumer in social housing

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Abstract

With the advent of flexible tenancies, marketised rents, the abolition of a consumer-focused regulator and the disbanding of the National Tenant Voice, three decades of efforts to induce consumer pressure in the English social housing sector have been abandoned by the Coalition Government. It appears social housing tenants in England are no longer to be considered as consumers and have been returned instead to their stigmatised identity as welfare dependents. While these twin identities have long characterised the position of tenants in the social housing sector, the promise of liberty and equality inherent in the role of the consumer has been the basis through which the quality of the offer of social housing has been maintained and through which claims on social citizenship have been launched. This paper analyses the mechanisms by which a consumer identity has been mobilised to ensure the resilience of the social housing sector in the face of continuous governmental erosion. Drawing on a detailed positioning analysis of discussions in tenants' organisations, it investigates the use of a consumer identity in collective mobilisations to defend the quality of the sector and, inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Hardt and Negri, it provides a theoretical framework through which to consider the potential for future claims on social citizenship on the margins of housing policy.

Introduction

A thirty-year project to transform social housing tenants into sovereign consumers has been abandoned by the Coalition Government in England. In the removal of security and affordability from public housing, the abolition of a consumer-focused regulator and the disbanding of a consumer watchdog, it is clear that social housing tenants are no longer to be considered as bearers of rights and are to be returned instead to their identity as 'irresponsible, workshy and undeserving' (Card 2006: 54).

While the identity of consumer has ushered the transformative dynamics of the market through public housing services it rested on a charter of tenants rights enacted in the 1980 Housing Act that provided for security of tenure and the evolution of an expanding range of consultation mechanisms (Lowe 1997). Tenants were to be empowered as consumers whose participation in their housing service provided them with experience of the responsibilities typically associated with property ownership, seen as the hallmark of the empowered citizen (Hart, Jones & Bains 1997). In its introduction of flexible tenancies, marketised rents and in the relegation of consumer regulation to an afterthought, the Coalition Government's Localism Bill signals the abandonment of this project and the end of thirty years of efforts to induce consumer pressure in English social housing sector.

This paper positions the social housing reforms of the Localism Bill as the latest policy attempt to reduce the competitive quality of the social housing sector, and argues that this is directly related to the success of the project of the consumer in revitalising the values of social citizenship in a residual housing sector and enabling its resurgence as a tenure with mass appeal. Social renting emerged as the only product that could withstand the collapse of the housing market in 2008. Thousands of potential homeownership properties were converted into social units to rent (Birch 2009), while nearly 100,000 extra people joined their local authorities' housing waiting lists (Rogers 2009). These were pointed reminders of the resilience of the

collective model of public services. Perhaps the most suggestive of all signs of the resurgence of social citizenship was the re-emergence of the 'limpet tenant' in contemporary housing discourse with claims that social housing tenants could be high-earners who were 'silting-up' a subsidised welfare service (Jacobs, Kemeny & Mazi 2003). A project to transform tenants into consumers had succeeded in bringing social housing back from the 'outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being' (Butler 1993: 121) to recover its potential as a tenure of popular choice.

Drawing on research with members of social housing tenants' organisations, and tenants who are active in the governance and scrutiny processes of their housing organisations, this paper charts the resurgence of claims of social citizenship among tenant-consumers. From analysis of audio recordings of focus groups and interviews with over 140 social housing tenants, it identifies the discursive journey that is made from the economic rights of the consumer to reclaim the social rights of the citizen. In asserting the consumer as a bearer of social rights, tenants in this research also reclaim a model of social housing as a universal public service, depicting it as a de-commodified service which engenders co-operation and mutual aid and constructs social relations within shared public space. These values are situated in opposition to the individualising tendencies of the market, and especially to the dynamic of home ownership.

The paper evidences the resilience of these claims of social citizenship and the accompanying values associated with de-commodification. Inspired by the political theories of Deleuze and Guattari and Hardt and Negri it then attempts to construct a framework within which the effects of flexible tenancies, and the further residualisation of social housing might be assessed, and it concludes with some hope that a nomadic tenant body may still launch fresh claims on the rights of social citizenship.

The resilience of social rented housing

Jim Kemeny's (1995) theory of maturation expresses the property of cost rental housing that gives it a competitive edge over the private market. The social housing sector in England exemplified this maturation process in the period 1945 to 1980 when the size of the private rented sector shrunk from 54 per cent to less than 14 per cent as the public housing sector expanded from 12 per cent to 31 per cent (Hamnett 1999). It was to circumvent this competitive ability, and to siphon off the surplus created by rent pooling, that the Thatcher Conservative government brought in the Right to Buy in 1980, encouraging working and especially dual income tenant households to leave the sector and generating revenue from the privatisation of mature assets. Following the lifting of rent controls in the 1989 Housing Act the private rental sector began to expand, freed from the competitive edge of a now-truncated social housing sector.

The package of social housing reforms proposed by the Coalition Government in the Localism Bill (HC 2010/11 55/1) aims to have a second swipe at the competitive strengths of what Kemeny calls cost renting. The removal of security of tenure through the introduction of Flexible Tenancies reduces the quality of the offer of social housing, and makes it comparable in tenancy rights to the private rented market. In addition housing associations are encouraged to use the private rental market as their benchmark when setting 'Affordable Rents' for new social housing tenants, thus reducing to a thin margin the distinction in cost between the sectors. The measures aim to realise the asset value of social housing by raising rents to near market levels and apply it to reduce public spending. The conservative think-tank Localis prepared the ground when it valued the country's social housing stock at £300 billion and complained that the rate of return on that asset was less than 1 per cent. Localis authors Greenhalgh & Moss (2009: 14) called for the tearing down of the 'Berlin Wall of varying tenure and rent levels that operates between the private rented and social housing sectors'. The social housing

reforms of the Coalition achieve this aim by liquidating the value and reducing the quality of cost renting.

The package of rights in the 1980 Housing Act granting security of tenure and family succession are to be undone to reduce the competitive edge of social housing. But another set of implied rights contained in the 1980 Act is also to be withdrawn by the Coalition Government. This is the identification of tenants as consumers, and with the disbandment of the Tenant Services Authority and the National Tenants Voice a thirty year re-imagining of the welfare user as sovereign consumer has been terminated. The project of the tenant consumer formed the main vehicle for policies aimed at transforming social housing along market lines and it has been undoubtedly successful in instilling in social housing the processes of business management and the neo-market dynamics of choice, and has transformed the ownership and governance of the sector through transfers and quasi-markets. The launch of the Tenant Services Authority as the new regulator of social housing organisations in late 2008 and the creation of a National Tenants Voice as a consumer watchdog organisation in 2010 appeared to announce an escalation of this process. The Tenant Services Authority was described by its Chief Executive, Peter Marsh as a consumer-centred regulator with a mission to drive up standards of service for all tenants in affordable housing, providing comparative information on landlord performance, and opening up the possibility that tenants could switch housing management suppliers. Marsh promised tenants that their views on performance would be made central to the business management of social housing (Marsh 2008). In a parallel development a consumer watchdog organisation, the National Tenant Voice was set up on the advice of Martin Cave's review of housing regulation in order to uphold the tenant interest against the well-resourced and articulate producers' lobby. The National Tenant Voice, although intended to run on the model of the consumer panels of the regulated industries, captured the imagination of tenants and was shaped by a tenant-led project group whose final report *Citizens of Equal Worth* defined the role of the Voice as increasing 'the opportunities for social tenants to have a strong collective influence over the

policies that affect them' (NTV Project Group 2008: 14). Both these organisations represented further steps in the marketisation of public housing services, yet both appeared to offer tenants a promise of improved status through the guise of the consumer. In 2010 both the Tenant Services Authority and the National Tenant Voice were abolished, victims of the 'bonfire of the quangos' ignited by the Coalition Government (Cameron 2009). The regulatory framework for social housing that replaced them gave scant attention to the role of the consumer, providing backstop protection only (CLG 2010). While the new regulatory process continued a pace with the deregulation of public housing services it appeared to put a halt to the project of the consumer as a vehicle for recommodification. Coupled with the overhaul of security of tenure and affordable rents contained in the Localism Bill, the retreat from consumer promotion to consumer protection in Coalition Government housing policy is marked.

The consumer provides a flexible identity and one ambiguous enough to be adaptable to a range of social aims. 'Consumerism has been one of the most recurring means by which citizens have moulded their political consciousness and shaped their political organisations' Matthew Hilton (2003: 1) maintained. The rise of the consumer in social housing appears to have enabled the tenure's resurgence in status, and created material evidence of the increasing popularity of the sector. The strongest signal that the social housing sector might be set to regain a competitive edge over profit renting was the re-emergence of the 'limpet tenant' in housing policy discourse. The supposedly wealthy yet subsidised 'Jaguar-driving council tenant' who occupied a tenure now intended for the poorest and most vulnerable was a spectre that dominated housing policy throughout the 1960s, and became the target of two government White Papers (Malpass 1990). Keith Jacobs, Jim Kemeny and Tony Manzi (2003) charted the campaign mounted by *The People* newspaper to vilify the so-called 'limpet' tenants who had the means to become owner-occupiers yet remained in council housing. Issue after issue of the newspaper called attention to 'The Great Council House Scandal' and pursued examples of alleged abuse, identifying the tenants with expensive cars, the bookmakers

with council homes, and the property tycoon with a subsidised flat. In February 1966, the paper quoted Labour's Housing Minister Richard Crossman saying: 'The present system has led to a cosseted and privileged class in our society – the council house tenant. These people are jealous of their privileged position – because a council house is a prize hard to come by,' (The People 6 February 1966 quoted in Jacobs et al 2003: 311). The Coalition Government's invention of Flexible Tenancies in 2010 was first introduced by Prime Minister David Cameron as a response to the problem of working social housing tenants who were earning sufficient to buy in the private market. Following in the footsteps of the People, The Daily Mail was quick to re-frame the limpet tenant as a 21st Century social spectre with the claim that: 'Almost a fifth of council households earn more than the national average wage - with tens of thousands taking in more than £50,000 a year' (Martin 2010). This message was oddly contradictory since earlier proposals aiming to remove security of tenure had based their arguments on the poverty of 'council' tenants, stressing the deprivation associated with social housing estates, and the lack of social mobility and opportunity the tenure offered (Dwelly & Cowans 2006).

The growing confidence of council tenants in the 1960s was chronicled by John Hayes (1988), working for the tenants' federation the Association of London Housing Estates, who recalled their optimism and aspiration, and refusal to accept a role as second-class citizens. These aspirational tenants were those targeted in the Right to Buy and encouraged to leave the sector so that social housing could continue its downward slide towards residualisation. Yet thirty years of the tenant consumer had apparently restored the fortunes of the sector, and even, if we are to believe the Daily Mail, the fortunes of many of its residents. Transforming tenants into consumers has perhaps achieved more than government policy intended. Although it has unarguably furthered the re-commodification of the social housing sector, it has also, and paradoxically, reasserted the popularity of decommodified public services. The next section explores the discursive process through which this transformation has taken place.

Consumers and social citizenship

The citizen-consumer is the anticipated product of a process of welfare restructuring that rejects notions of entitlement and social rights in favour of the civil rights of the market. Home ownership and consumption have become synonymous with responsible citizenship under the New Labour & Coalition governments, and this award of rights has demarcated those residents of the private market from social housing tenants who as flawed consumers find their citizenship contingent (Bauman 1998). Attempts to transform these imagined welfare tenants into rational consumers by instituting choice in lettings or, through stock transfer, choice of landlord have dominated housing policy for the last three decades. Choice and voice have been the methods used to insinuate market relations into public services and to transform the welfare subject into the enterprising citizen-consumer. While the opportunities for choice in the introduction of competition have been limited in the social housing sector, it has fallen to voice (Hirschman 1970) to carry this transformative effect.

Voice, originally considered as political action, was adopted in economic theory as a mechanism 'like the market' (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 386); conflated with market forces it was argued that voice brought about 'behaviour modification in providers' (Paul 1994: 3). The belief that voice provided market-like stimuli that could steer the behaviour of providers in lieu of a competitive market deeded it with performative power (Finlayson 2003). The performative operates according to John Austin (1976: 14) through 'an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect'. In the regulated social housing sector performative voice exerts its corrective force through a menu of nine involvement options (TSA & Audit Commission 2010). In surveys or focus groups, as mystery shoppers or on estate inspections, as directors or on residents' panels, the mere presence of tenants in landlord decision-making processes carries the transformative impact of consumer pressure. To take part in authorised participation processes, through one or

more of the nine involvement options, is to become an empowered consumer exercising rational choice in the market place.

The identification of tenants as consumers is produced through the appropriation of Hirschman's (1970) 'voice' to cite an idealised market transferred to the realm of public housing services. For Judith Butler (1993: 2) this is an example of the 'reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' but, importantly, Butler adds that 'discourse has many more aims and effects than those that are actually intended by its users' (Butler 2000: 157). Hirschman's 'voice' contains a range of meanings that are not cited in its performative application of a consumer identity. In Albert Hirschman's original definition of 'voice' it appears as collective action applied in a political rather than economic context (Hirschman & Nelson 1976: 386). In each reiteration voice becomes susceptible to a return of these alternative meanings, or as Butler (2000: 158) explains 'discourse can produce the possibilities of identities that it means to foreclose'. In the performative ritual of voice tenants are reminded of excluded voices and are presented with a discursive opportunity to engage with a 'voice' that extends the identity of the consumer into questions of power relations, citizenship and politics.

This re-articulation of voice is achieved through the linguistic ambiguities inherent in the expressions of citizenship and consumerism, and through the bi-lingual facility of voice to express these as rival traditions and as a unitary, if hyphenated, concept. T.H. Marshall's renowned definition of citizenship entailed the possession of three sets of rights: civil rights that provide for property ownership and grant equality before the law, political rights to vote and take part in decision-making, and contested social rights that allow for an equitable distribution of surplus goods. In the discourse of public service reform, rights to property have assumed a privileged position so that the political right to 'voice' has been elided with the civil rights of the citizen to participate in the market. While the concept of social rights has been whittled away, and the idea of entitlement guaranteed by the State has been all-but

erased, the expectation of service quality and the ability to exercise consumer influence have become enshrined as constitutional rights for the users of public services (Barron & Scott 1992). This confinement of political and social rights within a commodity transaction leaves behind a marker that enables claims to be made on notions of justice that have been marginalised but not fully excluded (Nicholls & Beaumont 2004). Voice therefore maintains a strong and dynamic discourse of rights that allows it to capture the political and civil identities of citizenship, and express through them the shadow of a claim to social rights.

At a discussion at the conference of tenant participation agency TPAS in 2010, Nick conducts a tortuous but illuminating linguistic journey around the troublesome concept of the consumer-citizen:

> If you're a tenant you're in a relationship with a, a landlord, you know you're having this, and, um, that, that's a sort of contractual relationship even if you've got other rights, what the tenants movement has attached to those rights, I think ultimately, originally there was, it was just a you and them relationship, I think the tenants movement for me is about making links with other tenants who are in similar situations so that sort of one to one contractual relationship is, is seen in the context of your, your neighbours and your community because there's usually one landlord for a lot of tenants.

In the first stage in this journey Nick breaches the isolation of the individual consumer to establish a collective contract, while implicitly misdirecting the relationship from the housing service to encompass a concept of neighbourhood and community. In the development of this argument below, Nick uses the rights inherent in 'voice' to affirm the existence of a social movement that goes beyond the contractual relationship and the confines of a landlord-tenant service.

But its about, it's the struggle to try to win rights that go beyond that original deal, offer from the landlord which is on the landlord's terms, I mean what you're given. I mean the ten- tenants' movement is a kind of self-parodying term, because it's about your home. Tenant is what the landlord calls you, ((laughs)) you know, that's their term for you, you know, you know. It's your home and it's giving, it's working with your neighbours to give yourself rights to stay in that home and to make sure that home becomes a community.

In elaborating a concept of home and community, Nick indicates the adaptability of voice's performative power. By accessing a vocabulary of rights through voice, Nick is able to exit the market definition of housing entirely and to construct the outline of a de-commodified service, voicing housing as security, housing as a social right. The language of exit and voice appears easily adaptable to the identity talk of social movements, since it can proceed from a lack of choice to an appeal for equality and then on to the vocabulary of struggle, as Steven illustrates in the same discussion:

So movement, the word movement to me suggests where there's an inequality between the person providing the, whatever you want to call it, the service, the object, and the person receiving it. There's an inequality and often the person receiving these services, or whatever it is, may be static in that place, so the only way to change what you have and what you're stuck in, and where you've got no choice, is to coalesce and form with your fellow people and try and band together and share in a movement, in a, actually act against whoever's providing you with a service, and housing very much fits into that, social housing fits into that, because there virtually is no market, there virtually is no choice.

As voice ranges from consumer rights to social rights and from the commodity to the de-commodified, it also conjures up a legacy of political struggle for rights, bestowing on the consumer an identity as political activist, a campaigner in a long line of social struggles. To sum up, voice, the

constitutive power of the dominant model of participation, is assumed to have a performative market effect in that the mere presence of tenants in decision-making processes influences the outcome. This market-place definition excludes more political notions of collective action or democracy from the meaning of participation and constructs an identity for tenants around their constrained role as consumers. Tenants in this study, however, appear to resignify the meaning of voice, while still adopting it as a performative. In their discourse, voice carries with it an awareness of a tradition of struggle, and conceals within its market discipline a language of rights that can range from civil to social. Claims to a de-commodified public service are rediscovered, accessed and performed from within a definition of the marketised consumer.

In reclaiming a de-commodified service from the confines of the commodity tenants attribute to social housing the benefits of community and co-operation. Starting from an appreciation of the convenience of a housing management and repairs service, and of superior design and building specifications, they present social housing as inherently superior to the isolation and poor quality of the private sector. The benefits of public housing are catalogued in this TPAS conference focus group from 2009:

> Clare: There are a lot of people in the private sector say 'oh wish we could get that, wish we could have someone come and repair our homes within a few hours of a flood burst' and, I mean I think we're very privileged people
>
> Sarah: I think we're better off than those in private accommodation to be honest
>
> Clare: To get repairs done, to have someone
>
> Linda: You just pay your rent and you get it all done

It is not just the management services integral to social renting that distinguish the tenure, however. Barbara, secretary of her tenants association, points to

the quality of building design in the social housing sector, and the benefits of renting from regulated landlords:

> I'm quite proud of the fact that I'm a council tenant. I've got a beautiful home and I live in an area where sheds are let and if you could see the condition of some of the private, its called shed city, in some of the houses that the private landlords let and expect people to live, you'd be, like me, proud to be a council tenant.

John, a member of a tenants' federation, gives these claims a historical context, and echoing a tradition of tenant struggle, reflects on the council house building programme of the 1945 Labour government, to characterise private housing development as substandard and unresponsive to housing need:

> You look at the development after the war and if it wasn't for the principle of quality in social housing, we could have got a lot of speculative building, like we have now, a lot of rabbit hutches.

The association of social housing with social welfare and public good is easily transposed to present the tenure as essentially co-operative. In a focus group at the 2009 TPAS conference, Robert explains that social interaction is intrinsic to the tenure, and alien to the owner occupied sector:

> Social housing, social as in interacting with other human beings, that's what social means. We are in a great position because we've got a quality of life which is far superior to people stuck in their private bloody little houses.

In these contentions the dominant narrative of deprivation and failure attributed to public housing is swept away to present the sector as purveying social benefits that are unavailable in the marketplace. The social rights implicit in de-commodified services are here presented as powerful dynamics

that can oppose and potentially transform the individualism and selfishness of a consumer society. This presentation of a de-commodified public service is expanded by tenants to makes claims on public space as a territory defined by relationships of mutual aid and co-operation and under threat from the forces of the private market and its individualising tendencies. In an interview at his tenants' federation office, John applies this concept beyond the limits of social renting to reclaim a sense of working class commonality in opposition to the divisions of housing consumption that now act as permanent barriers:

> It's about making them see if you live on a mixed estate you all own the estate. They are all of equal value when it comes to community values. They own their community and it's about working together, working in partnership. It's difficult for a tenant that's bought his own home. He may think he's made a vast leap forward; he may think he's better than tenants – it's just a mental attitude.

In a focus group, Gary presents the decision of his tenant management organisation to take over the running of the estate as aiming to recover public space for the community. Indicating a small space on a piece of paper he says:

> A lot of people now if that's their house, that's their space isn't it?

Another tenant manager, Marcie, makes clear at a TPAS focus group that this is a vision of community as a place of democracy; streets are political places and politics is played out in a spatial field as Henri Lefebvre maintained.

> Community for me means that we are, we discuss with our neighbours, our friends, the people around us the problems we have within housing.

This section has evidenced the resurgence of claims on the rights of social citizenship made possible through the equalising identity of the consumer applied to stigmatised tenants. These are powerful contentions of the value of

de-commodification and its benefits as a public good and represent the resilience of the social housing sector and its ability to assert competitive pressure on the private market. This potential was suddenly realised in the market collapse of 2008 as the next section maintains.

The new nomads

Messages circulated amongst tenants about the superiority of social housing and the value of de-commodification were made accessible to all in the period following the collapse of international finance in 2008 when housing construction stalled and mortgage lending dried up. The limitations of the private market and the advantages of a de-commodified housing sector were made clear as waiting lists for public housing soared, and the Homes and Communities Agency rode to the rescue of ailing developers to transform homes to buy into social housing to let. The resurrection of the stigmatised social rented sector as general needs housing was exemplified in the Brown government's amendments to council lettings policies to open up allocations to working tenants and lift the implicit means test imposed by residualisation (CLG 2009).

In 2010, as market dominance is reasserted and de-commodified services are sacrificed to bail-out finance capital, political focus has once more returned to social housing, not this time as the sink of deprivation but as a potential threat to the supremacy of the commodity. The social housing reforms to tenure, rent and regulation contained in the Localism Bill attack the attributes that express the social and material benefits of de-commodified services, and that provide their competitive thrust. In particular the imposition of flexible tenancies, which will end security of tenure and limit new social housing tenants to a residency of, at minimum, two years, creates an equivalence between the rights of the de-commodified sector and its commodified counterpart in private renting, while, in addition, threatening to nullify the sector's association with community, co-operation and collective action. Responses to the Coalition Government's social housing reforms have

stressed the impact flexible tenancies will have on community cohesion, community safety and sustainability. Although it will be at the discretion of housing providers to implement flexible tenancies, and to decide on the length of tenancy granted, the outlook of more than 250,000 new households every year being given only short-life housing has raised a spectre of community breakdown (see for example Garden Court Chambers Housing Team 2011, or Kelly 2011).

The breakdown of security entailed in the introduction of flexible tenancies is paralleled not just in private sector housing but in contemporary labour relations, and the shattering of the bonds of community, and the onset of insecurity and individual risk are firmly associated with the supremacy of global capital and the globalised accumulation of commodities.

> *'Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned' (Marx & Engels 1848)*

In recent times this break-down of community and of unitary relations has taken physical form and become the new spectre haunting Europe: the migrant worker. The migrant has become a necessity for capital accumulation and a problem for nation states. In the increasing flow of migrants, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000: 398) see a new challenge to what they call Empire, or the global order of capital, and argue: 'Empire must restrict and isolate the spatial movements of the multitude to stop them from gaining political legitimacy.' But capital must be careful not to restrict the productivity of the migrant too much because it depends on its further extension. Hardt and Negri, then, conceive of the migrant as a symbol of a new revolutionary class, the multitude, or all those who work under capital (Hardt & Negri 2005).

In proposing this political philosophy, they draw on the radical critique of capitalism expounded in 'Anti-Oedipus' (1977) and 'A Thousand Plateaus' (1987) by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their concept of global capital as *deterritorialisation,* as an inevitable force that rips apart all communities, uproots people and products, and mobilises all things as material for its accumulation. Celebrating the power of deterritorialisation to break-down the disciplinary dynamics of community, Deleuze and Guattari promote it as an effect that exceeds the regulatory intent of capitalism and has the potential to create unbounded freedoms. In 'A Thousand Plateaus' this expression of liberty in conveyed through the character of the nomad; nomads are the antithesis and the nemesis of state and capital. Where the task of the state is to control space and the task of capital is to capture all flows as commodities, the nomad is 'the vector of deterritorialisation' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 53). The nomadic relation to territory 'is a very special kind of distribution, one without division into shares, in a space without borders or enclosure'. Paradoxically, the nomad is not defined by movement, 'the nomad is one that does not depart, does not want to depart' (Ibid: 51). In this thesis, Deleuze & Guattari construe the destruction of all security, community and sedimented social relations as a positive dynamic. The creation of new nomads has the potential for the construction of de-commodified space; a territory that has no owners, no borders, and that is enjoyed by all in common. 'Imagine no possessions' may be an invocation of personal hardship and loss, but it is also the clarion call of a new commons.

Hardt and Negri's concept of 'the common' which they use to define the political challenge of the multitude, expresses the resilience of claims on social citizenship from among a divided, nomadic population. In arguing 'the production of the common always involves a surplus that cannot be expropriated by capital', Hardt and Negri (2005: 212) remind us of the ability of social housing to generate surplus through the process of maturation but also of its uncanny ability to reassert a competitive superiority despite all that the market bias in housing policy intends. While the imposition of flexible tenancies and the social housing reforms of the Coalition government are

clearly aimed as crushing the resurgent claims of social citizenship, it is by no means certain that the principles of de-commodified housing will be lost as territorialised social housing tenants are transformed into the new nomads. Although there is no denying the human cost of these measures, the social housing sector has demonstrated consistent resilience in the face of policies aimed at stifling its competitive ability. If a new nomadic existence is the lot of future social housing tenants it is likely that fresh claims on social citizenship will emerge and that the concept of the commons, of common ownership of space, services and goods, will rise again.

Conclusion

The housing reforms of the Localism Bill are a response to the resurgence of the social housing sector, and act to undermine its competitive appeal and skim off its asset value. This resurgence is the outcome of a thirty year project to construct tenants as consumers in order to introduce market values into public housing, and transform its management and ownership. The construction of the tenant consumer has provided a discourse from which social housing tenants have reclaimed the rights of social citizenship implicit in the tenure, rights which were seen to be enormously attractive in the market crash of 2008, and threatened the re-establishment of market supremacy. The effects of the Localism Bill may negate much of the value of the social housing sector, substituting everlasting uncertainty for security of tenure, and constant agitation for community sustainability. However, it is unlikely that they will prevent the emergence of fresh claims on the rights of social citizenship. In the absence of the unitary relations of community, and separated from the bonds of territory, the desire for a return to de-commodified relations is likely to generate further, and perhaps less-manageable tensions.

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