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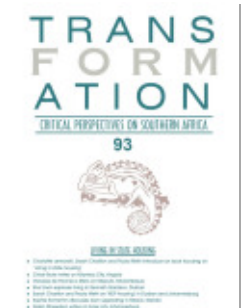
Article

Lived experiences of state housing in Johannesburg and Durban[1]

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Abstract

A focus on the lived experiences of beneficiaries of South Africa's main housing programme reveals its diverse results, which challenge more straightforward readings of it in either largely positive or largely negative terms. Incorporating specific findings from previous studies in the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg and Durban, the article explores a range of emotions, experiences and effects of the housing benefit across three dimensions: first, beneficiaries' interactions with their housing; second, gendered experiences; and third, citizenship practices. Discussing different aspects of the lived experience of the housing sheds light on the effects of policy on people's lives, helping to refine and distinguish multiple facets of an often unqualified and limited portrayal of the housing 'beneficiary'. These complex, and at times conflicting, inscriptions, impressions and effects are read against particular socio-economic contexts. Outcomes reveal some sense of inclusion at the same time that wider patterns of inequality persist, to a large extent echoing Anand and Rademacher's (2011) analyses of public housing initiatives in Mumbai.

Introduction

The lived experiences of those living in state-subsidised housing in South Africa are under-researched but can powerfully illustrate the housing programme's multi-faceted effects. In this article these are shown to include how the housing benefit fosters a form of inclusion despite its limited ability to contribute to more substantive reform. The article discusses the dominant component of South Africa's National Housing Subsidy Programme, known colloquially as 'RDP housing', from the perspective of housing beneficiaries. Central to the post-apartheid national psyche and lauded as representing the state's anti-poverty agenda, the housing programme is widely recognised as one of the world's most comprehensive in terms of the size of subsidy

provided, inclusion of services and targeting of a large number of very low or no-income households. There is a growing and diverse body of research including critiques of the programme for creating 'slum' communities that house the poor in small and badly-constructed housing on the urban periphery, far from amenities (see for example Gilbert 2004), and other, often single-project accounts, of subsidy housing communities at the scale of the settlement (see for example Lemanski 2009) . In contrast, this article explores RDP housing across two of South Africa's major metropolitan areas, drawing on the authors' studies from Johannesburg and Durban to analyse how the housing programme is experienced by those living in its houses. The article highlights a range of themes across the two cities in specifically analysing firstly, how beneficiaries interact with, relate to and are impacted by their housing (economically, socially, and spatially); secondly, the ways in which housing experiences are gendered; and thirdly, the complex relationship between state housing and citizenship practices. Through disaggregating lived experiences of the housing, the article deepens understandings of the effect of policy on people's lives, and humanises and gives texture to the often undifferentiated notion of the housing 'beneficiary'. The multiple ways in which the housing programme imprints and impacts on diverse residents are complex and at times contradictory, opening for deeper interrogation.

South Africa's National Housing Subsidy Programme

The National Housing Subsidy Programme was introduced by the ANC-led government on taking power in 1994 as one of its key welfare initiatives, with a view to redressing apartheid inequities in quality of living and access to property. The programme is substantial and has, to date, delivered around four million houses, mostly in the form of newly-built houses for private ownership in low-income or, more recently some mixed income, residential neighbourhoods. The state draws on the private sector to deliver housing units and related infrastructure, and earlier attempts at meaningful community or end-user involvement in the projects have largely fallen away. At the scale of the settlement or neighbourhood, allocation of housing has in recent years involved the ward councillor and local committees (Tissington et al 2013). Eligibility criteria for the fully grant-funded RDP housing include a maximum household income level (R3,500), having a co-habiting partner or dependents, being over the age of 21 for legal contractual competence, and being a South African citizen or permanent

resident (Tissington 2011).

By far the majority of government expenditure and delivery within its overall housing programme has been on this RDP housing, targeting the 54 per cent of South African households falling below the R3,500 income threshold (Melzer 2015), using capital funding for land acquisition, engineering services, the house and other development costs, but not for any ongoing or maintenance expenses. The built form is commonly detached single-storey houses. These initially often took the form of very basic starter or core units requiring extension and completion by the recipient (Huchzermeyer 2003), but since 2000 have had to meet material quality and size specifications, initially pegged at around 30m² but increasing to around 40m² (with regional variations). More recently, housing designs have responded to criticisms of sprawling low-rise and low-density settlements by including some terraced-style two storey and semi-detached structures. The majority of the housing has been built on the peripheries of cities where land is cheaper and available but well-located housing has also been constructed in some areas (Charlton 2014). Delivery has been hampered by, amongst other things, a lack of capacity, the complex administrative machinery which has accompanied the large scale national programme, and contestations over suitable and available land for development, and has slowed from a peak of around 270,000 units per annum in 2006/7 to about 150,000 in 2013/14 (DHS 2014). Whilst the overall quantity of housing delivered has been remarkable, the 2011 census data suggested an estimated 48 per cent of South African households across all income groups still lived in housing defined as inadequate (Melzer 2015), and there remains a clamour for delivery. In recent years, discourse in national government has suggested the continuation of the programme is fiscally unsustainable and some form of policy change is under discussion (Cross 2013).

Key debates and a need to focus on beneficiary experiences

The South African housing programme has been extensively studied: over 400 sources were catalogued in a government-commissioned review in 2015 for example (DHS 2015). A significant line of critique targets the perceived failure of the programme to transform apartheid urban spatial structure and offer significant opportunity to its recipients through locational advantage (Huchzermeyer 2001), with the fiscally-contained capital subsidy instrument blamed for encouraging low density edge development on cheap land (Gilbert 2004), and criticism of the emphasis on private ownership and

failure to tackle vested property interests hostile to low-income development (Huchzermeyer 2001a). The programme is intended as an intervention into poverty (Charlton and Kihato 2006), with the discourse of 'asset-building' featuring since the policy amendment of 2004 known as Breaking New Ground (BNG). However the programme has been critiqued for its limited impact on poverty or its negative consequences for poverty (Baumann 2003, Lemanski 2009, Cross 2013), and its disappointing performance as a financial or property asset (DHS 2015), reflecting also 'downward-raiding' and displacement in some well-located areas rather than the envisaged trajectory to better housing (see Lemanski 2014). This sale or rental of state subsidised housing to wealthier residents (often outside of legal processes) reflects the shortage of alternative affordable housing, restrictive mortgage requirements as well as the livelihood and financial needs of the original owner. While this trade shows some performance of the housing as a financial asset, other dimensions of asset functioning are less clear: Marais et al contend that use of the housing as an income-generating asset tends to remain at a survivalist rather than a wealth-creating level (DHS 2015) and can result in the original owner being forced into substandard and poorly located housing. This review of the extent to which the initiative has helped build assets for both households and municipalities is one of a long line of self-reflection within government, and extends more typical discourse on assets and housing in SA to a welfare perspective which emphasises psychological and social dimensions of asset-building (DHS 2015, Venter et al 2015). An emphasis on social outcomes intersects with a line of evaluation focused on housing satisfaction, extending to qualitative studies privileging the views of recipients (see for example Zack and Charlton 2003) and surfacing perspectives on decency and dignity (such as Ross 2010), and violence and gender dynamics (Meth 2015).

Despite the extensive body of work only very partially surveyed here, we contend there remains a significant gap in fully understanding the experience of RDP housing in people's lives, relevant not only to assessments of its policy effectiveness but also to its wider impacts. Considerable variation in the programme, between and within regions, across time periods, and in terms of expectations, perceived value and outcomes, all mediated by a broader socio-economic context of poverty, unemployment and social stress (Charlton 2009), means that the successes and shortcomings of the programme defy straightforward assessment. We argue for building a more detailed and differentiated picture of an intervention which is highly

complex in the manner in which specific, project-level interpretations of the national programme intersect with varied and fragile life circumstances under conditions of poverty.

Anand and Rademacher (2011) portray similar complexity in slum dweller's responses to formal housing delivery in Mumbai, which serve to destabilise observers' and official accounts of the housing intervention as either marginalising poor residents or as benevolently serving them. Slum dwellers' own practices and aspirations are for inclusion in the housing programme and through this attaining a form of citizenship, yet at the same time the authors show the housing's limits in shifting patterns of inequality in the city. Multiple, ambiguous and at times paradoxical facets of people's housing aspiration and experience disrupt more generalised labelling of the housing programme – as neo-liberal, for example – and contest the largely favourable or largely critical binaries that can come to characterise housing policy assessment. We find Anand and Rademacher's (2011) discussion highly productive as an overall conceptual framing within which to present the varied facets of our empirically-oriented article, which we suggest can serve as the basis for similar theorising on housing's diverse outcomes in a context of persistent inequality.

The fieldwork and empirical cases

We draw on primary data collected in Durban and Johannesburg, as well as secondary sources. The Durban research utilises four studies conducted between 2009 and 2015 in the largely upgraded settlement of Cato Crest using a mix of qualitative methods to understand residents' experiences including four resident focus groups, ten diaries with male residents and also 12 interviews with housing officers, local committees and the police. Research with residents was conducted in isiZulu and translated into English, with all other interviews conducted in English. Residents living in Cato Crest benefitted from a roll-over upgrade (currently ongoing), with allocation and location determined by local committees (Robinson et al 2004). As residents lived in different areas of Cato Crest, housing was allocated at different times, ranging from 2003 to 2015. Cato Crest is an excellent (and perhaps thus more unusual) example of well-located RDP housing in South Africa given its proximity to the city centre (around 7kms) as well as to employment opportunities. The wider area of Cato Manor benefits from substantial new and some historic investment in key facilities, including schools, clinics, a library, transportation, shops, and a police station.

The Johannesburg research draws on interviews with 34 recipient households in 2010 and 2011, conducted in the interviewee's choice of language and translated as necessary. Eighteen households were living in one of five settlements in the metropolitan area, three of these to the south west of the city centre, one located in the far south of the metro area and one in the far north east. Distance from Johannesburg's city centre is not always a reliable indicator of locational disadvantage or advantage, however (Charlton 2014), and some of the neighbourhoods might be characterised as fairly well located in certain respects (Tembisa-Ivory Park, Freedom Park, and Bramfischerville), and others, poorly located (Orange Farm and perhaps Lehae). A further 16 interviews were conducted with RDP recipients who were not living in their houses but living elsewhere in the city. As explained in Charlton (2013) this latter grouping forms an important 'hidden population' (Heckathorn 1997) for insight into their absence from their allocated houses but also in many cases, into the unexpected and ongoing spatial and temporal interactions they have with their houses. Research collected in both cities is qualitative in nature and reflects the authors' desires to use methods which maximise residents' own understandings of their lives and homes. The analysis and presentation of findings below emphasises the particular voices of RDP residents through interview and diary quotations with a view to disrupting more generalising and binary accounts of the beneficiary's experience.

Beneficiaries experiences of state-subsidised housing

This section discusses various themes epitomising residents' experiences of new housing beginning with improvements in quality of life, then impacts on identity (conceptualised broadly including as citizens, parents, partners and neighbours) and sense of security as well as privacy and experiences of safety. It considers the complex impacts on livelihoods and the costs of formal living, including consumption changes, and examines impacts on schooling, concluding with a discussion of the mixed cultural attributes of RDP housing.

Recognition of significant improvements in quality of life
Residents living in RDP housing, particularly those who had moved from informal housing, were near-unanimous in their joy over the improvement in their everyday quality of life. These benefits related in particular to protection from the elements (specifically rain), security of tenure, and

access to water, sanitation and energy. In the interview with Florence[2] in Johannesburg her son revealed: 'The day we opened this house, she even cried to see how happy she is' (son of Florence, Freedom Park 2011).

> [the RDP house] means everything… Yes. Because now… when it's raining, I'm sleeping comfortably. It's not like when I was in the shack, you *know* when it's raining…I have to move the things that side or what, what. It means everything. (Florence, ♀, Freedom Park, 2011)

Remembering her previous accommodation in an informal settlement Irene noted 'I like the fact that we have water and toilets here… [There] We used to get water far [away] and we did not have toilets' (Irene, ♀, Ivory Park, 2011). In Durban, residents described the foul smells of the toilets in the informal settlement, the rubbish and muddy passages and how these factors were associated with ill health, they expressed joy at the evident 'big difference' (Nester, ♀ CC[3], 2011) in quality of life.

Despite reports of poor construction quality in RDP houses (Tissington 2011:61-62), including from participants in our research, the significance of improvements in quality of life must not be underestimated, particularly for those who have moved from very poor quality informal housing.

Positive impacts on sense of security, stability and identity
Many residents alluded in some way to the important sense of permanence and stability that their RDP housing fostered. This was not only significant for themselves but was also a crucial legacy for their children. The sense of ownership – and legitimacy that flowed from recognition by the state as discussed below – lifted a burden of anxiety for residents.

> And I know now when I [am] dead my kids are in the house. Like before, I was staying there and sometimes they chase me there, I'm going there, there all over…. Now I know I've got my own house. Nobody's going to chase my kids here. (Florence, ♀, Freedom Park, 2011)

Residents' concerns about their family and delight about the new housing also shaped their immediate lives, affecting how they parented and also how their own families related to them:

> My family didn't want to visit me in the shack because [they] were so shocked to see where I lived … they are fearful to come again to visit. They started now after I got the new house and I feel like I'm a real parent because of the house and I'm owning. My family and relatives visit me without any fear now. (Bolina, ♀ CC, 2011)

A number of these views echo those in Zack and Charlton (2003).

Positive impacts on privacy

RDP housing compared with informal housing considerably improves residents' experiences of privacy, although this is dependent on the size of the new house and its subsequent internal dimensions and layout. In older RDP housing (less than 40m²) layouts typically included only one bedroom or possibly even an un-partitioned single internal space, which while an improvement on most informal housing, still generates privacy challenges, particularly in households with teenage or adult mixed-sex children or those with complex household structures with adult relatives sharing the dwelling. Some of the Johannesburg properties fall into this smaller type. Thabo referred to the privacy problems created for everyone in his small one-space dwelling when his adult sons came to live with him from the family's rural homestead: 'That is why I decided to build the rooms outside. I wouldn't sleep with the children forever because they are also old. They want to be with their wives too' (Thabo, ♂, Tembisa, 2011).

In Cato Crest in Durban, earlier RDP housing were one-bedroomed while more recent properties benefit from two bedrooms with a combined kitchen/diner/lounge and separate bathroom, which presents a significant improvement in privacy and division of internal space for residents:

> I'm so happy to own the house as I'm living with my children only... the children have their own room to make noise. We have space for cooking and the children are able to study in their room. If I'm thinking back in the informal settlement … we were sleeping in one bed with girls and boys because we did not have the space. (Siyanda, ♀ CC, 2013)

Like Thabo in Johannesburg, residents in Cato Crest housed in smaller properties all commented on how their privacy had not significantly improved with their move into an RDP house, referring specifically to interactions between adult partners as a particular challenge: 'I moved the children to someone [else's] house so that [we] will have chance to talk because we can't do anything in these small houses' (Bolina, ♀ CC, 2011).

> I also [do] not have privacy in the new house, I divided the bedroom with the curtain, as I'm living with my sister [we] still [have] no privacy. We [are] starting to extend the house so that we will have privacy. (Nester, ♀ CC, 2011)

Improvements in security?

Qualitative data from Durban suggests that crime is positively impacted upon through housing upgrading. This improvement is attributed to numerous factors, including investments in infrastructure such as street

lighting (Area Committee Interview, CC, 2013); the formalised procedures of housing allocation and ownership which reduce the capacity for random criminals to reside in the settlement, ensuring that 'The houses are for the families now not criminals' (Lethiwe, ♀, CC, 2013); and also clearer roads and passage-ways for mobility. However, in Johannesburg, several respondents expressed concern about leaving RDP houses unattended, even for short periods of time, indicating the pervasiveness of burglary in their neighbourhoods. While most of Pam's immediate family live elsewhere during the week mainly due to transport difficulties, her adult son is stationed in the RDP house as caretaker:

> If the tsotsis saw you didn't light the light about maybe two days, they can break in…. Even if my son is going to work … sometimes it can be somebody who knows that he is out now and then they come and break by that time, you know? (Pam, ♀ Forest Town, 2010)

Impacts on livelihoods, access to employment, costs of living and consumption practices

Residents' experiences of employment change as a result of housing gain reveals a mixed picture, often shaped very simply by RDP housing location, but not always aligning peripheral location with a decline in employment opportunity. In the Durban case, Cato Crest is well situated in terms of employment opportunities given its relative proximity to the city centre and 'very good' and 'convenient' transport infrastructure (♂ Focus Group, CC, 2011), but levels of actual employment are mixed and some residents expressed deep concerns about poverty and rising costs of living associated with their new housing. Several pointed to the loss of income generation incurred through formalisation, arguing that it was no longer possible, for example, to sell fruit in front of one's house as one did in the informal settlement as 'no one will come and buy it' (Bongani, ♂ CC, 2011). Bongani's concerns reflect wider government and/or community efforts to minimise informal selling from home in line with expectations about what a 'proper' settlement should look like, alongside the impact of losing established customers through relocation within the settlement. He also alluded to the loss of income from renting out shacks and the ease when living informally of simply constructing a shack for rental purposes, practices which are little tolerated in the upgraded settlement of Cato Crest (Interview Housing Officer, 2011). In the Johannesburg work, the cost of transport was an important factor in locational convenience, with the low

cost metropolitan train line in two neighbourhoods offering a cheaper – though often slower – alternative to the mini-bus taxi transport dominating closer-in settlements. Across all settlements a number of RDP properties were themselves the site of income generation, harbouring business such as car repairs, printing and internet services, grocery shops, and taverns, or, in a few instances, backyard rental (as distinct from backyard dwellings for family members). In other cases it emerged that the house was not even able to provide a home base for the household head due to its distance from the place where he or she earned an income. In these cases the costly, inconvenient and impractical commute had prompted RDP dwellers to establish an alternative sleeping place linked to their place of work, sometimes in informal or precarious circumstances such as living in a shack, sleeping rough in a public place or on the floor of an outbuilding. Contrary to the assumption that RDP housing replaces and eliminates the inadequate living circumstances of recipients, the Johannesburg research showed that these conditions can in fact emerge *after* receipt of an RDP house or can persist despite and alongside home-ownership, shaping the lived experience of recipients for much of each week, and in fact much of their lives (Charlton 2013).

Despite the introduction of free basic services by many municipalities, the Johannesburg research encountered RDP home-owners who had left their houses due to the cost of services, the pressures of debt, and having services disconnected. Christine explained she had to take her four children to share an already-crowded house with 12 other family members and two tenants whilst she rented out her RDP house which 'made her poor':

> Mostly what made me struggle was the fact that I had electricity cut off because I had bridged it [made an illegal connection]… They came to take the electricity box… I just saw that it's better [to rent out the RDP house], because I was struggling to pay [service charges] and there is no electricity, sometimes I would be short of money to buy paraffin, there was nothing to use for cooking. I just saw that life was very difficult for me... Sometimes when you don't have money to buy water you will stay like two days, three days without water, so I used to get it next door… hey, that place makes me poor…I struggled there [in the RDP house] with the kids. (Christine, ♀, Braamfontein, 2010)

Christine incurred derision from family members for having 'failed', provoking conflict in the new shared accommodation she relocated to.

In Durban, Bolina contrasts her new payment demands with her previous costs when living informally:

> I own the house and the cost of the house are very high, too expensive.
> It was cheap the time we were living in the shack because we were
> not paying electricity and water. The water and electricity [are] too
> expensive, I paid R400 per month for electricity, for the water I don't
> like to talk about it because the bill is around R1000, I didn't pay
> because I'm unemployed. (Bolina, ♀ CC, 2011)

Bolina's admissions illustrate the stresses of poverty, confirmed by Bongani, who says 'It is very expensive to live in these new houses… The problem you can't ignore the stomach and children if there is a need for food… the development came with difficulties to the people' (Bongani, ♂ CC, 2011).

Residents also argued that living in RDP housing presented new pleasures and pressures associated with the costs and cultural significance of consumption practices (supporting the findings of Yose 1999 in Huchzermeyer 2001:92) including that of extending or improving one's home. Bongani in Durban relished his newfound ability to take loans from the bank for home extensions because of possessing a 'physical address' (♂ CC, 2011). However residents expressed concerns about living in empty houses (which lacked furnishing) and noted new relationship tensions which arose over the desires for, and purchasing of, new items such as sofas, TVs and fridges. Nkosinathi astutely notes that 'new houses need [a] person who is working because if you are not working [it is] not easy to maintain it' (Diary, ♂, CC, 2015). Numerous residents also revealed rising jealousy and anxiety about what neighbours possessed or thought about consumer habits. Florence counters this jealousy with a caution about the need to keep to oneself and avoid comparison:

> Because if you look at other people's lives, they can look at you too,
> then you supposed to debate and there will be like conflict, all those
> fight, fight. (Florence, ♀ Freedom Park, 2011)

Questions of jealousy are likely a function of growing individualisation (Yose 1999 cited in Huchzermeyer 2001), poverty alongside inequality and ongoing competition over scarce resources, and emerge as a rising concern in the empirical data deserving of further research. Felokwakhe's comments suggest a worrying cultural norm embedded in these wider socio-economic realities:

> People in the new houses are very jealous, if you coming from town with
> the plastic bag from Shoprite, your neighbour get[s] sad and the next
> thing shows you the long face without any reason. Neighbours never
> want the progress from other people. (Felokwakhe, ♂ CC, 2011)

More substantive research is required to assess the relationships between ownership and movement into RDP housing alongside employment opportunities and costs of living.

Impacts on access to schooling for children

The new locations of much RDP housing produced new challenges in terms of residents accessing key site-specific services, particularly schools and health facilities. Residents who were moved to remote locations which lacked schools, and those moved to areas where school places were limited, or schools already at capacity, experienced significant hardship. This finding reflects difficulties and failures in delivery synchronisation between government departments (Charlton 2003), and in the Johannesburg research resulted in several spatially split households, in which children were living separately from parents, and separately from the RDP house. Pam's three school-going children live with her mother during the week because

> ...since we moved in Extension 28 in RDP house, we don't have a school at all. Since 1996, when I moved to my house it was 1996. Since from then, no school at all. (Pam, ♀ Forest Town, 2010)

This contrasts strongly with the Durban case which being well-located, and also forming part of a more substantial redevelopment scheme, boasts a number of schools in the greater settlement but also in nearby areas. Residents in this case did not raise access to schools as a concern.

Diverse experiences and ideas of neighbourhood

The construction of RDP housing produces new neighbourhoods, new communities and offers diverse ways of urban living. Residents hold mixed views on what kinds of urban spaces such settlements should be, and their views are bound up with histories of anxiety over informal living, and comparisons with other existing urban spaces. Some complained about the 'township-isation', in a material-cultural sense, of new neighbourhoods through uncontrolled land uses by neighbours. Fred had a large house that he had put a lot of effort into improving, altering and expanding extensively, yet complained about the noisy, dirty neighbourhood. Lamenting that 'you cannot control township life, never' he said:

> If I had money I would move somewhere… I'm tired of township life.
> … I can't stand it. There is a shebeen here. You can't sleep. They are

> making noise. See, there is a car-wash there, making noise, drinking beers. As you can see, I am trying to build a wall here, because they urinate all over. But that is township life. (Fred, ♂, Freedom Park)

The sorts of land uses Fred and others were complaining of are viewed as an informalisation of state-sponsored formal housing development (Robins 2002, Lemanski 2009). Some of this informalisation is arguably necessary for household survival, with backyard rentals generating essential income to meet the costs of living in RDP housing (Lemanski 2009). Along with the earlier point that some Johannesburg recipients needed secondary cheap and often informal accommodation elsewhere in the city to facilitate income generation, Charlton (2013) concludes that the efforts people make to retain RDP houses, often in the absence of formal jobs, can stimulate a range of informal or unsanctioned practices both on and off-site which are necessary for the preservation of the houses. Below we consider the intersections between state and citizen in the negotiations around the 'risks' of informalisation of RDP settlements but we argue more work is needed on the cultural and legal significance of informalisation in formal contexts.

The gendered nature of access to, and experiences of, housing

The housing programme specifically targets poor beneficiaries with dependents, a fact which has served to benefit women. A government report in 2014 claimed that at least 50 per cent of houses had been allocated to women (RSA 2014) and in Durban, a housing allocation officer claimed that around 70 per cent of all housing was allocated to female beneficiaries (Interview with Housing Officer, 2014). This gendered intervention is highly significant for various *practical* and *strategic* reasons (after Moser's 1989 theorisation of planning responses to different forms of gendered needs). First it points to the implementation of a potentially progressive strategic gendered intervention which directly benefits women who have long since suffered inequality in access to both land and housing in South Africa. These are key assets, potentially reducing financial insecurity and dependence, for women, and for their children in the future. Second, it chimes with the positive accounts offered by women of their joy and relief at finally accessing property, for reasons outlined above, but also its role in shaping their own safety and rights to the city. For many women, this advantage is tied to their roles as mothers, as their RDP house provides secure accommodation for their children, from where women can feed, clean and support their offspring, thereby meeting practical needs arising out of

gendered divisions of labour (Moser 1989:1804). Related to this benefit is the positive impact of living in a secure formal house on women and families' experiences of privacy, which in turn appears to shape experiences of domestic violence (Meth 2015). Finally, home ownership explicitly shapes and transforms relations between men and women in terms of the legal and emotional elements of relationships, marriage, partnerships and separation as well as negotiations over responsibilities and rights over children. The latter two issues, both strategic gendered needs, are explored in relation to empirical evidence revealing however that interventions are contradictory in gendered terms, and that resolving the practical does not always necessarily translate into meeting the strategic.

Positive impacts for women, including gendered experiences of violence

In Durban, women indicated that movement into formal housing seemed positively to impact on (as in reduce) the causes of, and experiences of domestic violence and other gendered violence. This related to gains in privacy, space and material security associated with home ownership which all assists with decreasing tensions between household members and enhancing safety.

> The other thing which cause violence [in] previous time was living in the one room. The father does not have privacy in that one room living with mother and children. The father ends up sleeping out or find[ing] other women who have the privacy and [this] creates domestic violence at home... The small space creates violence… Domestic violence is less in RDP house. (Area Committee Interview, CC, 2013)

Home ownership also shaped more strategic elements of social power whereby 'if a man [is] doing something bad as a women you can ask that person to pack and go, leave you with peace in your house' (Lethiwe, ♀ CC, 2013). In addition, the practical materiality of housing (building materials, doors, locks, and roofing construction) is key in shaping gendered experiences of violence and where materiality is lacking housing can be described as 'hyper-permeable' in relation to crime (Meth 2016). The impacts of RDP housing on experiences of crime more broadly are addressed above, but residents in Durban pointed to the advantages of RDP housing (eg lockable doors) in increasing protection from sexual violence including child rape (Balungile, ♀ CC, 2013).

Residents pointed to reductions in domestic and other violence and problematic behaviour as a result of receiving new housing, claiming RDP housing signalled 'behavioural improvement': 'In my area where I live I notice that people are changed and respecting each other … in their RDP houses' (Aphiwe, ♀ 2013, CC). Claims of behavioural change are complex and are partly tied to reformulated ideas of citizenship, rights and responsibilities, addressed below, but can also be problematic, signalling external pressures to behave in particular ways in order to secure housing (Ross 2010). Yet, residents' perceptions of positive gains from behaviour modifications suggest complex socio-spatial changes which deserve fuller and more nuanced investigation.

Despite the positive impacts on domestic violence identified above, women in Durban reported that the formal properties of RDP housing and the changes to the formerly communal nature of living in informal settlements, meant that neighbouring women were less likely to hear, or intervene in cases of domestic violence, as they had done in the past. Practical gains in privacy then, potentially shape strategically significant violence encounters as 'it not easy to know the thing happening to your neighbour unless that person tell you' (Didiza, ♀ CC, 2013), and thus it can be argued that new RDP housing impacts on gendered experiences of violence in contradictory ways (Meth 2015): 'If you are sitting in your [RDP house] no one will know your problems' (Babavana, ♀ CC, 2013).

Gendered tensions relating to home ownership

Domestic violence and intra-familial violence is also reported in relation to tensions over the ownership of RDP housing given that it is a significant asset for poor residents, particularly when it is well-located. Clashes over who controls and benefits from the house are thus inevitable in resource-constrained contexts of high unemployment and poverty. In 2015 the Minister of Human Settlements, Lindiwe Sisulu publically asserted that female beneficiaries should gain ownership of the property in cases of separation, claiming: 'When they get divorced the house belongs to the woman. That is our policy. So the man picks up his jacket and gets out' (SABC 2014). This reveals a state-held gendered intention to utilise housing to support the strategic goal of gender equality. Gendered change, particularly when it challenges the status quo does, however, lead to tensions. The very process of owning a house impacts on, in some cases exacerbates, tensions in relationships and between family members because of the enormity of the

value of the asset in contexts of poverty as well as the property consequences of separation. In the Durban case, both men and women pointed to the higher likelihood of women benefitting from court proceedings which granted ownership of property to women following separation or divorce. The tensions surround male partners or family members (sons and brothers) acting aggressively in response to their lack of access to RDP housing, illustrated by one son who 'beats his mother and [asks] why the committee gave her the house not him' (Siyanda, ♀ CC, 2013).

> The violence starts there and fighting for ownership. The person whose name is written on the house locked the house so that other family members will not have access to the house. If [they] are breaking the door and comes inside that person will call the police. (Area Committee Interview, CC, 2013)

Accessing, owning and sharing housing, in responding to strategic gendered needs, is thus not gender neutral in its impacts, and some evidence is emerging that men may feel excluded by the programme (Meth and Charlton 2016).

State-subsidised housing and citizenship practices

The provision of housing by the state to poor residents signifies a key governance act and marks an important shift in both how the state perceives its residents, and importantly, how residents perceive the state and themselves. In Meth (2009) male residents of Cato Crest expressed their anger and emotions at feeling neglected by the state when living in poor informal housing conditions, concerns which left men feeling marginalised and which epitomised 'a politics of abandonment' (Koonings and Kruijt 2007:3). In contrast to this, we share evidence of a politics of inclusion and recognition, although not necessarily equality (cf Anand and Rademacher 2011), through the significant role housing plays in shaping ideas of citizenship, evidenced through active recognition by the state, political party and city authorities. Citizen inclusion functions in relation to the obligations of formal party politics and a recognition that the political process is a two-way relationship between state and citizen, typified by Sfiso's observations: 'The house is the benefit [we receive] for voting. We had been voting for so many years and [we] never [got] a reward' (Sfiso, Diary ♂, CC, 2015). Residents of both cities articulate this recognition in terms of gratitude towards the state as well as selfless expressions of citizenship in relation to fellow residents. Taking on board the rights and

responsibilities that come with citizenship, residents also express views on their role in properly maintaining newly provided settlements and serving to uphold the state's intentions around urban planning and change. Yet the practices of citizenship come at a price, and residents struggled to embrace the state's cost-recovery approach to providing services, a function of wide-spread poverty.

Appreciation and empathy

Many residents specifically expressed their gratitude to municipalities and at times local councillors in their interviews or diaries, for providing them with housing: 'I like to thank the Ethekwini municipality to take me from the shack which was decreasing my dignity as a South African citizen' (Thulani, Diary, ♂ CC, 2015). Residents employed emotive language, describing how receiving a house 'was like a dream come true' (Aphiwe, ♀ CC, 2013).

> I was so happy to receive the free house without paying anything from the municipality … the day of receiving house is like heaven because they promise us many years about these houses and sometimes you see things going slowly and believe that chances will never come to you while you still alive. The reason I said that [is because] there are many people [who] died at mjondolo without getting that chance to be an owner of their house. (Sfiso, Diary, ♂ CC, 2015)

Despite the individualised nature of the housing programme (emphasising individual ownership), Sfiso's concerns parallels beneficiaries' worries about their wider community and citizenry, often recognising their own good fortune alongside others' suffering:

> They must [carry on building houses] because there are more people who can't afford to build their own house … like those who stay on the shacks… Sometimes, water comes in the shack, sometimes wires they are crossing each other, they are not safe for them. (son of Florence ♀, Freedom Park, 2011)

Embracing personal responsibility

Countering concerns in government and policy circles of a sense of entitlement to government hand-outs from expectant but passive beneficiaries (NPC 2011), a number of respondents embraced the independence, personal growth and responsibility the housing benefit afforded. For single mother Irene, the house offered autonomy and consequent responsibility:

> I am in control…I am able to do things myself… I decide what should be eaten and I have to make a plan to get money to buy food … as a parent I know that the children have the right to go to school. Ever since I had my own house, I told myself that I am a parent and I don't have to rely on my parents anymore. I have to take care of everything now. (Irene, ♀, Ivory Park, 2011)

Irene's response highlighted the significance of an established and secure life for her and her children despite her poor financial situation:

> I see this as my home because the government gave me a house so that I can be with my children… I have my children here and [they] are able to go to school. They are close to me. Never mind the fact that I don't have a permanent job. (Irene, ♀, Ivory Park 2011)

This embracing of responsibility and opportunity is a related dimension of the initiative and agency demonstrated by people's efforts to physically transform their housing or alter their socio-economic spatial practices to overcome the limitations evident in the housing benefit. Charlton (2013) argues that in contrast to some of these practices being read as defiance, resistance or rejection of an imposed state intervention (because they do not conform to a particular norm of formal, orderly suburban life), these reflect rather a complex range of engagements with state-provided housing within a predominantly 'embracing, adopting and adapting' stance by beneficiaries.

Assuming monitoring and oversight roles

Earlier we detailed residents' concerns about the 'township-isation' of settlements. Many residents living in RDP housing hold negative views about living informally, viewing it as inferior. They often supported formal community structures which monitored developments and instructed residents to dismantle shacks (including at Orange Farm, Devland, Lehae and Cato Crest). Residents' rising awareness of the relative value of their new asset shapes these concerns.

> We don't want shacks here because, shack is not allowed here – we come from shacks, we don't want shacks anymore… we break it down, seriously… The community come to you and say we don't want this here, we come from there [shack-living]… Don't come [build a shack], you see how beautiful houses that people are building here they spend hundred and thousands on their houses and you want to come and shack here, the value of the house [will] drop. (Philani, ♂, Devland Ext 27, 2011)

These concerns are highly complex, and contrast with practice elsewhere in South Africa where backyard shack construction for income generation and to alleviate shortages of housing is the norm (Lemanski 2009), though not necessarily accepted by all residents. More mature settlements may struggle to contain such practices over time, and residents may well come to accept more hybrid forms of housing.

The state delivery / user responsibility conundrum

Residents expressed sympathy and empathy for the state for the magnitude of its task of delivering housing to so many people with Mandla explaining: 'I thank the government of South Africa to give us free houses. It is not [a] small thing to have a four room house for free' (Mandla, Diary ♂, CC, 2015); and (from some respondents) sympathy for its largely failed attempts to manage service payment collection due in part to the practice of informal reconnections:

> Oh shame, they [the government] are trying but you know there's this thing that we are saying – if they switch off the electricity, we switch on in other way… If the job is finished and municipality come and close the water or the electricity, it's the same people [workers/ contractors] … that say I'll open it for you. Just pay me how much. And, then we carry on. So they're trying. (Pam, ♀, Forest Town, 2010)

Many residents accepted the illegality of informal connections, with some recognising that managing such connections cost municipalities in time and money (Zungu, Diary ♂, CC, 2015). At Cato Crest, the prevalence of illegal electricity connections (Mandla claims it is 90 per cent of households) was lamented by residents, who acknowledged the scale of the trend as follows: 'This illegal electricity is like legal at Cato Crest because many people are using it' (Mandla, Diary, ♂, CC, 2015). Many other respondents indicated they simply could not afford to pay the bills they were receiving as they were unemployed. Some did not experience disconnections or other consequences but, as indicated in the earlier discussion on the cost of living, others were badly impacted. In Johannesburg, interviewee Theresa expressed frustration about her house because she couldn't keep up with municipal services payments and thus got into debt. Subsequently most of her payment to purchase pre-paid electricity was retained by the municipality to service the debt, leaving her with a very small amount of electricity to consume each month, and periods when she had none. By contrast a number of respondents in the Johannesburg research said they

were not receiving bills from the municipality at all, suggesting a failure of the municipal revenue collection effort in these housing developments. These varied experiences indicate a complex set of relationships between housing beneficiaries and the state. These are likely to be influenced by the extent to which our respondents had been accessing the free but limited and quantity-capped basic service packages of eThekwini and Johannesburg municipalities. However, their mixed experiences indicate severe tensions and anxieties around assuming and meeting the government-expressed responsibilities of home-ownership, and the cost-recovery form of service delivery.

Although residents' primary critical reflections focused on poor construction quality, small house size and a lack of services (as in Cato Crest where connections to water and electricity are still lacking for many recipients) as well as the allocation process, the empirical research revealed some limited criticism of the house-without-a-job approach which has typified the housing programme:

> Those people who are buying those RDP or who are getting those RDP, where are they going to work? You know, because there's no work? So these people is forced to go and steal because he's hungry now and what's the government say now we have to pay the electricity. We have to pay the water. We have to pay for the municipality. If I don't have money for bread, where I'm going to get this money, to pay, to maintain this house, you know? (Pam, ♀, Forest Town, 2010)

The distortions of devolved and localised allocation practices
In Cato Crest, residents claimed they had little participation in the location and allocation of their RDP housing, articulating the lack of beneficiary participation in the housing programme more widely (Lemanski 2008).

> The allocating team … force you to take the house… [They say] I am in charge [of] this, you can't do whatever you like and another thing they said you are talking too much and there are many people in the area [who still] need to get the houses. The person ends up keep[ing] quiet because it's true many people still need the houses at Cato Crest. … The site manager and CLO[4] never come to the community and listen[ed to] what people like or prefer. (Lethiwe, ♀, CC, 2013)

There are also reports of illegal payment demanded by local officials or community appointees. Dumisani encountered this in his search to acquire an RDP house in Alexandra, Johannesburg where he was living in a backyard dwelling:

> …because there are other people, I know them. I did ask them, do you apply [for an RDP house] they said no I never applied, just gave him a cheque [amount] of 1,500 and he gave me a house. (Dumisani, ♂, 2010, Sandton)

Dumisani's further attempts to also pay were thwarted when the person he was interacting with was arrested, but Erica paid to access a stand in Orange Farm

> I think the councilor asked the people [to pay]. I think a lot of [men], maybe six or seven, they help to give the people the stands because we are a lot, it's a big place. So these people are [being] crook[s] … because the council doesn't ask the people to charge. They give the stands [for] free, but we pay. We pay, somebody pays R200, R500, R2,000. I pay one point five [R1,500]. The other people R3,000, R5,000, like that. (Erica, ♀, 2010, Hyde Park)

Residents' citizenship practices illustrate an explicit politics of recognition and responsibility, alongside a critical awareness of the challenges of poverty for enjoying citizenship to the full. They represent a dynamic political dimension to the beneficiary experiences of state housing.

Conclusion

The housing programme has evidently had an exceptional and contradictory impact on beneficiaries' lives. Complex and variable social (including gendered), economic, cultural and political outcomes are analysed in this article, working to disaggregate the beneficiary experience and expand discussion on the lived realities of those who receive RDP housing. Evidence from two cities helps illustrate how residents' experiences are mixed, combining joy with real concerns about privacy, livelihood and affordability. These outcomes are tied to wider patterns of unemployment and location in particular, which, as explained earlier, are not simple variables, but rather depend on a constellation of associated factors, including transport and services. The experiences discussed highlight diverse assemblages of benefits and difficulties and practices of citizenship accompanying receipt of the housing benefit, variation which can be obscured behind a more macro spatial analysis, for example. In this, as with Anand and Rademacher (2011), we find ways in which the programme serves to include and foster feelings of inclusion yet at the same time how experiences of poverty amongst recipients reflect a broader pattern of inequality which is only partially challenged by the housing programme.

This perspective serves to deepen existing assessments of the housing programme, to raise new or understudied aspects of housing impact which affect quality of life, and to expand lines of enquiry for future research and evaluation. By implication it emphasises the dangers of binary appraisals of policy interventions and flags the need to examine such interventions alongside and in relation to assessments of wider political and economic realities and policy measures. In this regard, the article does not provide policy implications per se. Our observations about financial challenges of home ownership, poor location relative to employment opportunities, variable quality of build, size, allocation procedures and informalisation are all documented critiques (DHS 2015, Tissington 2011, Charlton and Kihato 2006), but we emphasise here the variations and contradictions in experience, the potential for gains alongside losses and the need for more nuanced and holistic analyses.

Notes

1. We'd like to thank Sibongile Buthelezi (who has assisted with all the Durban work) and Tamlynn Fleetwood for assistance with the 2013 Durban data, as well as the Sheffield Method's Institute for funding the 2015 research undertaken in Durban. In the Johannesburg research thanks are due to the NRF, and the University of Sheffield for funding, and to fieldwork assistants Lerato Motlaung and Mawabo Msingaphantsi. We'd like to thank all the respondents for their participation in our research.
2. All participants' names are pseudonyms.
3. CC = Cato Crest, Durban.
4. Community Liaison Officer.

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